

Chinese Counselors' Level of Competence: A Move Towards A Competency-Based Training Program

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Abstract

This study focuses on the application of the Chinese counselors' level of competence with the end result of a competency-based training program. By surveying counselors in several universities, this study uses quantitative and qualitative research methods to analyze the shortcomings and deficiencies in the traditional training methods of Chinese counselors. The study constructed a counselor training system based on the perspective of competence, thereby improving the training system of university counselors and enhancing the counselors' competence. The study has found that the competency training system for counselors can effectively improve their ability level, but also points out challenges such as lack of resources and imperfect management systems. Based on these findings, the study puts forward suggestions such as identifying training needs, innovating training forms, and constructing a competency evaluation system for counselors to improve their competency level.

Keywords

The counselor, Competency, Training construction.

1. Introduction

College counselors play a crucial role in students' transition from high school to college, as they are the primary contact point and the most familiar with students' needs and challenges. The competence of counselors directly impacts the quality of college management and education. As students' ideas and social awareness evolve rapidly, it is essential for counselors to continuously enhance their skills and form a strong team to effectively manage student affairs and provide guidance across various areas like ideological education, student management, career counseling, and mental health support.

The competency of college counselors includes knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable them to support students in understanding themselves and making informed decisions. Counselor training, as outlined by China's 2017 Regulations on Counselor Construction, mandates systematic and continuous professional development. Institutions are required to ensure that counselors receive at least 16 credit hours of school-level training annually and attend national or provincial training every five years. This study aims to improve counselor competence through targeted training programs, contributing to the professional development of counseling services in higher education.

2. Problems in Counselor Training

One of the main problems in counselor training is the lack of diversity and scope in the training content. Currently, many training programs focus primarily on basic knowledge and administrative management, neglecting the enhancement of comprehensive skills in areas such

as mental health, career guidance, and ideological education. This narrow focus can leave counselors ill-equipped to handle complex student issues with diverse strategies.

Secondly, the training methods are often traditional and lack innovation and interactivity. Most training sessions are still lecture-based, with limited use of interactive techniques such as case studies and practical exercises. This makes it difficult for counselors to apply what they have learned in real-world situations. Additionally, the training content is often disconnected from the actual needs of counselors in their day-to-day work.

Finally, there is a lack of continuity and systematic approach to counselor training. According to current regulations, counselors are required to complete a certain number of training hours each year, but the quality and effectiveness of this training are not guaranteed. Some institutions lack a long-term mechanism for training, and the training system is underdeveloped. As a result, counselors' professional development relies heavily on occasional external training, rather than fostering a sustainable cycle of continuous improvement.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Ideas

