

A Three-Dimensional Exploration of Enhancing Vocational College Counselors' Professional Literacy Against the Backdrop of New Quality Productive Forces

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Abstract: With the introduction of the concept of new quality productive forces, new demands are placed on the professional competence of counselors. Higher vocational colleges focus on cultivating skilled professionals. As guides in students' educational management, growth, and talent development, the enhancement of counselors' professional competence is directly related to the cultivation of students' comprehensive qualities and the improvement of educational quality in higher vocational colleges. To address current issues such as counselors' weak professional knowledge structure, limited technical application capabilities; insufficient research literacy and innovation ability; ambiguous role positioning and unclear career development paths; and inadequate theoretical literacy, this article analyzes the enhancement of counselors' professional competence in higher vocational colleges under the background of new quality productive forces from three dimensions: value implication, practical dilemmas, and practical approaches.

Keywords: New Quality Productive Forces; Higher Vocational Colleges; Counselors; Professional Competence.

1. Introduction

As the primary practitioners of ideological and political education for college students, counselors' level of professional competence is closely tied to the effectiveness of fulfilling the fundamental task of "fostering virtue through education." Faced with the current proposition of new quality productive forces, the development of the counselor team has taken on new directions and requirements. Enhancing the professional competence of counselors in higher vocational colleges therefore holds significant practical importance.

2. The Value Implication of Enhancing the Professional Competence of Counselors in Higher Vocational Colleges under the Background of New Quality Productive Forces

2.1. An Inevitable Move to Align with the Talent Cultivation Goals of Higher Vocational Colleges in the New Era

Higher vocational colleges serve as fertile ground for cultivating talents for new quality productive forces and a cradle for nurturing skilled professionals. College students, as a highly innovative and dynamic group, are key agents of new quality productive forces. Different types of higher education institutions have distinct talent cultivation objectives. The starting point of new quality productive forces lies in "new," while the key lies in "quality." In this new era, the goals of talent cultivation are also constantly evolving. Higher vocational colleges should focus on cultivating applied technical talents who are proficient in utilizing new quality means of production. Counselors, as guides on the path of students' growth and talent development, play a crucial role. Therefore, enhancing the professional competence of counselors is essential to adapt to the talent cultivation goals of the new era. Only through the effective enhancement of

counselors' professional competence can they better meet the diverse and individualized needs of students, promote the high-quality development of higher vocational education, and better align with the developmental requirements of education in the new era.

2.2. A Practical Need for Strengthening the Effectiveness of Ideological and Political Education for College Students in the New Era

The rapid development of big data and the information age has brought new opportunities and challenges to the ideological and political education of college students. The ever-changing social environment, the astonishing pace of information technology advancement, and the increasing prominence of students' individuality all demand that counselors continuously enhance their professional competence. This is essential to better adapt to the new requirements under the backdrop of new quality productive forces and to carry out ideological and political education work more effectively [1]. As the organizers, implementers, and guides of daily ideological and political education and management work for college students, counselors' level of professional competence is a direct factor influencing the effectiveness of this education. Counselors with high professional competence are better able to accurately grasp national policies and current situations, more meticulously understand changes in students' ideological trends, and significantly improve work efficiency. This helps students develop clear cognition, life philosophies, and value orientations, thereby enhancing the practical effectiveness of ideological and political education.

2.3. An Inherent Requirement for Advancing the Professionalization and Specialization of the Counselor Team

Professionalization demands that counselors possess

specialized knowledge and skills, enabling them to be competent in all tasks related to student affairs. Through systematic training and learning, counselors can gain a clearer understanding of fields such as pedagogy and psychology, enhance their ability to solve practical problems, and thus perform their duties more professionally. Specialization requires counselors to have in-depth research and unique insights in a specific area or direction, allowing them to provide more precise and effective guidance to students. The key to achieving the professionalization and specialization of the counselor team lies in enhancing their professional competence. This element serves as a crucial cornerstone for advancing the entire team to a higher level of development and is also the core driving force propelling the counselor team toward professionalization and specialization.

