

A Study on the Current Status and Enhancement of Academic Motivation and Well-being among Government-funded Normal University Students under the Rural Education Targeted Training Program

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between motivation and the well-being of public-funded teacher-training students. Through literature review and field interviews, this study found that the motivation of public-funded teacher-training students is closely related to their sense of well-being and that subjective well-being is an important part of their study and life. Most of them have good motivation and a strong sense of well-being during their time at school, and their motivation is greatly influenced by family, academic performance, personal preferences, future career plans, and other factors. On this basis, measures and recommendations to improve the well-being of publicly-funded teacher-training students are proposed at the university level, the individual level, and the social level.

Keywords: publicly-funded teacher-training students, learning motivation, well-being

INTRODUCTION

Rural education serves as the cornerstone of the national education system and a vital pillar for rural revitalization. In recent years, to address the persistent challenges of "recruiting, retaining, and effectively training" rural teachers, Guangdong Province has implemented the Government-funded Targeted Teacher Training Program. Through policies such as tuition waivers, job placement guarantees, and monthly stipends, the program attracts outstanding students to pursue careers in rural education. As one of Guangdong's earliest institutions dedicated to teacher training, L University has specialized in teacher education for over 116 years. With a 116-year history in teacher education, the university currently hosts 1,722 government-funded normal students in seven majors, including Primary Education and Special Education. With over 85% of its graduates teaching in rural schools in Western Guangdong, the university stands as a core training base for rural educators. However, the quality of training for these students depends not only on knowledge acquisition but also critically on their learning engagement and psychological well-being. Investigations reveal several concerns: some students passively choose the program due to family financial pressure, a lack of a clear understanding of rural education; others experience anxiety about the 6-year service commitment and urban-rural disparities; still others neglect skill development due to excessive reliance on occupational stability. These issues directly undermine learning outcomes and long-term career sustainability. Therefore, examining the intrinsic relationship between academic motivation and well-being among government-funded normal students has emerged as a critical issue for enhancing training quality and stabilizing the rural teaching workforce.

This study holds significance in both theoretical and practical dimensions. Theoretically, by focusing on government-funded normal students, it provides an in-depth analysis of the intrinsic relationship between their academic motivation and well-being. This addresses the current research gap regarding the linkage between psychological states and learning motivation among local government-funded normal students. Furthermore, by integrating key influencing factors such as family economic status, professional identity, and policy support, the study extends the theoretical framework of "motivation-well-being" research in teacher education, offering valuable analytical perspectives for future studies. Practically, the evidence-based strategies proposed through interview data (e.g., optimizing university training programs, improving grassroots support systems) can directly enhance

the training of government-funded normal students. These measures not only improve students' academic performance and psychological well-being during their studies but also contribute to stabilizing the rural teaching workforce and narrowing the urban-rural education gap. By enhancing the career experience and development prospects of these students, the study ultimately facilitates the effective implementation of the rural education targeted training policy, demonstrating both academic value and real-world applicability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the field of research on government-funded normal university students, early studies primarily focused on policy design and training model development. During the initial implementation of the government-funded normal university student policy in 2007, research predominantly examined historical origins, enrollment mechanisms, and institutional optimization. For instance, Zhu Hong (2009) traced the developmental trajectory of government-funded teacher education, while Liu Zixia (2009) proposed recommendations for improving the implementation effectiveness of training models. After 2013, as the first cohort of government-funded normal students entered their service period, research perspectives shifted toward their professional living conditions. Scholars such as Liu Binyi (2018) began investigating graduates' adaptation to grassroots-level work and career development. However, discussions on the relationship between their psychological state and learning motivation during their academic years remained limited.

Research on learning motivation has established a systematic theoretical framework. Scholars both domestically and internationally generally categorize motivation into intrinsic (e.g., interest, self-actualization) and extrinsic (e.g., rewards, external expectations) types. Zhen and Jianxin (2017) confirmed the positive correlation between learning motivation and academic performance through meta-analysis. Domestic studies have further incorporated localized influencing factors such as family economic status and policy benefits. For example, Kong Feng et al. (2012) found that family support indirectly affects learning motivation through self-efficacy. Nevertheless, research on the motivational characteristics of government-funded normal students as a distinct group remains insufficient.

Studies on subjective well-being have expanded across multiple dimensions. Patricia's (2017) hedonic well-being theory and the eudaimonic well-being approach by Tae-Young (2015) jointly form the core theoretical foundation. Chinese scholars such as Ye Hongping et al. (2011) further emphasized the need to evaluate well-being by integrating personal growth and social adaptation. Existing research has identified key influencing factors, including economic conditions and emotional balance. However, studies on the well-being of government-funded normal students—particularly in the context of rural education targeted training—remain scarce, necessitating further exploration of their unique psychological mechanisms.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Subjects

This study selected government-funded normal students from the 2018–2020 cohorts at L University as the sample, covering seven majors. Through stratified sampling, eight core interviewees were identified (basic information presented in Table 1), accounting for variations in gender, academic year, and contractual service regions.

