

The Effect of Positive Psychological Capital of College Students on College Adaptation in the COVID-19 Situation: The Moderating Effect of Social Support

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has caused a lot of confusion for college students who have to adapt to the new environment of college students. After COVID-19, college students feel psychological difficulties and confusion due to sudden changes in the educational environment, and problems are occurring in adapting to their college life. Thus, this study attempted to explore the effect of positive psychological capital, such as self-efficacy, on college adaptation, and in particular, the moderating effect of social support. As a result of analyzing the responses of 215 college students in Seoul, self-efficacy had a positive effect on college students' adaptation during the COVID-19, and emotional and informational support among social support control the relationship. Based on the results of this study, the necessity of using various channels that enable customized psychological counseling and accurate information delivery for college students was suggested.

Keywords: self-efficacy, social support, college adaptation, COVID-19.

1. INTRODUCTION

After the COVID-19 in 2020, most educational institutions chose an online lecture method due to social distancing in Korea. Although distancing is gradually easing in 2022, it has been pointed out that the experience of the past two years can affect personal mental health, such as anxiety or emotional isolation of college students (Pfefferbaum and Nort, 2020). In Korea, it has been also studied that COVID-19 can adversely affect subjective and objective health (Seong, Kim, 2021; Kim & Park, 2021). Another study has pointed out that stress from isolation, such as social distancing, may be more vulnerable to young people, especially for college students who gain new social status as college students after a long college entrance preparation period in Korea (Kang, Baek, & Han, 2020). The study revealed that college students experienced a lot of confusion due to the changed learning environment due to COVID-19. The cause of the confusion was found to be due to adaptation to new learning tools, frequent changes in learning schedules on the progress of infectious disease, and unsmooth guidance and support for all these situational changes.

According to a survey conducted by the National University Student Association Network in Korea, 64.5% of college students said they were "very dissatisfied or dissatisfied" with online lectures, and that the quality of classes differed due to lack of full preparation to online lectures in universities. Due to the spread of COVID-19, the sudden change in the educational environment caused many psychological difficulties and confusion for college students. In addition to changes related to the educational environment,

it was reported that college students had difficulty in establishing appropriate interactions with others, and felt information isolation and confusion in self-identity due to interpersonal disconnection (Yoon, Baek, & Kim, 2021).

College student period is an important time to reflect on themselves, build knowledge related to their major, and determine their career path before entering society. However, many college student freshmen have left college due to changes in the educational environment and lack of social interaction during the COVID-19 period in Korea (Ministry of Education, 2022). Due to the psychological, physical, and social changes, they expected to have troubles in their daily lives, and furthermore, they experience more depression, anxiety, and stress. Accordingly, active research is being conducted overseas on the mental health crisis experienced by college students due to the spread of COVID-19, but research is still insufficient in Korea.

Therefore, this study is conducted to find out the ways to support college students who have difficulty adapting to universities due to COVID-19. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to explore whether an individual's self-efficacy, traditionally known to help adapt to college life, still has a positive effect even in the COVID-19 situation. Furthermore, the effect of social support was additionally examined to explore in detail what appropriate help is needed for college freshmen. It is hoped that the results of this study will help college freshmen who are struggling with the mental and psychological health in the COVID-19 situation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 College life adaptation

College life adaptation is a concept related to whether college students properly respond to and cope with college life needs in terms of academic, interpersonal, and emotional aspects (Jung et al., 2011). In order to adapt to college life, freshmen must interact with the components of the environment of the university, respond appropriately, and cope with it. In addition, college students have the task of forming social relationships while adapting to the new environment and the degree of adaptation to college life is determined by whether they take appropriate responses (Homebeck & Leake, 1999).

2.2 Self-efficacy

Positive psychology is attracting attention as more and more things negatively affect individuals or organizations due to stress. Self-efficacy, one of the positive psychology, is the ability to accurately understand the emotions of not only oneself but also those around you, and to utilize and control your emotions (Wong & Law, 2002). It is also known to lower stress levels by motivating individuals, allowing them to protect themselves in frustrating situations, and by having control and positive acceptance attitudes against impulses (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). People with a high level of self-efficacy have an individual's belief that they can do something effectively. In addition, they have a high belief in their ability to perform and organize specific tasks by selectively mobilizing the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional resources necessary to achieve their goals. In many studies conducted on college students in Korea, self-efficacy is also known to help successfully cope with various issues faced in college life (Park & Lim, 2019; Lee & Kim, 2018; Jung, Yoo & Ryu, 2011). Yet, it has not been sufficiently studied in Korea whether self-efficacy is still an effective psychological ability for college students in a situation where it brings changes in the

learning environment and relationships as a whole, such as COVID-19. Therefore, based on these previous studies, the following hypothesis was established in this study.