3. Practical Dilemmas in Enhancing the Professional Competence of Counselors in Higher Vocational Colleges under the Background of New Quality Productive Forces

3.1. Weak Professional Knowledge Structure and Limited Technological Application Abilities

The roles and responsibilities of university counselors are characterized by complexity and multiplicity, requiring a rich foundation of professional knowledge, including psychology, pedagogy, management, sociology, and other related fields [4]. Although the overall educational level of the counselor workforce is gradually improving, issues such as broad disciplinary backgrounds and low professional relevance persist. Some counselors lack sufficient knowledge reserves in these disciplines like psychology and pedagogy, particularly those with engineering backgrounds. Their weak professional knowledge structure leads to a lack of specificity and professionalism in student affairs and ideological and political education, making it difficult to respond efficiently in their work.

With the emergence of technologies such as big data, cloud computing, and the Internet of Things, university counselors face unprecedented opportunities and challenges in their work. Due to a lack of timely mastery of these new technological updates, counselors often struggle to apply data and information technology adeptly. This may lead to biases in information-based decision-making in daily work and create obstacles in conducting ideological and political education for college students. Furthermore, counselors exhibit deficiencies in utilizing new technological tools for student management and education, hindering the full realization of technology's empowering role.

3.2. Insufficient Research Literacy and Innovation Capability

Research capability is also a key factor in measuring the professional competence of counselors. Due to varying educational backgrounds among counselors in higher vocational colleges, their research capabilities are generally underdeveloped. Some counselors lack awareness of the importance of research, primarily because their daily work requires substantial effort to handle complex administrative tasks, leaving them with very limited time and energy to dedicate to research. Furthermore, counselors often lack the

necessary guidance and support in the research process, resulting in limited research output. This deficiency in research literacy makes it difficult for counselors to achieve breakthroughs in academic fields, thereby hindering the further enhancement of their professional competence.

With the continuous development of new quality productive forces, counselors in higher vocational colleges face new challenges. In the context of new quality productive forces, counselors must not only possess solid professional knowledge and skills but also, most critically, cultivate an innovative mindset and capability to meet the new demands of the labor force under this framework. However, due to the unique nature of their work, counselors often develop "work inertia" and fall into "path dependence" when handling daily tasks [6]. Over time, this can lead to professional burnout and a lack of intrinsic motivation for work innovation.

3.3. Ambiguous Role Positioning and Unclear Career Development Pathways

As noted by the renowned educator Gu Mingyuan, "For any social profession to earn societal respect, there exists an unbreakable principle: the profession must achieve professionalization." Counselors undertake highly important and diverse responsibilities—they are not only organizers, implementers, and guides in students' daily affairs management and educational teaching but also mentors on students' life paths and caring companions in their healthy growth. Thus, counselors embody a dual identity as both educators and administrators. This complex and multifaceted role positioning often leads to role conflicts in practical work and results in ambiguous role perception. While seemingly offering broader development space and more possibilities for counselors, this situation actually brings considerable uncertainty in career progression, such as in rank promotion and role transitions, which to some extent undermines their awareness of professional development.

The ambiguity in career development pathways for counselors has become a significant obstacle to the further enhancement of their professional competence. For many counselors, unclear career trajectories make it difficult to precisely anchor their future development direction. Additionally, due to insufficiently refined management mechanisms, counselors often lack a sense of identity and fulfillment in their roles, which hampers the realization of their intrinsic value and the improvement of their capabilities. The vague role positioning of counselors further leads some to lack clear planning for their future development, making it challenging to achieve sustained growth and advancement in their careers. Ultimately, this impedes the effective enhancement of their professional competence.

3.4. Insufficient Theoretical Literacy

Theory and practice complement each other, with theory providing guidance for practice. In their daily work, university counselors are often occupied with routine administrative tasks, making it difficult for them to allocate time for systematic theoretical learning. Consequently, they lack opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in practice. In terms of theoretical knowledge acquisition, passive learning is the norm for most counselors, who demonstrate limited initiative and proactiveness. As a result, their theoretical literacy cannot be effectively enhanced. This directly impacts the depth and effectiveness of counselors' work in ideological and political education, thereby hindering

the further improvement of their professional competence.