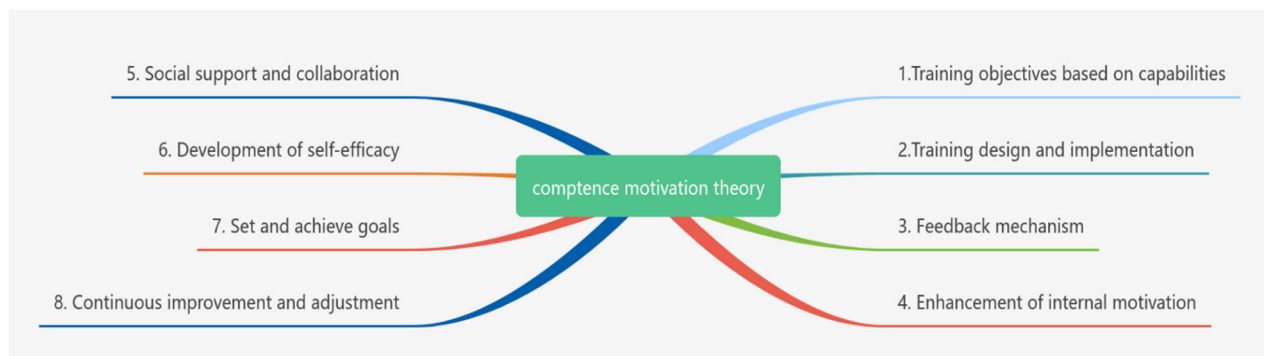


Figure 1. Competence Motivation Theory Development Intent

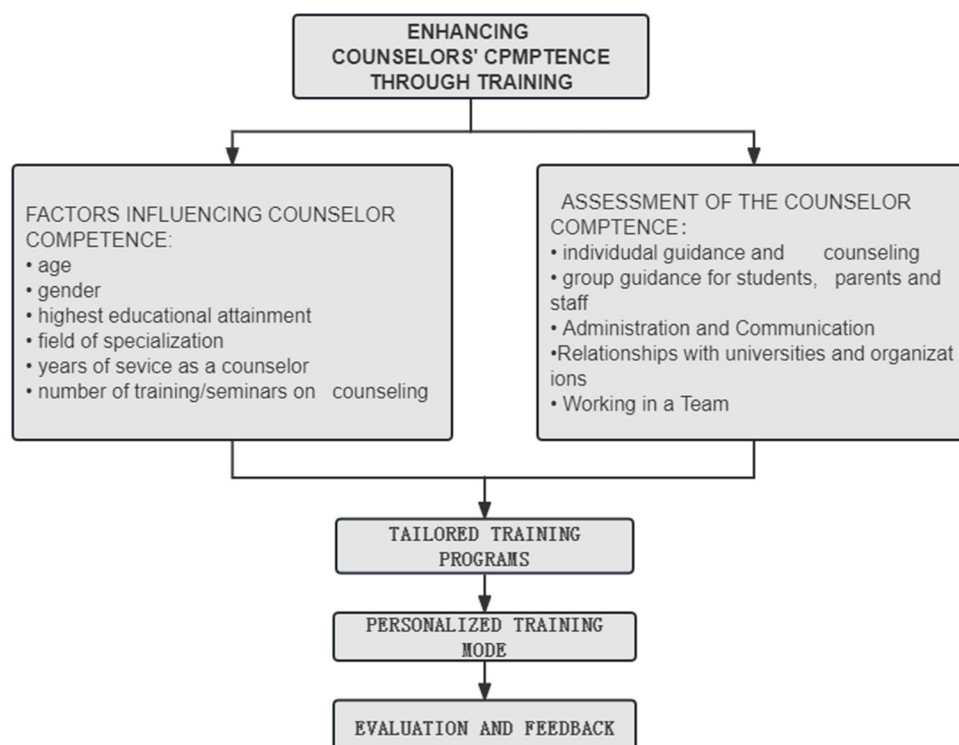


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of the Study

The competence Motivation Theory (CMT) is a motivational framework forwarded by Susan Harter (1981) for understanding achievement-related behavior in various domains such as academics, social and physical domains.

3.2. Research Design

This study used descriptive quantitative study method to record and analyze the training effect and the improvement of the counselors' competency. Descriptive quantitative research is a research method that aims to provide objective descriptions and quantitative analyzes of specific phenomena, populations, or events in order to better understand their characteristics and patterns.

3.3. Respondents of the Study

This study involved 200 counselors from three universities, A, B and C, The inclusion who have more than one year of working experience, considered their educational background, work experience, and professional areas to ensure the comprehensiveness and reliability of the research findings.

3.4. Instruments

The researcher-made questionnaire was the main tool for the data collection in this study for counselors and students. Each survey questionnaire was divided into three sections.

The first part is to describe the basic overview of the respondents. The counselor questionnaire consisted of six items including the respondent's age, gender, marital status, highest education, years of the counselor and number of training sessions.

The second part aims to understand the factors of counselor competency assessment. There were 30 survey items, divided into five main themes: guidance and consultation for students, guidance to students and parents, management and communication, relationships with schools and departments, and teamwork.

The third part is to understand the evaluation factors of the counselor's competency level. There were 30 survey items, divided into five main themes: personal and emotional counseling, academic counseling, occupational counseling, psychological counseling, and crisis intervention.

3.5. Treatment of Data

The raw data collected in this study were organized in tabular form and statistically processed using Microsoft Excel. The data collected using the developed questionnaire were statistically analyzed and interpreted using statistical tools such as mean ($\bar{x}$), standard deviation (σ) and Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (Pearson r).

For SOP1, these methods ($\bar{x}$) were used to master the basic information of counselors according to the age, gender, highest education, professional field, number of years as counselors and the number of training sessions. These variables can describe and interpret the standard deviation (σ) to show the distribution or change in scores relative to the mean.

For SOP2, mean ($\bar{x}$) were used to represent the counselor competency assessment program, including guidance and consultation for students, guidance for students and parents, management and communication, relationship with schools and departments, teamwork, and the standard deviation (σ) was used to indicate the average level of counselor success.

For SOP3, mean ($\bar{x}$) were also used to express the impact of counselors 'success level on students' counseling work, including personal and emotional counseling, academic counseling, occupational counseling, psychological counseling, and crisis intervention. Standard deviation (σ) was used to indicate changes in respondent scores and calculate the mean.

