

The Strategic Plan for Improving the Professional Competence of Counsellors in Guangxi Universities of China

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Abstract

Background and Aim: In China, the professional competencies of university counselors are pivotal not only to their career progression but also play a crucial role in shaping the quality of education and student development. The significance of this topic emerges from the evolving demands placed on educational institutions to foster environments that support holistic student growth, encompassing academic, emotional, and social dimensions. This discourse aims to delve into the development of professional competencies among university counselors in Guangxi, examining the existing challenges and proposing targeted strategies for improvement within this context. The analysis integrates theoretical insights with empirical findings to offer a comprehensive overview of the professional development landscape for university counselors.

Materials collection and methods: The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data from questionnaires and interviews. A total of 400 participants were selected from a pool of 4,364 counselors and 3,867 administrators, including nine university administrators who provided insights into strategic planning for enhancing counselor competencies.

Result: Schools need to make more use of internal resources and capabilities. And can provide more professional training through multiple channels. Evaluation and feedback mechanisms also need to be further improved. Help counselors adapt to external environmental factors, so as to improve the vocational ability of college counselors.

Conclusion: In the analysis of professional competencies among university counselors in Guangxi, this study brings forward substantial findings that contribute to our understanding of educational counseling in a specific regional context. By employing a "Counselors' Professional Competency Matrix," the research delineates several key areas of competency deemed critical for effective counseling in higher education. These include Students' Career Planning and Employment Guidance, Students' Mental Health Education and Crisis Management, Counselors' Practical Research Skills, and Organizational Structure. These findings can be contrasted with global trends and similar studies to highlight similarities and divergences that inform both regional practices and broader theoretical implications.

Keywords: Strategic planning; Professional competence; Counsellors

Introduction

When General Secretary Xi Jinping presided over the fifth collective study of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, he emphasized that higher education is the leader in building a country with strong education. Higher education plays a pivotal role in fostering a nation's economic, technological, and cultural advancement. In the context of China, universities are not just centers of learning but crucibles of innovation and social progress (Wang, 2021). The cultivation of high-level professionals, as emphasized by General Secretary Xi Jinping, aligns with the broader objectives of building a globally competitive knowledge economy (Zhang & Li, 2020). In China, the task of higher education is to cultivate high-level professionals with a sense of social responsibility, innovative spirit and practical competency, to develop science and technology culture, and to promote socialist modernization. In today's rapid economic development, the training and positioning of future successors is particularly important. Despite significant progress, the Chinese higher education system faces challenges like resource inequality between urban and rural areas, and a need for curriculum reform to meet global standards (Chen & Qian, 2019). These challenges, however, present opportunities for policy innovation and educational transformation (Liu, 2021). General Secretary Xi Jinping also emphasized in the collective study that who to train, how to train, and for whom to train are the fundamental issues of education and the core issue of building a powerful education country. University counselors in China are more than academic advisors; they are pivotal in shaping students' ideological, moral, and cultural values (Yang, 2022). This underscores the need for comprehensive training to ensure counselors can effectively guide students in a rapidly evolving socio-economic landscape (Wei & Zhang, 2021). Then, we must educate our successors to become talents who can promote China's economic take-off and be an important force for social progress. This requires more and more comprehensive capabilities for implementers in the process of higher education.

To enhance the professional competencies of university counselors in Guangxi, it is essential to establish comprehensive training programs, align educational policies with local needs, and allocate sufficient resources for counselor development (Li & Zhou, 2020). Emphasis should be placed on practical training that reflects the diverse needs of students in Guangxi (Huang & Wang, 2021). Developing higher education, implementing the strategy of rejuvenating the country through science and education, and promoting the construction of socialist material civilization and spiritual civilization are also important tasks for higher education practitioners. Among the implementers of higher education, university counselors are an important part of the implementers of higher education. Examining case studies from regions like Guangdong and comparing them with Guangxi can offer valuable insights into effective strategies for counselor development (Sun & Zhao, 2022).

