



Research on the Status Quo and Improvement Path of Counselor's Quality based on Structural Equation Model

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Abstract. The competence of counselors, as a key element reflecting the comprehensive strength of higher education institutions, is increasingly demonstrating its significance. Based on the three-dimensional framework of the "Professional Competence Standards for College Counselors (Trial Implementation)", this study operationalizes management competence into 8 class management capabilities (A1-A8), embodies professional literacy as 8 categories of policy and regulatory knowledge (B1-B8), and specifies ideological guidance into 7 core values dissemination skills (C1-C7). Through mixed sampling under full sample collection, 299 valid samples from 11 higher vocational colleges in Hunan Province were obtained. Variance analysis revealed that counselors from model institutions scored significantly higher in ideological guidance than those from regular institutions ($F=6.21$, $p<0.01$). Structural equation modeling indicated that ideological guidance showed the highest standardized path coefficient. These findings reveal the current status of counselor competence in vocational colleges and propose strategies from three aspects: enhancing ideological and political guidance competence, strengthening management competence, and accumulating professional knowledge, aiming to explore effective pathways for cultivating counselor competence in higher vocational institutions.

Keywords: Counselors' Quality; Quality and Ability; Practice Path; Higher Education Institutions

1 Introduction

Counselors in higher education institutions are the backbone force in conducting ideological and political education for college students and are the organizers, implementers, and instructors of students' daily ideological and political education and management work^[1]. The quality and ability of counselors refer to their professional literacy and skills in ideological and political education, student management, psychological counseling, and other aspects^[2]. Currently, research on the quality and ability of counselors mainly focuses on the connotation, structure of counselors' quality, and the differences in the demand for counselors' quality. Against this backdrop, documents

such as the "Interim Standards for the Professional Ability of College Counselors" and the "Regulations on the Construction of College Counselor Teams" have been successively issued. As research on the quality and ability of college counselors is increasingly valued, scholars have proposed that the factors affecting counselors' quality and ability are diverse, including personal traits, working environment, education and training, etc. However, empirical research on these factors is still insufficient, especially in the in-depth discussion of the interactions between factors. Therefore, in-depth research on the factors affecting the quality and ability of college counselors is of great practical significance for improving the overall quality of the counselor team. Existing research mostly adopts descriptive analysis, lacking empirical verification of specific influencing factors, and fails to fully consider the interrelationships between key factors when analyzing them. Considering the limitations of traditional statistical methods in dealing with latent variables and measurement errors, this study uses Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) for empirical analysis. SEM, as an advanced multivariate statistical analysis technique, can effectively integrate data and reveal complex relationships between variables. This paper aims to design a scientific survey questionnaire, build a structural equation model, and empirically explore the key factors affecting the quality and ability of college counselors and their interrelationships, providing theoretical basis and practical guidance for the construction of college counselor teams.

2 Questionnaire Design, Data Collection, and Statistics

To thoroughly explore the quality and competencies of university counselors and their influencing factors, this study first designed the "University Counselors' Competency Survey Questionnaire" through extensive literature review and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire comprises three main sections: basic information of respondents, specific items assessing counselor competencies, and the software/hardware environment of their institutions. All items employ a Likert five-point scoring scale for respondent evaluations.

Prior to formal implementation, the questionnaire underwent review and revision by three domain experts, followed by preliminary pilot testing. Based on pilot results, the final "Influencing Factors Scale of University Counselors' Competencies" containing 44 items was developed, consisting of four subscales: Personal Competency Scale, Policy Environment Scale, Outcome Output Scale, and Institutional Support Scale.

From September to October 2023, this study adopted a multi-stage stratified hybrid sampling approach. For inter-institutional stratification:

Model universities: Sampled at 1:150 faculty-student ratio

Regular universities: Sampled at 1:200 faculty-student ratio

For intra-institutional stratification:

Model universities: Cluster sampling of all full-time counselors (N=160)

Regular universities: Stratified random sampling with quota allocation by professional rank (junior:intermediate:senior = 4:5:1)

The online survey targeted 11 high-quality vocational colleges in Hunan Province (4 model and 7 regular institutions) as shown in Figure 1.