SOP4 and 5 used independent sample t-tests to determine the significant difference between the victory force level of the respondents and the evaluation level of their impact on the university

counseling program. For SOP5, Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient (Pearson's r) was used. The significance of the calculated degree of relationship was tested using $\alpha(a) < .05$ ($p < .05$), which implies that the relationship is significant at $p < .05$.

4. The Extent of Contribution of The Counselors' Level of Competence to The Counseling Program of The University

4.1. Personal and emotional counseling

Personal and emotional counseling refers to the provision of therapeutic support and intervention by counselors to address students' psychological, emotional, and personal well-being. This form of counseling focuses on helping students navigate and cope with various personal challenges, emotional concerns, and psychological distress that may impact their academic performance, social interactions, and overall quality of life. Personal and emotional counseling sessions may involve discussions and interventions related to stress management, anxiety, depression, self-esteem issues, relationship difficulties, grief and loss, and other mental health concerns. The goal of personal and emotional counseling is to provide a supportive and confidential space where students can explore their emotions, gain insight into their thoughts and behaviors, develop coping strategies, and work towards improving their emotional resilience and overall psychological health. Counselors utilize a variety of therapeutic techniques and approaches tailored to the unique needs and preferences of each student, aiming to promote self-awareness, emotional regulation, and well-being.

Table 1. Extent of Contribution of the Counselors' Level of Competence to the Counseling Program of the University in terms of Personal and Emotional Counseling

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	V.I
1. My competence in personal and emotional counseling significantly improves the well-being of students.	3.95	1.074	SI
2. I effectively establish trust and rapport with students seeking personal and emotional counseling.	4.07	1.035	SI
3. My ability to actively listen and empathize with students' emotions enhances the effectiveness of counseling sessions.	4.05	1.060	SI
4. I am skilled in helping students identify and cope with their emotions in a healthy manner.	4.05	1.058	SI
5. Students feel supported and understood during personal and emotional counseling sessions.	4.13	1.075	SI
OVERALL	4.05	1.012	SI

Legend: VSI – Very Strong Impact (4.50 – 5.00); SI – Strong Impact (3.50 – 4.49);

MI – Moderate Impact (2.50 – 3.49); LI – Little Impact (1.50 – 2.49);

NI – No Impact (1.00 – 1.49)

Table 1 offers the evaluation of the extent to which counselors' competence contributes to the personal and emotional counseling program within the university. The overall mean score of 4.05, with a standard deviation of 1.012, indicates a notably high level of contribution, falling within the "Very Good" range. This suggests that counselors' skills and effectiveness significantly enhance the personal and emotional counseling services provided to students. Among the indicators, "I effectively establish trust and rapport with students seeking personal and emotional counseling" registered the highest mean score of 4.07. However, while still rated within the "Very Good" range, the indicator concerning "My competence in personal and

emotional counseling significantly improves the well-being of students" received the lowest mean score of 3.95.

4.2. Academic counseling

Academic counseling refers to the provision of guidance, support, and intervention by counselors to assist students in addressing academic-related challenges and achieving their educational goals. Academic counseling encompasses a range of services aimed at helping students develop the necessary skills, strategies, and resources to succeed academically. This may include assisting students in setting and achieving realistic academic goals, providing guidance on study skills, time management, and organizational techniques, identifying academic strengths and areas for improvement, and offering support in navigating academic challenges such as course selection, academic probation, or academic stress. The goal of academic counseling is to empower students to maximize their academic potential, enhance their academic performance, and ultimately succeed in their educational pursuits. Counselors tailor their interventions to meet the individual needs and goals of each student, fostering a supportive and collaborative relationship to promote academic success and well-being.

Table 2. Extent of Contribution of the Counselors' Level of Competence to the Counseling Program of the University in terms of Personal and Emotional Counseling

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	V.I
1. My competency in academic counseling helps students set and achieve realistic academic goals.	3.96	1.043	SI
2. I provide valuable guidance to students in developing effective study skills and time management strategies.	4.08	0.974	SI
3. Students perceive my academic counseling as beneficial in improving their overall academic performance.	3.98	1.051	SI
4. I am proficient in assisting students in identifying academic strengths and areas for improvement.	4.00	1.068	SI
5. Students feel motivated and empowered to succeed academically after receiving counseling from me.	4.01	1.077	SI
OVERALL	4.00	0.988	SI

Legend: VSI – Very Strong Impact (4.50 – 5.00); SI – Strong Impact (3.50 – 4.49);

MI – Moderate Impact (2.50 – 3.49); LI – Little Impact (1.50 – 2.49);

NI – No Impact (1.00 – 1.49)

Table 2 assesses the extent of counselors' contribution to the counseling program of the university specifically concerning academic counseling. The overall mean score for the contribution of counselors' competence to academic counseling is 4.00, with a standard deviation of 0.988, indicating a high level of contribution within the "Very Good" range. This suggests that counselors' competence significantly benefits the academic counseling program of the university.