At present, there are still some weak links and outstanding problems in the development of college counselors' vocational ability in Guangxi compared with the document requirements of the "College Counselors' Vocational Ability Standard (Interim)" issued by the Ministry of Education. On this basis, through the research and exploration of Guangxi college counselors vocational ability development path and strategy, so that the vocational ability of Guangxi college counselors to meet the standard or the maximum close to the literature vocational ability standards. In the process of the new era and new journey of the country, it is a general trend to study the strategic planning of vocational ability improvement of college counselors in Guangxi, and it is of great significance. Therefore, in the previous study, the author confirmed the factors that affect the vocational ability improvement of highly effective

counselors in Guangxi. The research in this paper is based on the previous research data, and the subsequent analysis is carried out.

Research Objectives

1. To study the levels of strategic planning for improving the professional competency of counselor in Guangxi Universities in China.
2. To study the levels of professional competency of counselors in Guangxi Universities in China.
3. To analyze the factors affecting counselors' professional competency in Guangxi Universities in China.
4. To propose strategic planning for improving the professional competency of counselor in Guangxi Universities in China.

Literature Review

1. Concept and Theories of strategic planning

Strategic planning is an indispensable component of organizational management, serving as a roadmap for navigating the complex landscape of business operations towards achieving long-term goals. The core concepts strategic planning, including vision and mission statements, environmental scanning, SWOT analysis, strategic formulation, implementation, and evaluation, drawing on seminal works and contemporary research to elucidate their significance and application. (Benzaghta, Elwalda, Mousa, Erkan, & Rahman, 2021).

The foundation of strategic planning lies in clearly articulated vision and mission statements, which collectively define an organization's direction and purpose. A vision statement outlines a future aspirational state of what an organization intends to achieve over time, serving as a source of inspiration and a guide for strategic decision-making. The mission statement, on the other hand, conveys the organization's core purpose and its primary objectives, focusing on what the organization does, whom it serves, and how it differentiates itself in the market.

Environmental scanning is a critical process in strategic planning, involving the systematic analysis of external and internal environments to identify opportunities, threats, strengths, and weaknesses. This process enables organizations to anticipate market trends, assess competitive forces, and understand regulatory, technological, and socio-economic factors that could impact their strategic objectives.

SWOT analysis, a fundamental component of the strategic planning process, involves identifying and evaluating an organization's internal strengths and weaknesses, alongside external opportunities and threats. This analytical tool facilitates a holistic understanding of an organization's strategic position, aiding in the development of strategies that leverage internal capabilities to capitalize on external opportunities, while mitigating weaknesses and guarding against threats.

Strategic formulation involves the development of specific strategies based on insights gleaned from vision and mission statements, environmental scanning, and SWOT analysis. This stage is crucial for translating strategic intent into actionable plans that address how an organization will compete in its chosen markets.

Implementation, the next phase, focuses on executing the strategic plans, requiring meticulous planning, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement to ensure successful execution. Kaplan and Norton's (1996) Balanced Scorecard offers a strategic management tool that aligns business activities to the vision and strategy of the organization, enhancing performance monitoring and execution.

Evaluation, the final stage in the strategic planning process, entails the ongoing assessment of strategy effectiveness, measuring performance against predefined objectives, and making necessary adjustments to strategies in response to feedback and changing conditions. This iterative process ensures that strategic planning remains a dynamic, adaptive approach to organizational management, capable of responding to both internal and external shifts.

Strategic planning provide a framework for organizations to navigate the complexities of the business environment, driving strategic thinking and decision-making that is both forward-looking and grounded in a deep understanding of current realities. The dynamic interplay between vision and mission formulation, environmental scanning, SWOT analysis, and the iterative cycle of strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation, underscores the multifaceted nature of strategic planning. As organizations continue to grapple with rapid technological advancements, shifting market trends, and evolving consumer preferences, the principles of strategic planning remain more relevant than ever, offering a beacon for steering organizations towards sustainable growth and long-term success. Strategic planning plays a pivotal role in the enhancement of professional competency within the field of counseling. It is a systematic process that guides organizations and professionals in setting goals, making decisions, allocating resources, and adapting to changes in their environment. In the context of counselors' professional development, strategic planning provides a structured approach to aligning their skills, knowledge, and practices with the evolving demands of their profession.