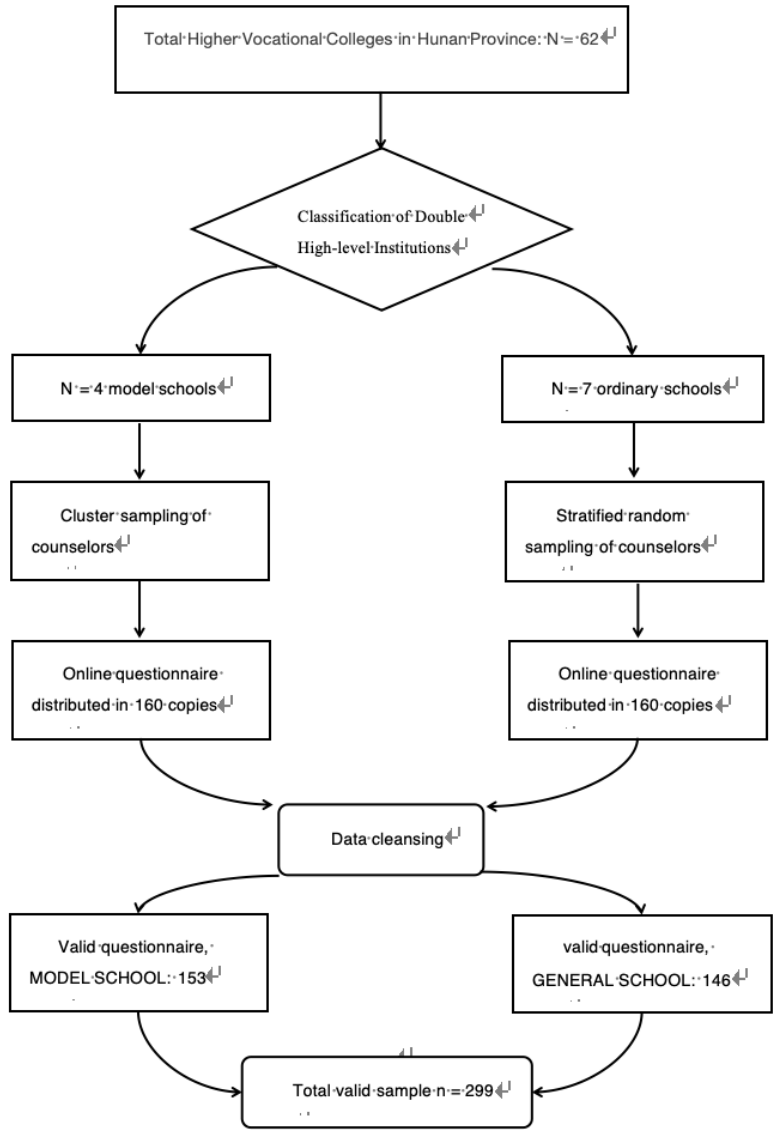


Fig. 1. Sampling Frame and Implementation Process

A total of 320 questionnaires were distributed for this study. After rigorous screening, 21 invalid responses were excluded, resulting in 299 valid questionnaires with a valid response rate of 93%. To facilitate further analysis of the survey data, operational definitions were established for the research dimensions based on the measurement

scale content (see Table 3). The operationalization indicators for dimensional conversion and their corresponding theoretical foundations are detailed below (Table 1).

Table 1. Operationalization of Latitude Definition

Management quality	Organizational Coordination Skills	A1-A8	Article 5 of Document No. 2 [2014] on Ideological and Political Education
Professional quality	Mastery of Regulations and Policies	B1-B8	Chapter III of the <Standards for Professional Competence of College Counselors (Interim)>(Professional Knowledge)
Ideological Guidance quality	Effectiveness of Value Dissemination	C1-C8	Chapter II of the <Standards for Professional Competence of College Counselors (Interim)>(Ideological and Political Education)

3 Empirical Analysis

3.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis

To further prove the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, this study used SPSS 22.0 software to conduct reliability and validity tests on the scale. As shown in Table 2, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of each latent variable were above 0.95, indicating high internal consistency and reliability of the measurement items. The KMO validity coefficients of each latent variable were above 0.85, indicating high validity.