Among the indicators, the highest mean score is attributed to Indicator 2, "I provide valuable guidance to students in developing effective study skills and time management strategies," with a mean score of 4.08. This indicates that counselors excel in offering guidance and support to students in developing essential academic skills, which are crucial for academic success.

Conversely, the indicator with the lowest mean score is Indicator 1, "My competency in academic counseling helps students set and achieve realistic academic goals" with a mean score of 3.96. Despite falling within the "Very Good" range, this suggests a slightly lower perception

of the direct impact of academic counseling on students' academic performance compared to other aspects of academic counseling.

4.3. Career counseling

Career counseling refers to the provision of guidance, support, and resources by counselors to assist students in making informed decisions about their career paths and achieving their career-related goals. Career counseling encompasses a range of services aimed at helping students explore and understand various career options, identify their interests, strengths, and values, and develop strategies to pursue meaningful and fulfilling careers. This may include providing information and resources about different industries, occupations, and job market trends, assisting students in assessing their skills and interests, and guiding them in setting achievable career goals and developing action plans.

Table 3. Extent of Contribution of the Counselors' Level of Competence to the Counseling Program of the University in terms of Personal and Emotional Counseling

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	V.I
1. My competence in career counseling assists students in exploring and understanding various career paths.	4.04	1.004	SI
2. I provide relevant and up-to-date information to students regarding job market trends and career opportunities.	4.05	1.011	SI
3. Students find my career counseling sessions helpful in making informed decisions about their future careers.	4.08	0.997	SI
4. I effectively guide students in developing career plans and setting achievable career goals.	4.02	1.012	SI
5. Students feel confident and prepared for their future career endeavors after receiving counseling from me.	4.03	1.056	SI
OVERALL	4.04	0.963	SI

Legend: VSI – Very Strong Impact (4.50 – 5.00); SI – Strong Impact (3.50 – 4.49);
 MI – Moderate Impact (2.50 – 3.49); LI – Little Impact (1.50 – 2.49);
 NI – Not Impact (1.00 – 1.49)

Table 3 evaluates the extent of counselors' contribution to the counseling program of the university in terms of career counseling. The overall mean score for counselors' contribution to career counseling is 4.04, with a standard deviation of 0.963, indicating a high level of contribution within the "Very Good" range. This suggests that counselors' competence significantly benefits the career counseling program of the university.

Overall, the table indicates that counselors make a significant and positive contribution to the career counseling program of the university, particularly in helping students make informed decisions about their future careers. However, there may be opportunities to further enhance counselors' effectiveness in assisting students in exploring and understanding various career paths.

4.4. Psychological counseling

Psychological counseling refers to the provision of therapeutic support and intervention by counselors to address students' psychological and emotional well-being. Psychological counseling encompasses a range of services aimed at helping students cope with and overcome various mental health challenges, emotional issues, and psychological distress that may impact their academic performance, social interactions, and overall quality of life. This form of

counseling involves creating a safe and supportive environment for students to explore and discuss their psychological concerns, feelings, and experiences. Psychological counselors utilize a variety of therapeutic techniques and approaches tailored to the individual needs and preferences of each student, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness-based approaches, and psychodynamic therapy.

Table 4. Extent of Contribution of the Counselors' Level of Competence to the Counseling Program of the University in terms of Personal and Emotional Counseling

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	V.I
1. My proficiency in psychological counseling helps students better understand and manage their mental health concerns.	3.96	1.097	SI
2. I create a safe and supportive environment for students to discuss their psychological issues and challenges.	4.04	0.992	SI
3. Students perceive my psychological counseling as beneficial in improving their overall emotional well-being.	3.90	1.100	SI
4. I am skilled in applying appropriate therapeutic techniques to address students' psychological needs.	3.85	1.111	SI
5. Students feel empowered and equipped to cope with psychological challenges after receiving counseling from me.	3.92	1.083	SI
OVERALL	3.93	1.009	SI

Legend: *VSI* – Very Strong Impact (4.50 – 5.00); *SI* – Strong Impact (3.50 – 4.49);
MI – Moderate Impact (2.50 – 3.49); *LI* – Little Impact (1.50 – 2.49);
NI – Not Impact (1.00 – 1.49)

Table 4 assesses the extent of counselors' contribution to the counseling program of the university in terms of psychological counseling. The overall mean score for counselors' contribution to psychological counseling is 3.93, with a standard deviation of 1.009, indicating a high level of contribution within the "Very Good" range. This suggests that counselors' competence significantly benefits the psychological counseling program of the university.