4. Practical Approaches to Enhancing the Professional Competence of Counselors in Higher Vocational Colleges under the Background of New Quality Productive Forces

4.1. Enhancement in the Dimension of Philosophy and Awareness

1. Understanding the Connotation of New Quality Productive Forces

New quality productive forces begin with "newness," hinge on "quality," [7] and are grounded in "productive forces." Characterized by high technology, high efficiency, and high quality, they are driven primarily by innovation, moving beyond traditional economic growth models. Emphasizing technological innovation as the leading factor, along with industrial upgrading and informatization as driving forces for productivity, this concept places higher demands on counselors in higher vocational colleges. Counselors need to deeply understand the essence of new quality productive forces, thereby recognizing their profound impact on talent cultivation, educational management, student employment, and other related areas.

2. Recognizing the Importance of Enhancing Professional Competence

The responsibilities of a counselor necessitate firmly establishing a student-centered educational philosophy in their work, consistently focusing on the holistic development of students, which may sometimes lead to neglecting their own professional growth. As counselors in higher vocational colleges, it is crucial to recognize the importance of enhancing professional competence. Possessing a high level of professional competence enables counselors to better understand their professional value and mission, thereby engaging more actively and effectively in their work.

4.2. Enhancement in the Dimension of Knowledge and Skills

1. Improving the Structure of Professional Knowledge

The development of new quality productive forces requires counselors to possess broader and deeper expertise, including knowledge in psychology, pedagogy, management, and emerging technologies such as big data and cloud computing. Counselors should strengthen their study of theories related to ideological and political education, psychology, and pedagogy, and master scientific educational methods and tools. This will contribute to improving the effectiveness of ideological and political education for students in higher vocational institutions. Additionally, counselors must deepen their understanding of the Party's theories, guidelines, principles, and policies, as well as the fundamental theories and methods of ideological and political education, continuously enhancing their theoretical foundation and political awareness.

2. Mastering Emerging Technologies

In the context of new quality productive forces, digital and intelligent technologies are widely applied [4]. Counselors should stay informed about advancements in science and technology, keep pace with the times, and enhance their understanding of new technologies and industries by

participating in professional training, seminars, and similar activities. They need to familiarize themselves with emerging fields and technologies while continuously improving their technical application skills. Acquiring information technology and data analysis capabilities will enable counselors to better utilize online resources and technological tools in their student-related work. For example, leveraging new technologies to analyze students' learning progress and psychological states can facilitate personalized education and guidance.

3. Cultivating Problem Awareness and Innovation Capability

Counselors should dare to break away from conventional thinking patterns and be willing to experiment with new educational methods and approaches. They must strengthen their problem awareness, engage in deep reflection on issues emerging from daily ideological and political education, and summarize their insights. By courageously exploring new methods and pathways, they can overcome "path dependence" and innovate in their work practices. Additionally, participating in innovation and entrepreneurship projects within schools or enterprises can help accumulate practical experience and enhance their innovative capacity.

4. Strengthening Practical Experience

Practice serves as the sole criterion for testing truth, and genuine knowledge arises from practical experience. Counselors should emphasize the accumulation of hands-on experience by engaging in activities such as organizing student events, providing psychological counseling, facilitating social practices, and offering career guidance. This will help improve their practical skills and adaptability. At the same time, counselors should actively participate in scientific research and teaching reforms within their institutions to promote innovation in education and instruction.

5. Enhancing Research Capabilities

Research proficiency is an indispensable component of effectively improving counselors' professional competence. Through their daily work, counselors interact directly with students, providing access to firsthand resources. They can employ investigation and research as valuable tools to refine and analyze work cases, effectively transforming routine work outcomes into research achievements such as projects and academic papers. Furthermore, regularly attending academic conferences, engaging in professional exchanges, and interacting with experts and scholars can broaden their perspectives and elevate their research standards. Joining relevant research teams and collaborating with peers across disciplines also serve as effective means to enhance research capabilities.

