

Strategies for Enhancing the Quality and Capability of Counselors in Private Universities

Youxin Lai¹ Hao Wang²

^{1,2} Guangzhou City University of Technology, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China

¹Corresponding author. Email: laiyx@gcu.edu.cn

ABSTRACT

The rapid development of higher education is inseparable from the rise of private universities, which are an important part of higher education. However, in terms of operational mechanisms, faculty allocation, teaching management, and research levels, private universities significantly differ from public universities, making it more challenging for private universities to improve the quality and capability of their faculty and counselor teams. Through literature analysis and case studies, this paper systematically analyzes the current status of counselor team building in private universities, explores the key difficulties in enhancing counselors' quality and capabilities, and proposes corresponding strategies and suggestions. The innovation of this paper lies in combining current education policies and practical cases to propose a counselor quality and capability enhancement project centered on "one plan, two platforms, and three constructions," which has strong practical guidance significance and promotion value. This study aims to provide theoretical support and practical paths for private universities to enhance the quality and capability of their counselor teams, promoting their healthy development.

Keywords: Private universities, Counselors, Quality and capability enhancement, Strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Private universities are an indispensable part of higher education, sharing the responsibility with public universities of cultivating outstanding youth for the new era[1]. The rapid development and healthy growth of private universities rely on the improvement of the quality and capability of their counselor teams. However, due to differences in funding sources, faculty allocation, teaching management, and research levels between private and public universities, private universities face greater challenges in enhancing the quality and capability of their counselor teams.

Existing research indicates that there is a significant gap between the professional backgrounds of counselors at private universities and the requirements of ideological and political education work, affecting the effectiveness of ideological and political education and the job satisfaction of counselors. Furthermore, the management models and incentive mechanisms of private universities are often inadequate, leading to

high work pressure and high turnover rates among counselors. These issues not only restrict the development of the counselors themselves but also affect the quality and effectiveness of ideological and political education for university students.

This paper systematically analyzes the current status of counselor team building in private universities through literature analysis and case studies, explores the key difficulties in enhancing counselors' quality and capabilities, and proposes corresponding strategies and suggestions. The purpose of this study is to provide theoretical support and practical paths for private universities to enhance the quality and capability of their counselor teams, promoting their healthy development. Through systematic analysis and proposed strategies, this paper aims to provide strong support for the high-quality development of private universities in the context of the new era.

2. CURRENT STATUS OF COUNSELOR TEAM BUILDING IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

Counselors play a critical role in guiding and leading young university students towards their goals, serving as bridges to help them realize their dreams. They are not only the guides in students' academic and daily lives but also the first responders to everyday emergencies and the executors of decisions and plans from higher education administrative departments. Although counselor positions are widely established in universities across China, counselors in private universities face more challenges in performing their duties compared to those in public universities. Based on survey data, the current status of counselor team building in private universities is as follows:

2.1 Low Professional Alignment

There is a significant discrepancy between the majors studied by counselors in private universities and the requirements of ideological and political education for students[2]. Many counselors' professional backgrounds do not fully align with their job requirements. Private universities often prioritize the comprehensive qualities and management abilities of candidates over their specific academic backgrounds when hiring counselors. This results in many counselors lacking sufficient professional knowledge in ideological and political education. Additionally, many private universities have not yet established systematic and comprehensive training programs for counselors, with training content often focusing more on daily management and student affairs rather than professional knowledge and practical guidance in ideological and political education. This professional background discrepancy has a notable impact: counselors' insufficient professional knowledge in ideological and political education may lead to less effective educational outcomes and hinder their ability to effectively guide students in establishing correct values and outlooks on life. Furthermore, the professional background gap increases counselors' work pressure when dealing with complex issues in ideological and political education, affecting their job satisfaction and work enthusiasm. This not only restricts the development of the counselors themselves but also affects the quality and effectiveness of ideological and political education for university students.