Conversely, the indicator with the lowest mean score is Indicator 4, "I am skilled in applying appropriate therapeutic techniques to address students' psychological needs," with a mean score of 3.85. While still falling within the "Very Good" range, this suggests a slightly lower perception of counselors' proficiency in applying therapeutic techniques compared to other aspects of psychological counseling.

4.5. Crisis Intervention

Crisis intervention refers to the timely and effective response and support provided by counselors to individuals experiencing acute psychological distress, emotional crises, or other urgent situations that pose a threat to their safety or well-being. Crisis intervention involves identifying and assessing individuals in crisis, de-escalating immediate risks, and providing immediate psychological and emotional support to help them cope with the crisis. This may include addressing issues such as suicidal ideation, acute anxiety or panic attacks, traumatic events, or interpersonal conflicts. Crisis intervention also involves coordinating with relevant stakeholders, such as campus security, medical personnel, or mental health professionals, to ensure a coordinated and effective response to crises.

Table 5. Extent of Contribution of the Counselors' Level of Competence to the Counseling Program of the University in terms of Personal and Emotional Counseling

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	V.I
1. My competency in crisis intervention enables me to effectively respond to and manage crisis situations on campus.	4.03	1.012	SI
2. I provide timely and appropriate support to students and staff members during times of crisis.	4.07	1.005	SI
3. Students and staff members feel reassured and supported by my actions during crisis situations.	4.00	1.084	SI
4. I am skilled in coordinating with relevant stakeholders to ensure a coordinated and effective response to crises.	4.03	1.032	SI
5. The campus community perceives my crisis intervention efforts as instrumental in maintaining safety and well-being during challenging times.	3.91	1.062	SI
OVERALL	4.01	0.986	SI

Legend: VSI – Very Strong Impact (4.50 – 5.00); SI – Strong Impact (3.50 – 4.49);

MI – Moderate Impact (2.50 – 3.49); LI – Little Impact (1.50 – 2.49);

NI – Not Impact (1.00 – 1.49)

Table 5 evaluates the extent of counselors' contribution to the counseling program of the university concerning crisis intervention. The overall mean score for counselors' contribution to crisis intervention is 4.01, with a standard deviation of 0.986, indicating a high level of contribution within the "Very Good" range. This suggests that counselors' competence significantly benefits the crisis intervention efforts of the university.

Among the indicators, the highest mean score is attributed to Indicator 2, "I provide timely and appropriate support to students and staff members during times of crisis," with a mean score of 4.07. This indicates that counselors excel in providing timely and appropriate support to individuals in crisis situations, reflecting positively on the effectiveness of their crisis intervention efforts.

Conversely, the indicator with the lowest mean score is Indicator 5, "The campus community perceives my crisis intervention efforts as instrumental in maintaining safety and well-being during challenging times," with a mean score of 3.91. While still falling within the "Very Good" range, this suggests a slightly lower perception of the impact of counselors' crisis intervention efforts on the overall safety and well-being of the campus community compared to other aspects of crisis intervention.

Table 6. Summary Table of the Extent of Contribution of the Counselors' Level of Competence to the Counseling Program of the University

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	V.I
Personal and emotional counseling	4.05	1.012	SI
Academic counseling	4.00	0.988	SI
Career counseling	4.04	0.963	SI
Psychological counseling	3.93	1.009	SI
Crisis Intervention	4.01	0.986	SI
OVERALL	4.01	0.956	SI

Legend: VSI – Very Strong Impact (4.50 – 5.00); SI – Strong Impact (3.50 – 4.49);

MI – Moderate Impact (2.50 – 3.49); LI – Little Impact (1.50 – 2.49);

NI – Not Impact (1.00 – 1.49)

Table 6 provides a summary of the extent of counselors' contribution to the counseling program of the university across different areas. The overall mean score for counselors' contribution to the counseling program of the university is 4.01, with a standard deviation of 0.956, indicating a high level of contribution within the "Very Good" range. This suggests that counselors' competence significantly benefits the overall counseling program of the university across various areas.