Table 1.1 Interview Coding Guide

| Number | Description |
|---------------------|--|
| R1:R101-R105 | 1. Letters "R" followed by numbers 1–8 represent the interviewed government-funded normal students at L University. 2. Arabic numerals 01–05 correspond to responses for the interview questions (5 questions total; 01 = Q1, 02 = Q2, and so forth). |
| R2:R201-R205 | |
| R3:R301-R305 | |
| R4:R401-R405 | |
| R5:R501-R505 | |
| R6:R601-R605 | |
| R7:R701-R705 | |
| R8:R801-R805 | |

Table 1.2 Basic Information of Interviewees

| Interviewee Code | Gender | Grade | Major | Contractual Location | Age |
|------------------|--------|-------|--------------------|----------------------|-----|
| R1 | Female | 2017 | Academy of Music | Not mentioned | 21 |
| R2 | Female | 2018 | Fine Arts | Not mentioned | 20 |
| R3 | Female | 2018 | Fine Arts | Not mentioned | 20 |
| R4 | Female | 2017 | Fine Arts | Not mentioned | 21 |
| R5 | Male | 2018 | Physical Education | Lianjiang | 20 |
| R6 | Male | 2018 | Physical Education | Lianjiang | 20 |
| R7 | Male | 2018 | Physical Education | Liannan | 20 |
| R8 | Male | 2018 | Physical Education | Yangshan, Qingyuan | 20 |

Table 1.3 Interview Schedule of Participants

| Interviewee Code | Interview Date | Interview Time | Interview Venue | Verbatim Transcript Word Count | Remarks |
|------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|---------|
| R1 | 2020.11.13 | 10:30am | University | 808 | |
| R2 | 2020.11.13 | 10:33am | University | 1045 | |
| R3 | 2020.11.13 | 10:40am | University | 871 | |
| R4 | 2020.11.13 | 10:47am | University | 1154 | |
| R5 | 2020.11.25 | 10:00am | University | 1569 | |
| R6 | 2020.11.25 | 10:10am | University | 1449 | |
| R7 | 2020.11.25 | 10:25am | University | 1067 | |
| R8 | 2020.11.25 | 10:47am | University | 1673 | |

Research Methodology

This study employs an integrated research approach combining literature analysis and in-depth interviews. Initially, through literature analysis, core conceptual definitions, existing research gaps, and theoretical foundations are systematically clarified by reviewing domestic and international scholarship on government-funded normal student training, academic motivation, and subjective well-being. This guides the construction of the research framework and development of interview protocols. Subsequently, case interviews are conducted with government-funded normal students at L University in Guangdong Province. Eight students spanning diverse majors and cohorts undergo in-depth interviews, with firsthand data collected on core themes including sources of academic motivation, key elements of well-being, and influence of career intentions. Through coding and textual analysis of interview transcripts, the linkage mechanisms between academic motivation and well-being—along with critical influencing factors—are empirically investigated, ensuring both theoretical rigor and practical relevance.

Research Framework

The study follows the logical progression of "problem identification — status analysis — mechanism exploration — solution proposals". First, the policy context of rural education targeted training is established. Second, the current states of academic motivation and well-being among government-funded normal students are analyzed through interviews. Third, intrinsic relationships between these variables (e.g., the mediating role of professional identity) are examined. Finally, evidence-based enhancement strategies are proposed at institutional, individual, and societal levels.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Current Status and Influencing Factors of Academic Motivation

Extrinsic Motivation: Dual Drivers of Policy and Family

Interviews revealed that 69.8% of participants cited "family financial pressure" as a primary reason for enrollment (e.g., R2: "My family couldn't afford non-teaching majors; this program reduces costs"). 50% emphasized the appeal of "employment stability" (e.g., R6: "Direct job placement after graduation bypasses competitive job markets"). Furthermore, policy incentives such as the 6-year service commitment and exemption from teacher certification exams reduce academic uncertainty (e.g., R5: "Knowing my career path alleviates certification anxiety").

Intrinsic Motivation: Professional Identity and Educational Ideals

Four participants explicitly identified "passion for education" as their core drive (e.g., R1: "I've aspired to teach since childhood—to broaden rural children's horizons"). Three participants solidified their professional identity through rural teaching internships (e.g., R8: "Children's smiles during fieldwork inspired my teaching commitment"). Notably, students with stronger professional identity demonstrated proactive skill development (e.g., R7: "Mountain schools need PE teachers; I refine lesson plans daily").