2.2 Poor Effectiveness of Ideological and Political Education

Due to factors such as faculty cost control and market-oriented management of student affairs teams, many counselors in private universities are often graduates who stay on at their alma mater. While this can contribute to the stability of the counselor team to some extent, it can also lead to problems of internal negative cycles. Counselors who are graduates of the same institution tend to use their inherent understanding of ideological and political education, formed during their student years, to educate and guide current students. This approach makes it difficult to achieve significant improvements and breakthroughs in the ideological guidance of contemporary young university students.

2.3 High Work Difficulty

There are significant differences in the educational positioning between private and public universities. Private universities place greater emphasis on student safety and stability, career guidance, and public opinion management. Within this unique system, counselors in private universities need to serve students with greater precision and care, ensuring the school's positive brand image and making thorough preparations for student recruitment and employment.

2.4 Significant Differences in Work Recognition

There is a disparity in counselor-to-student ratios between private and public universities, leading to higher work pressure and intensity for counselors in private universities compared to their counterparts in public universities. Counselors in private universities are not only responsible for students' ideological and political education but also need to address various aspects of students' academic, psychological, daily, and employment needs, as well as handle various emergencies in a timely manner. The workload is extremely complex. However, their salaries, benefits, and professional recognition are lower than those of counselors in public universities, further exacerbating their work pressure and professional burnout.

The heavy and numerous tasks faced by counselors in private universities hinder their participation in various training programs and academic advancements, affecting their smooth

career development. Additionally, the evaluation systems in some private universities are not yet fully developed. Counselors often do not receive adequate rewards for their hard work, and their self-worth is not recognized, leading to increased professional burnout, which severely limits the improvement of student work management services in private universities. Unlike the personnel systems and retirement benefits in public universities, private universities have lower stability and higher turnover rates among counselors. These issues not only affect the improvement of ideological and political education for young university students in private universities but also hinder the progress of student work management services. To enhance the core competitiveness of private universities, it is essential to ensure the stability of the counselor team. The stability of the counselor team is crucial for the healthy development of private universities. This requires the management of private universities to consistently address the difficulties faced by counselors, focus on improving their quality and capability, continuously optimize the student work management service system, and effectively enhance the overall level of private universities.

3. CHALLENGES IN ENHANCING THE QUALITY AND CAPABILITY OF COUNSELORS IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

Against the backdrop of the internationalization of higher education, an increasing number of private universities in China are recognizing the importance of effective management models and incentive mechanisms for their development. They are beginning to shift their development mindset, learning from the advanced management models and incentive mechanisms of developed countries and drawing on their experiences to enhance their own competitiveness and management levels[3]. However, in practice, most private universities can only mimic these models superficially, neglecting the unique characteristics of private universities themselves. This leads to a failure to integrate the advanced management models and methods effectively, thus limiting the development and improvement of private universities.

3.1 Relatively Tight Funding

Currently, the management of private universities involves several contradictions and

conflicts, such as the competition between student enrollment rates and academic leadership, the balance between profitability and social welfare, and the regulation by the market and national policies. Among these, tuition revenue is often the primary consideration. The operational logic of most private universities is "to fund education with tuition," focusing on maintaining normal operations and passing various evaluations. In contrast, public universities adhere more to the principles of public service and public welfare. Consequently, private universities lag significantly behind public universities in terms of salaries and benefits for their faculty and counselor teams.

3.2 Limited Educational System

Private universities are an important part of higher education, and theoretically, there should be no significant disparity between counselors in private and public universities[4]. However, private universities do not place enough emphasis on counselors' salaries, benefits, and personal advancement. Particularly in terms of current salary levels, there remains a substantial gap between private and public universities, leading to high turnover and mobility rates. Many counselors in private universities feel they do not receive the same level of social respect as their counterparts in public universities, affecting their enthusiasm for work. The primary reason for this is the unique nature of private education, which cannot be treated the same as public education, resulting in unequal treatment in terms of personnel systems and social security.