Table underscores the significant and positive contribution of counselors' competence to the counseling program of the university across various domains, with particular strengths in personal and emotional counseling, career counseling, and crisis intervention. These findings highlight the effectiveness of counselors in supporting the holistic well-being and academic success of students within the university community.

5. Proposed Training Program for Counselors

Table 7. Proposed Training Program For Counselors

COUNSELORS							
KRA	SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	ACTIVITIES	TIME FRAME	PERSONS RESPONSIBLE	RESOURCES NEEDED	BUDGET	EXPECTED OUTPUT
Personal and emotional counseling	Cultivate active listening skills	Attend workshops Engage in Active Listening Exercises	1 week	teaching expert Student Affairs Department	PPT discussion material	6,000 Yuan	Over 90% of students seek counseling from advisors
	Enhance Questioning Techniques	Expert Lecture Scenario Simulation Role-Playing	1 week	teaching expert Student Affairs Department	training materials Demonstration tool	8,000 yuan	Counselor's capacity in managing emotional issues increased to 80%
Academic counseling	Enhancing Academic Performance	Study Skills Improvement Attend debates, discussions and case studies	1 day	academic experts Student Affairs Department	PPT training materials	2,000 yuan	Tutors are able to offer personalized academic support to students
	Guidance in academic planning and goal setting	Case counseling training Attend studying group	1 day	academic experts Student Affairs Department	training materials case analysis	2,000 yuan	The counselor's capacity for providing school guidance has increased to 80%
Career counseling	Enhance career self-assessment and awareness	Career planning lectures and discussions Take the career aptitude test	1 day	Career planning expert Student Affairs Department	PPT discussion material	3,000 yuan	Counselors are capable of offering career planning guidance to students 100%
	Promote career guidance and skills development	Mock interviews Interview skills training Job search skills training	4 hours	industry practitioners Student Affairs Department	discussion material	2,000 yuan	The student employment rate reaches 90%
Psychological counseling	Enhancing Therapeutic Skills	Attend psychological counseling training courses Attend workshops Utilizing Technology and Innovation training	1 month	Mental health professional or psychiatrist Student Affairs Department	PPT training materials	1 8,000 yuan	Counselors can handle common psychological problems that students face increased to 80%
	Promoting Self-awareness and Self-care	Organize special lectures or seminars Self-awareness, self-compassion, and self-care practices Attend Interactive seminar	2 month	Mental health professional or psychiatrist Student Affairs Department	PPT discussion material	30,000 yuan	The counselor's proficiency in psychological education increased to 80%
Crisis Intervention	Master crisis intervention skills	Crisis Intervention Skills Training Workshop Role-Playing Exercises Case Studies Analysis	3 months	crisis intervention expert Student Affairs Department	PPT training materials	30,000 yuan	The counselor's capability in crisis intervention has reached 80%
	Establish crisis response mechanism	Attend group discussion Mock Drills and Simulations Case Studies Analysis	1 month	crisis intervention expert Student Affairs Department	training materials Demonstration tool	10,000 yuan	The counselor is knowledgeable about the intervention process and can respond effectively to 90%

6. Conclusion

This study aims to explore the competency level of counselors in Jiangxi Province, as well as their understanding of competency and training needs. Through questionnaire surveys and interviews with counselors and college students in Jiangxi Province, the study found that counselors have a fear of competence and a strong desire to improve their competency, especially in personal counselors and management, academic guidance, employment guidance, psychological counseling and crisis intervention. aspect. At the same time, counselors also show a positive attitude and high willingness to participate in training, but there are certain challenges in terms of training time, training content, and training methods. The study also found that counselors' competencies were closely related to their application and understanding of emerging technologies. Technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data analysis, and virtual reality involved in training courses have played a positive role in improving counselors' work efficiency and service quality. Therefore, continuing to strengthen the new technical content of counselor training is of great significance to improving counselors' competency and adapting to the development of modern college education. In addition, feedback from students and counselors showed that challenges were encountered during the training process. For example, aspects such as personalized care and guidance, interdisciplinary knowledge and skill development, and international perspective and communication need more attention and in-depth research. By continuing to optimize the training plan, strengthening the integration of training resources and the construction of the teaching staff, it will help to further improve the overall competency and work efficiency of counselors.

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