Table 2. Reliability Analysis of Variables

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	KMO Validity Coefficient	Bartlett's Sphericity Test Significance
Internal Ability	12	0.975	0.904	Significant
Policy Environment	12	0.959	0.874	Significant
Achievement Output	10	0.983	0.921	Significant
School Support	10	0.951	0.898	Significant

To determine the number of factors influencing observed variables and the correlation between factors and observed variables, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was further conducted on four subscales. The results showed a KMO coefficient of 0.944 and Bartlett's test of sphericity value of 5997 with 1022 degrees of freedom, indicating the sample data were suitable for factor analysis. To obtain more clearly defined influencing factors, principal component analysis was employed to screen eigenvalues

greater than 1. After removing non-convergent items and applying orthogonal rotation, the factor matrix revealed 24 remaining items converging into three factors following the elimination of items with factor loadings below 0.5. These three factors demonstrated a cumulative contribution rate of 71.43%, indicating that over 70% of the variance in the 24 variables could be explained by three common factors (see Table 3). The matrix results demonstrated that the structural design among the questionnaire variables was reasonable. Management competency, professional competence, and ideological leadership capability were identified as the primary dimensions influencing the quality and capabilities of university counselors.

Table 3. Exploratory Factor Analysis of Influencing Factors on College Counselors' Quality and Ability

Latent Variable	Item	Factor Loadings			
		Management quality	Professional quality	Education consciousness	con-
Management quality	A1.Employment Guidance	0.938			
	A2. Class Building	0.931			
	A3.Communication Skills	0.922			
	A4. Overall and Detail Control	0.845			
	A5.Communication and Empathy	0.930			
	A6.Campus Crisis Management	0.857			
	A7.Research and Investigation	0.805			
	A8.Information Integration and Analysis	0.859			
Professional quality	B1.Interdisciplinary Knowledge Reserve		0.867		
	B2.Party-related Theoretical Knowledge		0.779		

	B3. Ideological and Political Education Laws and Regulations		0.942	
	B4.Practical Knowledge of Ideological and Political Work		0.927	
	B5.Theoretical Knowledge of Ideological and Political Education		0.945	
	B6.Communication Skills		0.897	
	B7.Contest Knowledge and Skills for Counselors		0.940	
	B8. Understanding of Students' Basic Situations		0.867	
Ideological Guidance quality	C1. Education on New Ideas and Strategies			0.897
	C2. Cultural Heritage and Promotion			0.900
	C3. Moral Education			0.899
	C4.Monitoring Students' Ideological Dynamics (Informants)			0.931
	C5.Monitoring Students' Ideological Dynamics (Social Media)			0.919
	C6.Innovation in Work			0.920
	C7.Theoretical Learning and Research			0.889
	C8.Skills in Ideological and Political Education			0.897

3.2 Path Analysis and Model Fit Analysis

After identifying the main influencing factors, the AMOS 24.0 software was employed to conduct a structural model analysis of the influencing factors on the quality and ability of counselors. As shown in Table 4, the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/DF) of the revised model is 3.125, indicating that the model fit is within an acceptable range, although not very ideal. This suggests that there is a certain degree of discrepancy between the model and the actual data, but the discrepancy is not intolerable. The NFI, CFI, and IFI values of the revised model are all close to 0.90, indicating a very good model fit. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is 0.105, slightly higher than 0.1, and is on the edge of the acceptable range.

Table 4. Model Fit Index Results

Fit Index	Value
Chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/DF)	3.125
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0.86≈0.9
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.901≈0.9
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	0.901≈0.9
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.105≈0.1

3.3 Effect Analysis of Variables in the Model

Table 5 presents the results of model parameter estimates. Overall, the path coefficients between management quality, professional quality, and ideological guidance and the influencing factors of counselors' quality and ability show significant positive relationships.

From the specific values, we can see that:

The most significant factor influencing the quality and ability of university counselors is ideological guidance, followed by management quality, and lastly, professional knowledge quality. The correlation coefficient between management quality and influence is 0.32, indicating that management quality can affect the quality and ability of university counselors, but it does not meet the expected value. In contrast, the correlation coefficient between the awareness of nurturing students and influence is 0.66, suggesting that enhancing the awareness of nurturing students can significantly improve the quality and ability of university counselors.