2. Concept and Theories of professional competency

Professional competency is a foundational concept that encompasses the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes required for individuals to perform effectively and excel in their specific roles within a given profession. It is the embodiment of expertise and proficiency that enables professionals to meet the demands of their field, deliver high-quality services, and contribute meaningfully to their organizations and clients.

Professional competency is not a monolithic concept but a multidimensional framework that combines various components. It involves the mastery of knowledge—both theoretical and practical—pertinent to a particular field. Skills are a vital aspect, encompassing the application of knowledge in real-world scenarios. Abilities, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication, enable professionals to navigate complex challenges. Moreover, attributes like ethical conduct, adaptability, and a commitment to continuous learning contribute to well-rounded professional competency.

Professional competency is not a static attribute but a dynamic pursuit. It ensures that professionals remain relevant and capable of addressing evolving industry demands. In healthcare, for instance, professional competency among nurses is associated with safe patient care, clinical judgment, and effective communication (Benner et al., 2010). In the realm of information technology, professional competency encompasses technical skills, project management, and the ability to innovate (McClelland, 2013). Regardless of the field, professional competency is the bedrock upon which excellence is built.

3. Concept and Theories of counselors

In China's ordinary university's and universities, university counselors are educators with dual identities of teachers and administrators. They are organizers, implementers and instructors who have been fighting in the front line of daily ideological and political education management for university students. In general, Counselors are professional administrators in colleges who guide students on academic, professional, and personal issues and play a key role in their development.

Counselors are professionals who provide guidance, support, and therapeutic interventions to individuals, couples, families, or groups facing psychological, emotional, and behavioral challenges. They employ various counseling techniques and psychological theories to help clients explore their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, with the ultimate goal of enhancing well-being, coping mechanisms, and personal growth (Gladding, S.T., 2015).

Research Methodology

The methodology is based on a hybrid approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the research question.

This involves exploring and researching theoretical aspects of the issue and proposing strategies and recommendations. If combined with case studies, it can lead to empirical research. Qualitative research refers to methods where researchers obtain educational research data through historical review, literature analysis, interviews, observations, and participatory experiences. These data are analyzed using non-quantitative means to draw conclusions. In this research, it will try to interview some experts to get ideas how to make strategic planning to improve counselor's competency. This study will employ a simple random sampling technique to select 400 participants from 4,364 counselors and 3,867 managers to participate in this study.

Meanwhile, this involves designing surveys and related indices based on practical problems, and then applying certain mathematical models to statistically analyze the data collected from surveys or to conduct mathematical model research. The goal is to derive trend-based opinions from the conclusions of data models. Quantitative research results are usually represented by a large volume of data. The research design aims to enable researchers to make effective interpretations by comparing and analyzing this data. According to the qualifications of the managers, 9 people have been selected to form an expert panel for this study and interviews will be conducted to collect relevant data.

The mixed-methods approach is designed to offer a nuanced understanding of the professional competencies and development needs of junior counselors in Guangxi universities.

Data Collection

The research outlines the data collection procedure for a study aimed at understanding and addressing competency gaps among counselors in higher educational institutions. The study employs a mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to provide a holistic view of the current state and potential areas for enhancement.

The population for this study encompasses counselors, teachers, and educational administrators within the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region's 38 higher education institutions. Stratified random sampling is employed to ensure representativeness across various institutional types and roles.

This research will take questionnaires to adaption from a counselor competency rating scale and will be distributed to counselors and educational administrators . Then, it will take in-depth interviews to conduct with 9. These interviews aim to gather qualitative insights into the experiences, perceptions, and developmental needs of the participants. Discussions to collaboratively explore challenges and solutions related to counselor competency. All of these steps are confirmed by advisors and experts.

