
Research on the Practical Pathways and Effectiveness Enhancement of Counselors' In-Depth Counseling in University Mental Health Education

Qiang Luo*

Sichuan Technology and Business University, Chengdu 610000, Sichuan, China

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

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Abstract: University counselors, as frontline ideological and political educators, have long been immersed in student management. Their daily close interactions with students enable them to accurately capture students' ideological dynamics and psychological changes, granting them inherent identity and situational advantages in psychological education. Grounded in the daily work practices of university counselors and focusing on the practical needs of university students' mental health education, this paper explores the specific implementation pathways of in-depth counseling within mental health education. By constructing equal and sincere teacher-student trust relationships, accurately identifying students' psychological crisis risks, and integrating various educational resources inside and outside the university, it promotes the comprehensive transformation of in-depth counseling from traditional "transactional heart-to-heart talks" to "developmental companionship." This effectively enhances the pertinence and effectiveness of psychological education, helping students resolve psychological confusion, improve their psychological literacy, fortify the campus psychological safety line, and safeguard the healthy growth of university students.

Keywords: Counselor; In-depth Counseling; Mental Health Education; Psychological Education

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1. Introduction

With the high-quality development of higher education, issues such as academic pressure, interpersonal relationships, emotional distress, and employment anxiety among university students have become prominent, placing higher demands on university mental health education. Counselors, as the backbone of student ideological and political education, serve as life mentors and confidants for students' growth. Their natural advantage of being close to and understanding students makes them a core force in psychological education^[1]. Currently, some counselors' guidance remains at the level of transactional communication, lacking systematicity and pertinence, making it difficult to meet students' deep-seated psychological needs. In-depth counseling breaks away from the traditional passive response model. It is student-centered, employing comprehensive and personalized communication to achieve the shift from "transactional heart-to-heart talks" to "developmental companionship." This is of great significance for enhancing the effectiveness of psychological education and fortifying the campus psychological safety line. Based on the practical work of counselors, this paper explores the

practical pathways of in-depth counseling, analyzes existing problems, and proposes strategies for enhancing effectiveness, providing a practical reference for psychological education in universities.

2. The Core Connection Between Counselors' In-Depth Counseling and University Mental Health Education

2.1. The Core Connotation of Counselors' In-Depth Counseling

Counselors' in-depth counseling is an educational practice where counselors, based on their responsibilities and aiming for students' healthy psychological growth, transcend the limitations of transactional guidance. They establish equal and trusting teacher-student relationships, engage in regular, personalized, in-depth communication, accurately grasp students' psychological states and growth needs, and provide psychological counseling, ideological guidance, and crisis intervention. This helps students resolve confusion, enhance their literacy, and achieve comprehensive development. Compared with traditional counseling, its core characteristics are pertinence, continuity, and development: Pertinence is based on individual student differences, avoiding a "one-size-fits-all" approach; continuity runs through the four years of university, not just ad hoc communication; development addresses both immediate confusion and long-term psychological growth.

2.2. The Core Needs of University Mental Health Education

The core goal of university mental health education is to cultivate students' rational, calm, optimistic, and positive mindset, helping them master adjustment methods, resolve psychological crises, and improve their personality^[1]. Currently, the psychological needs of university students are diverse and phased: Freshmen face confusion regarding adaptation to university life and role transition; sophomores encounter challenges with academic pressure and interpersonal relationships; juniors face major choices and emotional conflicts; seniors experience employment anxiety and stress related to adaptation to departure and graduation^[4]. Some students, due to family environment or life experiences, may have issues like inferiority or sensitivity, and may even face extreme crises. There is an urgent need to build a comprehensive and personalized education system, and counselors' in-depth counseling is the key bridge connecting the school's professional education with students' individual needs.

2.3. The Internal Relationship Between the Two

The two complement and unify each other dialectically: On one hand, counselors' in-depth counseling is a vital component of university mental health education. Rooted in the student frontline, it can promptly detect psychological abnormalities, conduct regular counseling, and compensate for the shortcomings of insufficient coverage by professional psychological teachers, forming an education pattern of "professional guidance + daily companionship"^[2]. On the other hand, university mental health education provides direction and professional support for in-depth counseling, clarifying counseling goals and methods, enhancing professionalism, and avoiding blindness. The quality of in-depth counseling directly impacts the effectiveness of psychological education, and the improvement of mental health education also provides a solid foundation for in-depth counseling.