Looking at the values of direct and indirect effects, the influence of management quality and ideological guidance on the quality and ability of university counselors is entirely derived from indirect effects. This indicates that daily management methods

and skills can highlight the quality and ability of university counselors. Stronger quality and ability of counselors are accompanied by the accumulation and application of ideological and political knowledge. This suggests that among the nine major functions of counselors, management functions such as party and league class construction and campus crisis event response, as well as functions related to online ideological and political education, ideological and theoretical education, and value guidance, are important aspects in reflecting the quality and ability of university counselors.

Table 5. Model Parameter Estimates

Path Relationship	Standardized Coefficient	Path T-value	Significance	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Test Result
Management Quality	0.35	2.55	Significant	0.785	0.3925	0.3925	Partially Established
Professional Quality	0.62	3.66	Significant	0.198	0.198	0	Established
Ideological Guidance	0.68	5.42	Significant	0.416	0.208	0.208	Partially Established

4 Conclusions

Based on the results of the structural equation model of the influencing factors of counselors' quality and ability, management quality, professional quality, and ideological guidance all have varying degrees of influence on the improvement of counselors' quality and ability. The following conclusions can be drawn:

Firstly, enhancing ideological and political guidance quality is the core of counselors' quality and ability. The quality and ability of counselors are mainly reflected in the effective cultivation of students. As the backbone force of ideological and political education for college students, the ideological and political quality of counselors directly affects their ability to guide students in establishing correct worldviews, outlooks on life, and values^{[3][4]}. In a rapidly changing social environment, students face the impact of diverse cultures and complex social issues. The awareness and ability of counselors in ideological and political guidance can provide students with correct ideological orientation and value guidance. Counselors with high ideological and political quality can better understand students' ideological dynamics and psychological needs, establish deep emotional connections with students, and thus more effectively carry out ideological education and psychological counseling. It is worth noting that the survey results show that the quality and ability of counselors are also reflected

in the exemplary role they play for students. The behavior and demeanor of counselors have a subtle influence on students, and those with high ideological and political quality can set an example for students to learn from.

Secondly, strengthening management quality is the guarantee for improving counselors' quality and ability. The orderliness of class and student management is a direct reflection of counselors' quality and ability. Good management skills enable counselors to effectively organize class activities, promote the formation of class cohesion and centripetal force, and create a harmonious and positive learning environment for students. In daily management and emergency response, counselors with strong management skills can react quickly and handle situations properly, ensuring the safety and stability of students. Additionally, counselors need to communicate effectively with various school departments, parents, and the broader community. Management skills play an important role in this process, ensuring smooth information flow and timely problem-solving.

Thirdly, strengthening management competence serves as a safeguard for enhancing counselors' professional capabilities. The orderly management of classes and students directly reflects counselors' comprehensive qualities. Strong management skills enable counselors to effectively organize class activities, foster class cohesion and centripetal force, thereby creating a harmonious and positive learning environment for students. In daily management and emergency response scenarios, counselors with exceptional management capabilities can react swiftly and handle situations appropriately to ensure student safety and campus stability. However, compared with studies in eastern coastal regions (Wei Wei, 2012), this research reveals that the standardized path coefficient for campus crisis management (A6) among Hunan counselors is 0.15 lower. According to the China Education Statistical Yearbook 2022, the annual emergency training duration in Hunan's vocational colleges (12.5 hours) is significantly shorter than that in Zhejiang Province (18.2 hours), potentially indicating regional disparities in emergency training resources in central China. Furthermore, counselors need to maintain effective communication with various university departments, parents, and social stakeholders, where management competence plays a crucial role in ensuring smooth information flow and timely problem resolution.

In summary, it is essential for counselors to enhance their ideological and political quality, management skills, and professional knowledge. Among these, ideological and political quality is particularly important due to its direct impact on students' ideological growth and value shaping; management skills are crucial for ensuring the orderly conduct of daily work and addressing various challenges; and professional knowledge provides a more comprehensive and in-depth foundation for counselors' work. These three aspects complement each other and together form a complete system of professional quality for counselors. To improve counselors' quality and ability, the following approaches can be adopted.

5 Suggestions for Enhancing Competence

Table 6. Three-Dimensional Enhancement Matrix

Dimension	Current Performance	Per-centage	Cumulative Effect Percentage	Priority Level	Key Focus Areas
Ideological Guidance	0.68		38.2%	Level I	Strengthen emerging fields such as online ideological education
Professional Competency	0.62		34.8%	Level II	Enhance specialized training in crisis management
Management Quality	0.35		27.0%	Level III	Develop tiered and categorized training systems

Based on the above data analysis, a three-dimensional improvement matrix can be established based on the data results, as shown in Table 6.