4.3. Enhancement of the Methods and Strategies Dimension

1. Establishing Scientific Mechanisms for Assessment, Evaluation, and Incentives

University counselors possess dual identities as both educators and administrators, which often leads to ambiguous role definition, placing them in an interstitial position between teaching staff and managerial personnel. To better enhance the professional competence of counselors, universities should establish a scientific assessment

mechanism. This involves conducting multi-dimensional evaluations of counselors, encompassing comprehensive assessment from various perspectives such as "integrity, competence, diligence, performance, and probity." Furthermore, it is essential to establish a multi-faceted evaluation system. This system should incorporate evaluations from multiple sources, including students, colleagues, leadership, and self-assessment, to ensure comprehensiveness and objectivity. Equal emphasis should be placed on process evaluation and outcome evaluation, focusing not only on the results of counselors' work but also on their efforts, innovations, and methodologies during the work process. A combination of feedback and guidance should be utilized, providing timely evaluation results to counselors, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses, and offering specific suggestions for improvement. This encourages counselors to engage in self-reflection and continuous improvement, thereby constantly enhancing their professional competence. Additionally, a scientific incentive mechanism is crucial. It should skillfully utilize both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic incentives, such as salary benefits, position promotions, and commendations, serve to stimulate counselors' work enthusiasm through material rewards. Intrinsic motivation, for instance, involves addressing counselors' spiritual needs like self-actualization and providing research support, thereby igniting their internal drive and promoting the comprehensive enhancement of their professional competence.

2. Clarifying the Job Responsibilities of Counselors

To effectively enhance the professional competence of the counseling team, it is essential to clearly define the job responsibilities of counselors, standardize and detail their work duties. Clarifying counselors' job responsibilities at the position level ensures that their work has clear boundaries. The nature of counselors' work is characterized by numerous miscellaneous tasks, varied responsibilities, and diverse situations, often resulting in fragmented duties, many of which do not meaningfully contribute to enhancing their professional competence. To genuinely improve the professionalism and relevance of counselors' work, it is necessary to clearly define and standardize the core scope of their responsibilities. Based on the "Regulations on the Construction of Counselor Teams in Ordinary Higher Education Institutions" issued by the Ministry of Education and other relevant policy documents, and in close alignment with the specific conditions and student characteristics of the institution, a detailed and comprehensive list of counselor job responsibilities should be carefully formulated. This list explicitly outlines the specific duties of counselors, covering key areas such as ideological and political education, mental health counseling, academic guidance, employment support, and more. Building on clearly defined responsibilities, the focus should be on addressing the primary contradictions and key issues in the work, applying targeted efforts to avoid dispersion of energy. Through reasonable task allocation and process optimization, counselors should be relieved from a large volume of tedious and fragmented administrative tasks, enabling them to devote more time and energy to core responsibilities. This will allow counselors to truly play a vital guiding and mentoring role in the process of students' growth and development, thereby advancing the professionalization of the counselor team in higher vocational colleges as a whole.

3. Optimizing Career Development Pathway Planning

for Counselors

To achieve the professional development of counselors, their career development pathways require scientific planning. First, counselors must clarify their own career goals and positioning. Through methods such as SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis, they should conduct a comprehensive self-assessment of their interests, abilities, values, and career inclinations, and set clear career development goals. This involves choosing diversified career paths, such as moving towards administrative positions, teaching roles, or research-oriented roles, combining long-term and short-term objectives. Examples include competing for administrative positions such as college leadership or head of a teaching and research office, or transitioning to become a specialized course instructor. Second, universities should attach high importance to the professional development of the counselor team. By inspiring career vision, strengthening professional identity, and mapping out a development blueprint, the professional competence of the counselor team can be enhanced. It is essential to fully recognize the dual identity of counselors as both teachers and administrative staff. Universities should build platforms for counselor growth, including curriculum development platforms, research platforms, and professional competency competition platforms, actively promoting the specialization of counselors. Ultimately, this will lead to the effective improvement of counselors' professional competence.