3.3 Rigid Management Models

Due to the management models of private universities, some leaders fail to fundamentally recognize the importance of counselors' roles, viewing them merely as "tools." This attitude not only lacks incentives for counselors but also overlooks individual attention, resulting in high counselor turnover. The development history of private universities in China is relatively short, and management experience is insufficient, making it difficult to address counselors' concerns effectively. For example, private universities typically follow enterprise rate standards when paying social insurance and housing provident funds, leading to significant discrepancies compared to public universities. This lack of security causes counselors to feel insecure, unable to work with peace of mind, and results in low retention rates[5].

3.4 Lack of Self-Worth Recognition

Some private universities suffer from low social recognition, imperfect systems, and uncertain development prospects, leading counselors to experience self-doubt. Additionally, the academic expectations of students at these universities are generally low, increasing the difficulty and scope of counselors' guidance work. Most private universities focus on training application-oriented talents, and students primarily evaluate teachers based on their contributions to practical skills and technical improvements. If counselors have relevant professional backgrounds and can provide professional guidance, they can naturally integrate into ideological and political education. However, if counselors lack professional backgrounds or fail to find suitable entry points, the difficulty in conducting ideological and political education increases, making it hard for counselors to gain a sense of accomplishment from their hard work, and their self-worth goes unrecognized[6].

3.5 Evaluation Focused Solely on Immediate Results

Due to the need to control labor costs, some private universities adopt low-cost, high-efficiency standards for building their counselor teams. Counselors not only have to handle a large volume of routine student affairs but also undertake many non-core and non-professional tasks, resulting in high work volume and difficulty. Many private universities link counselors' performance and promotion opportunities to various student affairs metrics, focusing evaluation indicators more on short-term results and neglecting alignment with sustainable talent development goals. Under such circumstances, counselors' work pressure and mental burden continue to increase, leading to burnout and a tendency to leave the profession over time[7]. Often, the training of new counselors cannot keep pace with the rate of departures, resulting in wasted institutional investment.

4. STRATEGIES FOR STABILIZING AND ENHANCING THE QUALITY AND CAPABILITY OF COUNSELORS IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

Counselors play a crucial role in the ideological and political education of university students, and the quality of their team building directly affects the outcomes of this education. The quantitative

and qualitative changes in the counselor team are the results of a virtuous cycle based on the school's strong emphasis. By reforming the organizational management system of private universities, improving the salary system, enhancing benefits, standardizing the work content and responsibilities of counselors, ensuring a reasonable workload, and taking professionalization and expertise as assessment points, it is necessary to address the current issues in counselor team building in private universities and ensure the stability of the counselor team.

4.1 Improving Welfare and Enhancing the Salary System

To build an efficient and professional counselor team, private universities must improve the salary system and establish a sound reward mechanism. These systems should be used to motivate counselors, ensuring that the counselor team is well-staffed and strong. Private universities should set reasonable salaries for counselors based on the school's salary standards, considering the urban residents' consumption levels and relevant insurance contribution bases to meet their basic needs. Salary levels often reflect the value of counselors; counselors are "valued for their contributions." Therefore, schools need to improve the salary system and reward mechanisms, incorporating occupational pensions and commercial insurance, effectively implementing the principles of prioritizing efficiency and rewarding merit. This not only ensures that counselors' salaries can grow steadily but also improves their benefits and future retirement life, thereby retaining outstanding talents. By improving the salary system and reward mechanisms, private universities can motivate counselors to better perform their duties, enhance their job satisfaction and sense of belonging, and build a high-quality counselor team that provides strong support for the development of the school.