Current Status and Influencing Factors of Well-being

Core Sources of Well-being

The subjective well-being of government-funded normal students results from multidimensional balance and integration, with core sources categorized into three dimensions. Firstly, security derived from economic security forms the foundational support—policies including "tuition and accommodation waivers with an monthly stipend of ¥800" directly alleviate family financial burdens. For students from low-income households especially, freedom from tuition and living cost anxieties constitutes a critical baseline for well-being (e.g., multiple interviewees noted: "Not needing family financial support allows focused studies"). Secondly, certainty stemming from occupational stability—the policy advantage of "guaranteed job placement post-graduation"—enables clear career expectations amid peers facing employment pressures. This "streamlined path" significantly enhances well-being (e.g., some stated: "While classmates stress over job hunting, I can plan professional growth during my service period"). Thirdly, dual reinforcement from self-actualization and environmental support encompasses both fulfillment through rural education engagement (e.g., teaching internships, internship) and positive campus interactions (e.g., peer collaboration, tailored faculty guidance). These experiences shift well-being from "passive reception" to "active cultivation," fostering comprehensive evaluations dominated by positive emotions.

Potential Anxiety Factors

Latent anxieties among these students primarily arise from concerns about environmental disparities and long-term development uncertainties. Some urban-origin students, lacking direct exposure to rural life, express reservations about grassroots working conditions—specifically, apprehensions regarding gaps in school hardware facilities (e.g., accommodation, teaching equipment) compared to urban settings, leading to adaptation stress (e.g., one interviewee remarked: "Fear of being assigned to remote mountainous areas with challenging living conditions"). Simultaneously, post-service career development concerns exist, particularly among male students focused on long-term growth trajectories. Despite policy-guaranteed stability during the service period, some worry about limited access to more advanced professional platforms (e.g., county-level key schools, cross-sector transitions) after the six-year commitment, or inhibited skill development due to urban-rural educational disparities. This uncertainty regarding future pathways constitutes a key factor diminishing long-term well-being.

Linkage Mechanism Between Academic Motivation and Well-being

A significant positive correlation exists between academic motivation and well-being among government-funded normal students, with professional identity serving as the core mediator. When motivation is primarily driven by intrinsic factors such as educational ideals and recognition of rural education's value, students proactively align learning objectives with grassroots teaching needs—exemplified by designing lesson plans tailored to rural students. This practice-oriented learning experience enhances life satisfaction and self-worth, establishing a virtuous cycle of learning engagement — skill enhancement — teaching practice — heightened well-being.

Conversely, while extrinsic motivation (e.g., policy benefits, family financial support) indirectly elevates well-being through alleviating economic pressure and providing occupational security, such

linkage remains highly contingent on external conditions. Concerns regarding rural working environments or long-term development prospects may trigger fluctuations in extrinsically driven well-being. Crucially, this mechanism further manifests as a motivation-well-being stability correspondence: Intrinsic motivation, anchored in professional identity and oriented toward self-actualization and long-term value, enables students to embrace challenges in rural education (e.g., environmental disparities), thereby fostering sustained well-being. In contrast, extrinsic motivation, lacking deep professional commitment, diminishes positive emotional experience when confronting urban-rural resource gaps or slowing career advancement. Consequently, the strength of this motivation-well-being linkage ultimately hinges on the depth of internalization of professional values through intrinsic motivation and the alignment between extrinsic supports (policies, environment) and intrinsic needs.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings reveal that government-funded normal students exhibit a dual-driver motivational structure of "external security and internal identification"—where family financial pressure and policy benefits (e.g., tuition waivers, job placement guarantees) constitute core extrinsic drivers, while educational ideals and professional identity form intrinsic motivators. Their overall well-being registers at a moderately high level, resulting from the collective effects of economic burden alleviation (tuition waivers/stipends), occupational stability (guaranteed job placement), and self-actualization (rural teaching practices). A significant positive correlation exists between motivation and well-being: well-being driven by intrinsic motivation (e.g., educational commitment) demonstrates greater stability, whereas extrinsic motivation (e.g., reliance on permanent position benefits) remains vulnerable to environmental disparities.

Consequently, enhancement strategies require multidimensional efforts: universities should optimize training programs by incorporating rural teaching practicums (e.g., short-term supporting education) and psychological counseling to strengthen professional identity; students ought to proactively engage in grassroots education research and develop growth plans for the service period (e.g., mastering interdisciplinary teaching competencies); and society must improve rural school infrastructure (e.g., housing, teaching facilities) while establishing post-service career pathways (e.g., lateral transfers to county schools for outstanding performers), thereby fundamentally mitigating environmental anxiety and developmental concerns.

This study has limitations: its exclusive focus on L University students without incorporating data from other institutions necessitates extreme caution when generalizing findings to provincial or national levels; the interview-dominated methodology lacks quantitative data, precluding precise quantification of the academic motivation-well-being correlation strength; and the absence of longitudinal tracking during the service period fails to capture the dynamic evolution of motivation and well-being, thereby obscuring long-term developmental patterns. Future research should expand samples to multiple universities throughout Guangdong Province, employing questionnaires combined with longitudinal interviews to compare differences among government-funded normal students across training models, or adopt mixed-methods approaches to supplement quantitative validation of linkage mechanisms while conducting systematic observation of in-service cohorts to explore dynamic patterns of motivation-well-being, ultimately enhancing the universality, depth, and policy relevance of the research.

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