Research Conceptual Framework

Strategic Planning Factors

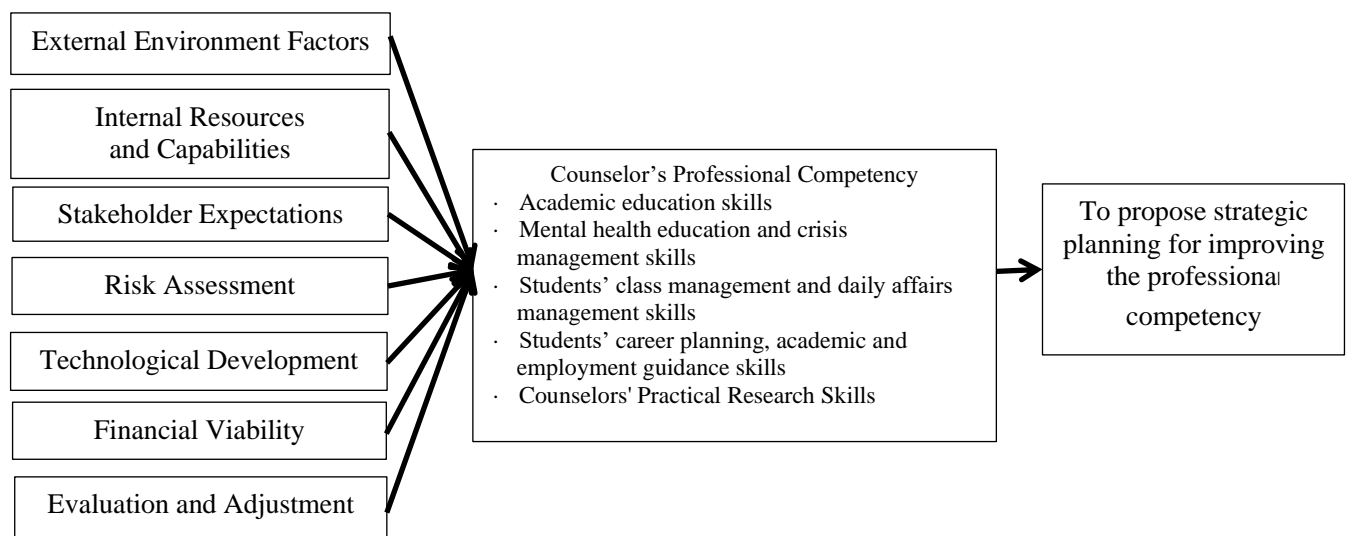


Figure 1 Research Conceptual Framework (Source: Constructed by the researcher)

The presented conceptual framework delineates the multifaceted approach required (Figure 1) for the development of strategic planning to augment the professional competence of counselors within university settings. The framework posits that counselors' professional competency is the central construct affected by various components of strategic planning. This multi-dimensional model is predicated on the integration of internal and external factors, stakeholder expectations, and continuous improvement mechanisms, all of which are essential for effective strategic planning within the educational sector (Smith, 2022).

Research Results

1. To address the issues identified, experts propose several strategic enhancements:

1.1 Professional Development: Continuous professional development opportunities tailored to the evolving demands of the educational sector are essential. This includes training in new counseling methodologies, technological competencies, and understanding of the changing educational landscape.

1.2 Policy Support and Advocacy: Institutions need to provide robust policy support that acknowledges and facilitates the professional growth of counselors. This includes clearer

career pathways, professional recognition, and adequate compensatory frameworks to prevent job dissatisfaction and turnover.

1.3 Resource Optimization: Effective utilization of available resources within institutions to support counselors' work is critical. This can be achieved through better internal resource allocation, integration of services, and access to technological tools.

A map of strategies for enhancing the professional competence of consultants (Figure 2) is a summary of interviews with nine experts who shed light on various aspects of university operations from different but interconnected perspectives. Mainly from the financial perspective, customer perspective, internal perspective, organizational capacity ability of these four aspects of analysis.