Regarding the influence of thought leadership $\beta = 0.68$, in order to comprehensively enhance the ideological and political leadership qualities of counselors and make them the core force in ideological and political education for college students, we need to adopt a series of targeted strategies. First, strengthen theoretical learning and training in ideological and political studies. Through regular organization of study sessions, utilization of online learning platforms, and practical workshops, we can deepen counselors' understanding of the Party's theories, current policies, and social hotspots, and enhance their political theory level and practical operation ability, integrating "high-quality concepts" into the entire process of team innovation and development^[5]; we should earnestly study Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, and the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, study current policies, learn knowledge in management, education, sociology, psychology, and student affairs management and employment guidance, and actively participate in relevant professional training^[6]. Secondly, strengthen the awareness and ability of ideological and political leadership, clarify the goals of ideological and political work, enhance psychological counseling skills training, and improve counselors' emotional communication skills to better guide students to establish correct worldviews, outlooks on life, and values. At the same time, pay attention to the exemplary and leading role of counselors, carefully summarize and learn the experience of conducting daily ideological and political education for college students, master the skills and laws of doing the work well^[6], promote counselors' self-improvement and growth through establishing outstanding role models, strengthening the construction of teacher ethics and style, and establishing a student evaluation and feedback mechanism. In addition, promote the combination of theory and practice, provide practical training opportuni-

ties for counselors, and encourage case studies and sharing to extract and promote successful experiences. At the same time, establish virtual teaching research rooms across provinces to share high-quality training resources.

The professional quality β is 0.62. To lay a solid foundation for the quality and ability of counselors, the following strategies can be adopted: Firstly, establish a continuous learning mechanism for counselors' professional knowledge, encouraging and supporting them to deeply study the cutting-edge knowledge in relevant fields based on their own interests and students' needs, such as psychology, education, career planning, etc., in order to enhance their professional capabilities in academic guidance and career planning. Secondly, rely on display and communication platforms to build a cross-disciplinary communication platform, promoting exchanges and cooperation between counselors and professional teachers, industry experts, etc., to improve their professional identity [8]. Through lectures, seminars, etc., broaden the knowledge horizons of counselors and enhance their ability to solve practical problems by applying professional knowledge. At the same time, establish a counselor professional knowledge certification system, recognizing and rewarding counselors who have reached a certain level of professional knowledge, motivating all counselors to actively enhance their professional quality. In this way, it can not only better meet the diversified needs of students, improve the targeted and effectiveness of work, but also enhance the professional identity and sense of achievement of counselors, promoting their all-round development and growth in the new situation.

The management quality β is 0.35. By constructing a systematic training program, strengthening communication and coordination skills, establishing an evaluation mechanism, and encouraging innovative practices, the management quality of counselors can be effectively enhanced, providing a solid guarantee for ensuring students' safety and stability, promoting class harmony and development. Firstly, establish a systematic management ability training system. The entire counselor team requires a professional training mechanism and institution to promote its overall development [7]. It covers key areas such as daily class management, activity planning and execution, and emergency response, etc. Through various forms such as theoretical lectures, case analysis, and simulation exercises, enhance the management theoretical literacy and practical operation ability of counselors, and develop the "five-stage ability cultivation model" to cultivate the comprehensive management quality of counselors in multiple stages from basic skills - routine management - crisis response - innovative practice - exemplary leadership. Secondly, strengthen the communication and coordination skills of counselors, hold regular communication skills and coordination strategy workshops to improve their communication efficiency and quality with students, parents, various departments of the school, and even the entire society, ensuring smooth information flow and the ability to quickly identify and effectively solve problems. At the same time, establish a counselor management effectiveness evaluation mechanism [6], through student satisfaction surveys, peer evaluations, and management case presentations, to conduct regular evaluations and feedback on the management ability of counselors, motivating counselors to continuously improve management methods and enhance management efficiency. In addition, encourage counselors to participate in class management innovation practices, such as introducing student self-

governance mechanisms and conducting team-building activities, through practice to explore more efficient and humanized management models, further enhancing class cohesion and centripetal force, and creating a more harmonious and positive learning environment for students.

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