4. Strengthening the Training and Professional Development of Counselors

Under the backdrop of new quality productive forces, the importance of enhancing counselor training has become increasingly prominent. As a key driver of socio-economic development, new quality productive forces are led by innovation [7]. Their advancement demands that counselors possess greater innovative spirit and capabilities, as well as the ability to adapt to new technologies and emerging industries. As guides for students' growth and development, counselors must continuously update their own knowledge structures and capability systems to better guide students in adapting to the developmental demands of new quality productive forces. Through enhanced training, counselors can stay abreast of cutting-edge trends in new technologies and industries, gain a deeper understanding of the connotations and characteristics of new quality productive forces, and continuously elevate their own comprehensive qualities and competency levels to better meet the needs of students' growth and development. This enables them to provide better guidance and education, thereby enhancing students' overall qualities and abilities.

Higher education institutions should attach great importance to counselor training. Schools should establish diverse training platforms, such as counselor workshops, experience-sharing sessions, and online learning platforms, to provide counselors with rich training resources. Inviting seasoned experts and scholars with extensive experience and profound expertise from fields such as education and industry to conduct thematic lectures and experience-sharing activities can break through counselors' existing knowledge boundaries, broaden their horizons, and inspire fresh approaches to work. This allows them to engage in student management and educational efforts with a broader perspective and more forward-thinking mindset. At the same time, fully considering the individual differences among counselors, personalized

training plans should be tailored based on each counselor's actual work situation, career development goals, and their specific needs for knowledge and skill enhancement. From the selection of training content and course design to the choice of teaching methods, every aspect should revolve around the core objective of improving counselors' practical work capabilities. This ensures that the training content is both closely aligned with counselors' actual work and highly targeted and practically effective, truly making the training purposeful and assisting counselors in their continuous growth and progress on their professional paths. Meanwhile, counselors should also actively participate in training activities, continuously improving their own qualities and competency levels to better adapt to the developmental demands of new quality productive forces and contribute to the ongoing advancement of higher education.

5. Implementing Continuing Education and Academic Qualification Enhancement Plans

Society is developing rapidly, and technology is constantly evolving. Counselors must regularly update their knowledge reserves to keep pace with the times. Under the background of new quality productive forces, innovation has been elevated to a new height. This also places higher demands on the professional competence of counselors. Academic qualification enhancement is an important pathway for the professional growth of counselors. The academic qualifications of counselors in higher vocational colleges are generally lower than those in undergraduate institutions, with many counselors holding only a bachelor's degree. Through systematic learning and research, counselors must further deepen their understanding and mastery of disciplines such as pedagogy, psychology, and management, thereby enhancing their professional competence and vocational capabilities. It is essential to refine the academic qualification enhancement plans for counselors in higher vocational colleges, helping more of them raise their academic levels and steadily improve their professional standards. Counselors should actively conduct comprehensive and in-depth self-assessments, meticulously analyzing aspects such as their work performance, knowledge reserves, and skill levels, gaining insight into their strengths while not shying away from their shortcomings. Higher vocational colleges should introduce relevant policies to encourage and support counselors in advancing their academic qualifications, such as establishing special funds for doctoral studies, appropriately reducing the workload for counselors applying for doctoral programs, and collaborating with other institutions for joint doctoral training. Through their own efforts and institutional support,

counselors can ultimately achieve effective enhancement of their professional competence.

5. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of new quality productive forces, enhancing the professional competence of counselors in higher vocational colleges is the essential path for them to adapt to its development and effectively fulfill their duties. This requires comprehensive improvement across multiple dimensions, including philosophy and cognition, knowledge and skills, as well as methods and strategies. Only by continuously advancing the professional competence and comprehensive abilities of counselors can they better meet the demands of educational transformation, drive the overall development of higher vocational colleges, and make greater contributions to the advancement of higher vocational education and the cultivation of high-quality technical and skilled talents.

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