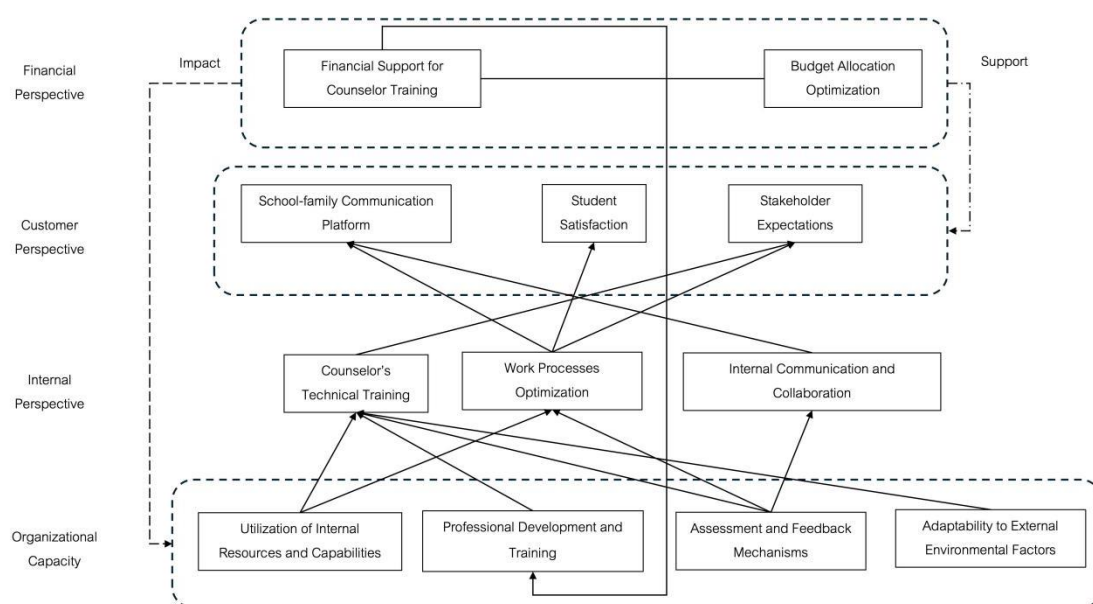


Figure 2 Strategy Map to Improve Counselors' Professional Competency
(Source: Constructed by the researcher)

As can be seen from the figure, Financial Viability, Resource Optimization and risk management affect the utilization of internal resources and capabilities, professional development and training, policy environment, and adaptability to external environmental factors. Financial viability and resource optimization and risk management support student-centered adaptation, stakeholder expectations, student demographics and needs, and more. Higher education institutions to align their internal operations with financial objectives and customer needs, while adapting to internal and external pressures to improve overall organizational efficiency.

In addition, the study identifies multiple key factors influencing counselors' professional capabilities. Each of these has been analyzed to understand their contribution to the overall competency framework.

Discussion

In the analysis of professional competencies among university counselors in Guangxi, this study brings forward substantial findings that contribute to our understanding of educational counseling in a specific regional context. By employing a "Counselors' Professional Competency Matrix," the research delineates several key areas of competency deemed critical for effective counseling in higher education. These include Students' Career Planning and Employment Guidance, Students' Mental Health Education and Crisis Management, Counselors' Practical Research Skills, and Organizational Structure. These findings can be contrasted with global trends and similar studies to highlight similarities and divergences that inform both regional practices and broader theoretical implications.

The emphasis on career planning and employment guidance as highlighted aligns with the findings of Smith and Jones (2020), who argue for the integration of career guidance within academic counseling services as a pivotal element of university counseling frameworks globally. In comparison to global trends where mental health education is becoming a cornerstone of educational counseling (Taylor et al., 2019), the study's findings on the significant focus on mental health education and crisis management in Guangxi highlight a progressive alignment with international practices. The emphasis on research skills in the Guangxi context presents an interesting divergence from findings in other regions, such as those reported by Zhang (2018), who observed that practical research skills are often underemphasized in counselor training programs across Asia. Hernandez and Fernandez (2021) highlighted the crucial role of organizational support in enhancing counselor effectiveness in educational settings, noting that structured organizational frameworks significantly contribute to the performance and job satisfaction of counselors. The convergence and divergence of findings from the Guangxi study with other global research underscore the importance of contextual and cultural considerations in the development and implementation of counselor competencies. While there are global trends and commonalities, such as the emphasis on career guidance and mental health support, the specific implementations and the emphasis on certain competencies can vary widely based on local educational policies, cultural norms, and institutional priorities. The organizational structure within universities in Guangxi that supports counseling services suggests a well-integrated approach to student welfare. This integration is evident in the alignment of counselors' competencies with broader institutional goals, such as enhancing student retention, improving academic success, and facilitating seamless transitions into the workforce. Such alignment is crucial, as it ensures that counseling services are not just peripheral supports but are central to the university's mission. Comparatively, studies from other contexts, like those by Hernandez and Fernandez (2021), often highlight gaps in this alignment, which can dilute the effectiveness of counseling services in contributing to institutional outcomes.