Hypotheses 1. Self-efficacy of new students who entered college during the COVID-19 period has a positive impact on their adaptation to college life

2.3 Social support

Adaptation to college life means actively and appropriately responding to and coping with the needs of college life in terms of emotion as well as academic and interpersonal relationships in an unfamiliar environment of college. However, the learning environment changed due to Covid-19 brought many difficulties in terms of college students' academic, interpersonal, and emotional aspects. In general, maladjustment in college life leads to a decrease in academic performance and isolation from social relationships, and eventually negatively affects the career and job identity of college students (Park & Lee, 2016; Jung & Chae, 2018). Social support, which refers to an important variable to improve college life adaptation, is a positive resource that individuals receive from social relationships (Betz, 1989; Medina 2018; Paulino & Castano, 2019). Social support provides the knowledge and direction that an individual needs to adapt to the social environment. Therefore, social support is known not only to protect individuals in stressful situations, but also to positively influence college life adaptation, academic commitment, and career preparation efforts (Kim & Choi, 2015; Park, 2017). Based on previous research studies on social support, the following hypothesis can be established.

Hypotheses 2. Social support felt by new students who entered college during the COVID-19 period has control effect on the relationship between self-efficacy and college life adaptation.

3. METHOD

3.1 Research subjects and sampling

In order to achieve the goal of this study, first and second-year college students at four-year universities located in Seoul were conveniently sampled from July to September 2021. The survey was conducted online. After explaining the purpose and method of the study, the survey was conducted only on participants who agreed to the survey. A total of 237 copies were collected, and 215 copies were used for analysis, excluding 22 copies of data with incomplete responses.

3.2 Survey Tools

3.2.1 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy, according to Bandura, is a kind of personality dynamic, which is influenced by the interaction and characteristics of the individual and environment, and can be seen as a kind of belief or expectation that one can overcome difficulties and successfully accomplish tasks. The scale developed by Sherer et al. (1982) was used for college students. The survey was conducted on a 5-point scale, and the higher the score, the higher the self-efficacy. Self-efficacy was found to be Cronbach's α .92 in this study.

3.2.2 College life adaptation

The scale developed by Choi (2016) was used to measure college life adaptation. The tool is divided into social, academic, and affective adaptation, and consists of 21 questions. It consists of "I am enjoying college life itself" and was measured on a 5-point scale. Cronbach's α was .87.

3.2.3 Social Support

Social support is a positive factor that individuals can gain from their relationships with many people, and is being treated as an alternative to overcoming various stress situations that individuals are facing. To measure social support, a tool consisting of 25 questions developed by Park (2017) was used. This scale consists of emotion, information, material, and evaluation support, and the higher the score, the higher the degree of social support. Similarly, it was investigated on a Likert 5-point scale. Cronbach's α was .86 in this study.

4. ANALYSIS

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS 22.0. The general characteristics of the survey respondents were analyzed, and reliability analysis of measuring tools for self-efficacy, college life adaptation, and social support was performed. Multiple regression analysis was performed to verify the hypothesis, and interaction terms were generated and analyzed to verify the moderating effect of the four sub-variables of social support.

As a result of analyzing the demographic distribution of the respondents in this study, 104 male (49%) and 111 female (51%) were used in the analysis, and 123 (58%) were in the first grade and 89 (42%) were in the second grade. The major subjects were 100 (47.1%) in humanities and society, 83 (39.1%) in nature and engineering, and 29 (13.6%) in arts and physical education and others.

Table 1. Correlation analysis

		self-efficacy	emotional	informational	material	evaluation	adaptation
self-efficacy		1					
social support	emotional	.441***	1				
	informational	.336***	.451***	1			
	material	.451***	.446***	.397***	1		
	evaluation	.448***	.387***	.401***	.319***	1	
College adaptation		.355***	.425***	.448***	.545***	.413***	1
<i>M</i>		3.68	3.99	3.94	2.85	3.58	3.65
<i>SD</i>		.52	.58	.61	.77	.69	.74

Prior to the hypothesis verification of this study, a correlation analysis was performed on self-efficacy, social support, and college adaptation. As a result of checking the correlation coefficient values of all variables, there was no problem with multi collinearity because there was no value higher than 0.8.

Table 2. Multiple regression analysis

	emotional support		informational support		material support		evaluation support	
	B	β	B	β	B	β	B	β
constants	3.947		1.368		2.822		10.688	
self-efficacy	.819	.317***	.811	.314***	.563	.221***	1.420	.441***
social support	.552	.242**	.484	.213*	.763	.340**	.209	.151
interaction variable	.117	.383***	.100	.361*	.021	.009	.117	.075
R ²	.311		.357		.276		.266	
Adjusted R ²	.297		.334		.251		.240	
F	22.789***		15.759***		10.862***		10.305***	

This study attempted to confirm how self-efficacy, the positive psychological capital of college students, is controlled by social support in the COVID-19 situation and affects college life adaptation. Self-efficacy was found to have a positive effect on college adaptation in all four models. In the case of social support, it was confirmed that emotional, informational, and material support had a positive effect on college adaptation.