3. Practical Difficulties of Counselors' In-Depth Counseling in University Mental Health Education

3.1. Deviation in Counseling Philosophy: Emphasizing Administrative Tasks over Psychological Needs

Some counselors have a cognitive bias regarding in-depth counseling, equating it with transactional heart-to-heart talks. They focus primarily on specific administrative tasks like academics, discipline, scholarships, and loans, while neglecting students' psychological needs and personality growth. Some counselors believe mental health education is solely the responsibility of the psychological counseling center, and their core role is ideological and political education and daily

management. Consequently, they pay insufficient attention to students' psychological confusion, intervening only with simple advice and failing to conduct in-depth counseling. Furthermore, the philosophy of "emphasizing problem-solving over prevention and guidance" is common. Intervention occurs only when students show obvious psychological problems, lacking regular attention, making it fundamentally difficult to enhance students' psychological literacy.

3.2. Insufficient Counseling Ability: Professional Competence Needs Improvement

In-depth counseling requires solid knowledge of psychology and education, as well as strong skills in communication, counseling, and crisis intervention. However, many counselors do not have a psychology-related educational background and lack systematic training. Their mastery of identifying common psychological problems and employing counseling methods is insufficient^[3]. University training for counselors often focuses on ideological and political education and daily management, with fewer specialized training sessions on mental health and in-depth counseling. Moreover, the content often lacks pertinence, failing to meet practical needs. Due to insufficient professional competence, some counselors cannot accurately grasp student needs, and inappropriate counseling methods might even aggravate students' psychological burden.

3.3. Imperfect Counseling Mechanism: Lack of Systematization and Continuity

Most universities have not established a well-developed mechanism for in-depth counseling. Counseling lacks systematic planning and is often in a passive response state, failing to create regular plans based on students' grade levels and major characteristics^[5]. Simultaneously, the assessment and evaluation mechanism is not sound. Universities' assessment of counselors emphasizes administrative tasks, lacking scientific indicators for the quality and effectiveness of in-depth counseling, making it difficult to motivate counselors. Additionally, counselors have heavy workloads, juggling ideological work, management, employment guidance, and other tasks. Their time and energy are limited, making it challenging to ensure the continuity and pertinence of counseling, causing some counseling sessions to become mere formalities.

4. Practical Pathways for Counselors' In-Depth Counseling in University Mental Health Education

4.1. Establish a Scientific Counseling Philosophy: Achieving the Shift from "Transactional" to "Developmental"

Philosophy guides action. Counselors need to break cognitive biases and clarify the core role of in-depth counseling in psychological education, integrating psychological education throughout the entire counseling process^[3]. Adhere to a "student-centered" approach, respect individual differences, pay attention to psychological needs and growth experiences, abandon condescending communication methods, establish equal and trusting teacher-student relationships, and guide students to initiatively confide and share. Establish a "developmental counseling" philosophy, shifting the focus from "solving problems" to "promoting growth," addressing both immediate confusion and long-term psychological development. Strengthen sense of responsibility, promoting the unity of nurturing the heart and nurturing virtue^[2].

4.2. Enhance Professional Counseling Ability: Build a Solid Professional Foundation for In-Depth Counseling

Universities and counselors need to work together synergistically to improve professional competence: First, conduct specialized training, construct an integrated "teaching, research, training, and practice" mechanism^[2]. Invite experts to conduct special lectures on psychological problem identification and counseling techniques, organize case studies and simulated counseling to enhance practical skills. Second, build communication platforms, establish counselor mental health studios, facilitate experience sharing, and encourage participation in research projects to enhance practice through research. Third, encourage counselors to engage in self-directed learning, read professional literature, obtain psychological counselor certificates, enrich their knowledge systems, and enhance counseling professionalism^[3].