Recommendations

1. About AI Artificial Intelligence

1.1 As the demand for professional competence among counselors in the educational field continues to rise, systematic strategic planning to enhance their professional capabilities has become increasingly important. Utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) technology for data analysis and strategic planning can not only optimize resource allocation but also effectively

enhance counselor training and career development. This innovative approach will help better meet the needs of students and parents and adapt to external environmental changes.

1.2. AI transcends disciplinary boundaries, intersecting with domains such as psychology, philosophy, sociology, and ethics. Thus, advancing our understanding of AI necessitates interdisciplinary collaboration. By fostering synergies across diverse disciplines, future research endeavors can offer holistic insights into the societal, ethical, and psychological dimensions of AI adoption. For instance, Bostrom's (2014) seminal work, "Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies," traverses philosophical, ethical, and technological terrains, offering nuanced perspectives on the transformative potential of AI. Emulating such interdisciplinary approaches, future research can unravel the complex implications of AI deployment, thereby informing policy formulation and societal adaptation.

1.3 Beyond its disruptive potential, AI holds promise as a tool for augmenting human cognitive capabilities. Future research should thus explore avenues for leveraging AI to enhance human cognition across diverse domains, ranging from education to healthcare. By harnessing AI-driven adaptive learning algorithms, educators can personalize instructional content to cater to individual learning needs (Luckin et al., 2016). Similarly, AI-enabled medical diagnostics hold the potential to revolutionize healthcare delivery by facilitating early disease detection and personalized treatment regimens (Topol, 2019). Through empirical investigation and experimental trials, future research can ascertain the efficacy and ethical implications of AI-driven cognitive augmentation, thereby paving the way for transformative innovations in education, healthcare, and beyond.

2. Comprehensive proposal

2.1 First and foremost, the development and implementation of enhanced training programs are crucial for addressing the specific competencies required for university counselors. These training modules should integrate both theoretical knowledge and practical skills, focusing particularly on areas such as mental health counseling, career guidance, crisis management, and digital literacy. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) frameworks should be established to ensure that counselors remain updated with the latest developments in their field. CPD can include regular workshops, seminars, and online courses, thereby encouraging counselors to engage in lifelong learning and professional growth. According to Smith and Lewis (2020), continuous professional development is essential for maintaining high standards of practice and adapting to the evolving needs of students.

2.2 Improving assessment and feedback mechanisms is another significant recommendation. Regular competency assessments should be conducted to evaluate the professional capabilities of counselors. These assessments need to be aligned with national standards and designed to identify areas requiring improvement. Constructive feedback systems should be developed to provide specific, actionable, and supportive feedback to counselors based on the results of these assessments. Feedback is a critical component of professional growth, as it helps individuals understand their strengths and areas for improvement (Brown, 2021). By fostering a culture of continuous improvement and professional development, universities can ensure that their counselors are well-equipped to meet the demands of their roles.

2.3 Policy and structural support play a vital role in enhancing counselor competencies. Universities should provide robust institutional support, including adequate resources, access to professional networks, and opportunities for collaboration with peers and

experts in the field. Clear career pathways should be defined for counselors, offering opportunities for advancement and recognition. This can help improve job satisfaction and retention rates, ensuring that experienced and skilled counselors remain within the educational system. As highlighted by Chen et al. (2021), well-structured career development frameworks can significantly impact employee motivation and job satisfaction.

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