4.2 Implementing Institutional Reforms and Establishing Promotion Channels

To optimize the building of counselor teams in private universities, a scientific job grading system should be established, adhering to the principles of "scientific job setting, optimized structure, job allocation, and staffing," as well as "separate plans, separate standards, and separate evaluations." The number of counselor positions should be set according to a teacher-student ratio of no less than

1:200, with a combination of full-time and part-time positions, primarily full-time. This approach helps to better serve students, improve the efficiency of student management services, and enhance the quality and capability of the counselor team. Specifically, full-time counselor positions should be established, with job levels refined into four levels: counselor (Level 4), deputy director of counseling (Level 3), and director of counseling (Level 3). The job levels should be determined based on actual conditions, with the number of deputy director and director positions set at 50% of the number of candidates meeting the promotion criteria for the year. An evaluation leadership group should be formed, consisting of school leaders in charge, relevant department heads, and student management heads from each teaching unit. The leadership group should establish an evaluation working group responsible for the daily assessment of full-time counselors. The group leader and deputy group leader of the evaluation working group should be the heads of the Human Resources Department and the Student Work Department, respectively, with members from administrative departments and relevant personnel from each teaching unit. The evaluation criteria should cover aspects such as morality, ability, diligence, performance, integrity, educational background, current job level, professional title (qualification), and years of service. Through this scientific job grading system, private universities can more effectively coordinate and manage the counselor team, improve its work efficiency and professional level, and better meet the needs of student management and services.

4.3 Standardizing Work Content and Improving Performance Levels

Private universities should guide counselors to focus on their primary duties, with the goal of practical work achievements and effective education. Ideological and political education should be prioritized, along with student management and service work. Counselors must be fully aware of political issues, enhance their theoretical levels, and improve safety awareness, thus fulfilling the fundamental task of cultivating moral integrity and strengthening the ability to connect theory with practice. In the context of the new era, counselors should meet new requirements and showcase new achievements. Therefore, schools should regularly train and evaluate counselors to enhance their capabilities in managing daily student affairs, career planning and

guidance, handling emergencies, and more. This approach not only highlights the core responsibilities of counselors but also expands innovative working methods, enhances execution ability, and gradually improves their performance levels.

4.4 Formulating Enhancement Plans and Promoting Quality Development

To improve the quality and capability of counselor teams in private universities, it is essential to thoroughly understand and implement the relevant policy spirit regarding counselor team building from educational administrative departments. Following the theoretical guidance and institutional construction from national agencies, the Ministry of Education, and provincial education departments, schools should actively promote the enhancement of counselors' quality and capabilities. This requires increasing theoretical training, strengthening ideological and political construction, and systematically organizing or selectively sending counselors for further studies at both the school and department levels to ensure they continuously improve their professional qualities and work abilities[8]. Practical training should also be implemented to improve business skills, which is crucial for enhancing counselors' quality and capabilities. Training should focus on basic professional skills such as responsibility awareness, communication skills, writing ability, crisis identification, and more, to increase the relevance and effectiveness of ideological and political work. Each semester, targeted training modules should be conducted on various topics, including student mental health and guidance, emergency prevention and response, student entrepreneurship, education reform and development, career planning education, campus safety knowledge, and counselor team building. To ensure the effectiveness of these trainings, schools should invite renowned experts and scholars in the educational field for on-site guidance, thereby comprehensively improving counselors' professional levels and practical abilities.

4.5 Promoting the Implementation of the "Project" to Support Student Affairs Development

There is a must to promote the implementation of the "one plan, two platforms, three constructions" project. The "one plan" refers to the counselor team quality and capability enhancement

plan; the "two platforms" refer to the student affairs information exchange platform and the student affairs research mutual assistance platform; the "three constructions" include the informatization of student management, the construction of "three styles" (teaching style, study style, and school spirit), and the construction of a career development and experiential learning system. This project aims to unify the thoughts of the counselor team, gather strength, and form a cohesive force to comprehensively enhance the quality and capability of counselors, promoting the effective implementation of student management and ideological and political education work.