4.3. Improve the Counseling Mechanism: Ensure the Systematization and Continuity of In-Depth Counseling

Establish and improve a regular mechanism: First, develop personalized counseling plans. Combine students' grade levels, majors, and family backgrounds to clarify counseling goals and content, conducting targeted counseling for students in different grades^[4]. Second, establish a model of "regular heart-to-heart talks + communication anytime." Conduct 2-3 one-on-one in-depth heart-to-heart talks with each student per semester, utilizing online and offline channels to broaden counseling pathways. Third, improve the assessment, evaluation, and incentive mechanism. Incorporate in-depth counseling into performance assessments, formulate scientific indicators, and commend counselors with significant results to motivate work enthusiasm.

4.4. Innovate Counseling Forms: Enhance the Effectiveness and Appeal of In-Depth Counseling

Innovate forms based on the characteristics of university students: First, conduct group counseling. For common issues like academic pressure and interpersonal relationships, use methods like group discussions and role-playing to help students share confusion and learn adjustment techniques^[2]. Second, utilize new media for online counseling. Disseminate mental health knowledge, conduct online consultations, break time and space constraints^[5]. Third, combine with special activities. Carry out targeted counseling activities during orientation season, graduation season, and Mental Health Month to enhance the appeal and effectiveness of counseling.

5. Strategies for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Counselors' In-Depth Counseling in University Mental Health Education

5.1. Strengthen Ideological Guidance: Improve Students' Level of Psychological Awareness

Guide students to establish a correct understanding of psychology, abandon the misconception that "psychological problems equal mental illness," and clarify that mental health is equally important as physical health^[4]. Teach students basic psychological adjustment methods, such as appropriate catharsis, positive suggestion, and time management, to enhance their self-adjustment ability. Guide students to cultivate a positive and optimistic attitude towards life, develop stress resistance and frustration tolerance, and face difficulties and challenges with a positive mindset.

5.2. Precisely Match Needs: Enhance the Pertinence and Effectiveness of Counseling

Through methods like heart-to-heart talks, psychological assessments, and dormitory visits, comprehensively understand students' psychological states, establish psychological files, categorize needs, and develop personalized counseling plans^[5]. Conduct targeted counseling for different psychological difficulties. For students with severe psychological crises, promptly coordinate with the psychological counseling center for professional intervention to ensure students' psychological safety.

5.3. Focus on Long-Term Construction: Promote the Regularization and Institutionalization of In-Depth Counseling

Improve mechanisms for planning, implementation, assessment, and incentives to ensure the orderly progression of counseling. Integrate in-depth counseling throughout the students' entire four-year university growth process. Set phased goals based on grade-level needs, establish a dynamic psychological tracking mechanism, timely update files, and adjust strategies. Strengthen summary and reflection, optimize counseling methods, and continuously promote the improvement of in-depth counseling.

5.4. Strengthen Team Building: Create a Professional Counselor Team

Optimize the structure of the counselor team by recruiting graduates with psychology-related majors to enhance the

team's professional competence. Establish a regular training system, incorporating mental health and in-depth counseling training into daily routines, and carry out specialized training and academic exchanges. Establish professional development mechanisms, encourage counselors to conduct research projects and obtain professional certifications, provide guarantees for professional development, and stimulate work enthusiasm.

6. Conclusion

Counselors' in-depth counseling is a key link in the university mental health education system and an important starting point for implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education and safeguarding students' mental health. It plays an irreplaceable and fundamental role in resolving students' psychological confusion, counseling emotional pressure, enhancing psychological literacy, and fortifying the campus psychological safety line. Currently, in-depth counseling work still faces numerous practical difficulties: Some counselors have deviations in their educational philosophy; their professional capabilities are incompatible with complex psychological needs; the work mechanism is not sufficiently sound; and the integration of multiple resources, such as home, school, and community, is insufficient. These factors hinder the full realization of counseling effectiveness.

Therefore, universities must adhere to a problem-oriented and systematic approach, establish a scientific educational philosophy, and strengthen counselors' professional competence and practical skills. They need to improve regular and precise counseling mechanisms, integrate resources inside and outside the university, and innovate counseling forms combining online and offline methods. It is crucial to strengthen ideological guidance, precisely match student needs, focus on long-term construction, and promote the professional development of the counselor team. By comprehensively enhancing the effectiveness of in-depth counseling, we can promote the high-quality development of university mental health education, assist the healthy growth of university students' bodies and minds, and cultivate well-rounded socialist builders and reliable successors who are developed morally, intellectually, physically, aesthetically, and labor-wise.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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