First, in order to examine the moderating effect of emotional support among social support for college freshmen, the effects of self-efficacy, emotional support, and interaction terms (self-efficacy x emotional support) on college adaptation were analyzed through regression analysis. Significant results were found in both self-efficacy, emotional support, and interaction terms. This means that the control of emotional support has a significant effect on the effect of self-efficacy on college adaptation. In other words, college freshmen with high self-efficacy become more adaptable to college when they feel that emotional support is high. Second, the moderating effect of information support was examined. The effects of self-efficacy, informational support, and interaction terms (self-efficacy x informational support) on university adaptation were confirmed. Significant results were found in both self-efficacy, informational support, and interaction terms. It means that college freshmen with high self-efficacy have higher university adaptation when they perceive that information support is high. Next, in the case of material support and evaluation support, the interaction term self-efficacy x material support, and self-efficacy x evaluation support were created and analyzed. As shown in the results of multiple regression analysis, self-efficacy, material support, and evaluation support showed significant results in college adaptation of first and second graders in the COVID-19 period, respectively, but both interaction terms were not significant. In other words, unlike emotional and informational support, material and evaluation support does not control the relationship between self-efficacy and college adaptation.

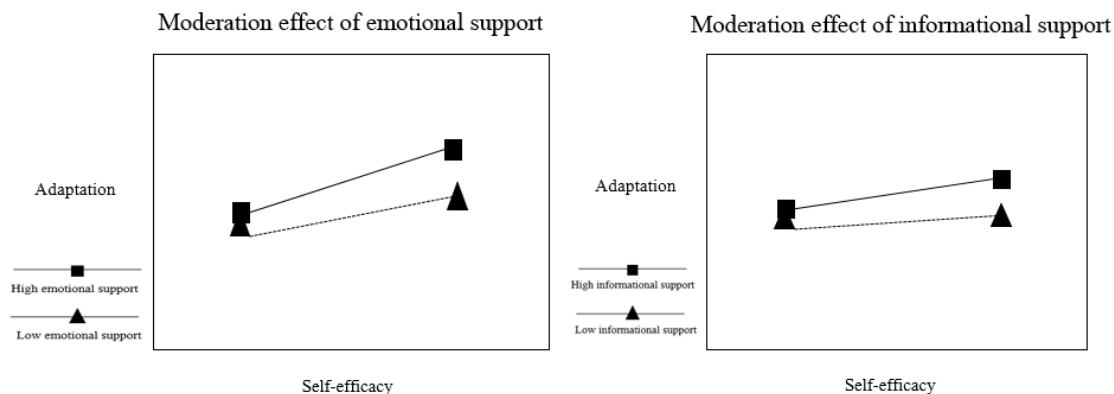


Figure. Moderation effect of social support

5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study attempted to explore how social efficacy, their positive psychological capital, affects college adaptation for college freshmen who have undergone major changes in the educational and social relationship environment due to COVID-19. In addition, the moderating effect of social support was examined to find out what support college students need to adapt to college at a time when a crisis such as COVID-19 may occur again due to a similar epidemic in the future.

This study conducted on 212 first and second-year college freshmen located in Seoul showed that self-efficacy had a significant effect on college adaptation of college freshmen. Among the sub-variables of social support, all emotional, informational, and material support, excluding evaluation support, were found to have a significant effect on university adaptation. In addition, in the case of emotional and informational support, it was found to control the relationship between self-efficacy and college adaptation.

Self-efficacy has been known to have a positive effect in many studies targeting various groups, including college students. It was found that college students had a positive effect on their college adaptation, career preparation, and academic achievement (Yoo Eun-ju, Kim Soon-gu, Jung Sook-hee, 2013; Lee Kyung-hee, Kim Ji-yeon, 2014), because they are aware of difficulties and use their abilities more efficiently when dealing with environmental needs when they have high self-efficacy. In the case of social support, a study conducted on college students found to affect their academic adaptation, college adaptation, and career decision-making (Kim Jong-woon, Kim Hyun-hee, 2016; Lim Rang, 2019). In order to increase self-efficacy, universities need to identify factors that increase students' self-efficacy and provide various emotion control programs online and offline to increase it. In addition, efforts are needed to develop college students' ability to recognize and control their own emotions and how to express emotions from the other person's point of view.

Combining these previous studies and the results of this study, positive psychological capital such as self-efficacy can affect university adaptation, academic performance, and core areas of university life such as career development activities for college students, especially unexpected stress situations such as COVID-19. Therefore, higher attention should be paid to the use of various channels for accurate and effective information delivery and customized psychological counseling that can operate various comparative programs to enhance students' self-efficacy and provide emotional and informational support to students. Many previous studies point out the importance of efforts to increase

social support through appropriate human relationship. Therefore, it is necessary to support the establishment of various support systems based on human relationships that college freshmen can establish. In the face of shrinking small groups and club activities, universities should actively come up with measures for freshmen to promote in-depth human relationships even online. In particular, mentoring programs from peer groups and seniors and juniors are known to be effective, and this method improves students' college adaptability and interpersonal relationships (Baek & Choi, 2007).

However, as this study was conducted on several universities in Seoul, it will be necessary to expand the scope of the study nationwide and conduct additional research to generalize the research results. In addition, it is necessary to conduct research that can provide new ways to overcome the difficulties college students feel in the stress situation of COVID-19, including various variables such as academic achievement and major satisfaction.

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