4.5.1 Establishing Communication Platforms and Strengthening Student Affairs Research

To promote the overall development of counselors and improve their job performance and research levels, it is necessary to enhance information exchange and research mutual assistance. By setting up a WeChat public account and establishing a school emergency incident record ledger, counselors can timely access key information on study improvement, job competition, academic competitions, project applications, and share experiences in handling student emergencies. In terms of research mutual assistance, schools should first help counselors cultivate research interests and refine research directions. Schools should establish and improve various academic organizations at both the school and department levels, build platforms to enhance research capabilities, and establish a counselor pairing exchange system. Through group guidance and exchange, counselors' research horizons and ideas can be broadened, research interests stimulated, and research directions clarified. The main purpose is to pass on experiences, teach methods, and provide daily guidance, using the "pairing" form and the "bring in" approach to achieve the goal of "promoting growth." Additionally, a student work research team should be established, with dual functions of theoretical study and practical exploration. Each research team should identify and analyze problems and shortcomings in student work at both the school and department levels, conduct countermeasure research and policy formulation, and combine national and provincial project applications to integrate research with practical work, thereby enhancing counselors' research capabilities and work levels.

4.5.2 Informatizing Student Management and Thoroughly Implementing "Three Styles" Construction

The student work informatization system greatly reduces counselors' workloads and shortens the time needed to record and retrieve student information. Using big data records, counselors can quickly analyze each student's personality and issues, thereby adopting different communication methods to guide education based on individual student needs. This approach not only reduces work difficulty but also improves work efficiency. Additionally, the construction of the "three styles" (good teaching style, strong study style, and upright school spirit) should be emphasized, embedding this concept deeply into the hearts of all teachers and students. The construction of the "three styles" relies on the silent dedication of the counselor team. A strong study style is the foundation of running a school, a good teaching style is crucial for branding, and an upright school spirit is the soul of the school. The "three styles" construction should be seen as a guarantee for expanding the scale of private universities. During the school operation process, the school spirit should drive the teaching style, the teaching style should promote the study style, and the study style should drive the school spirit, striving to provide education that satisfies the people.

4.5.3 Focusing on Career Development and Experiencing a Fulfilling Career

Some counselors often feel uncertain about their future, experience inefficiency in their work, lack motivation, and even face professional burnout. These issues stem from unclear career development plans for counselors, leading to aimlessness in work and life, lacking reasonable life planning. Therefore, private universities should provide counselors with "happy career experiential learning" and "happy career counseling" to help them clarify their career development plans, divided into short-term and long-term parts. The short-term plan is to perform their current duties well, mastering relevant methods and skills; the long-term plan is to encourage counselors to enhance their professionalization and expertise. A professional counselor should have clear language expression abilities, quick information acquisition capabilities, active organizational coordination abilities, thorough research abilities, and flexible emergency handling skills. Expertise means that counselors should regard this career as a lifelong profession,

not just a transitional job. To engage in counseling work long-term, they must study it as a science, constantly practice, gradually deepen, and strive to become experts in student work. Through "full preparation," counselors can lay a solid foundation for a fulfilling career[9].

5. CONCLUSION

In the development process of private universities, increasing attention to the enhancement of counselor team quality and capability is an important pathway to promote sustainable development. Through literature analysis and case studies, this paper systematically analyzes the current status and existing problems of counselor team building in private universities and proposes specific enhancement strategies. The study indicates that improving the salary system, establishing a sound reward mechanism, standardizing work content and responsibilities, and promoting professionalization and specialization are key measures to enhance the quality and capability of counselor teams.

The significance of this study lies in providing private universities with a systematic and operable plan for enhancing counselor quality and capability, which has strong practical guidance value. Through these measures, private universities can increase counselors' job satisfaction and sense of belonging, thereby stabilizing the counselor team and improving the overall level of student management and ideological and political education. Future research directions can focus on the following areas: first, further exploring the specific problems and solutions in counselor team building in different types of private universities; second, in-depth research on the pathways and practical cases of counselor professionalization and specialization development; third, evaluating and optimizing existing counselor incentive mechanisms and evaluation systems to ensure their long-term effectiveness and sustainability. Through continuous research and practical exploration, private universities can continuously enhance the quality and capability of their counselor teams, providing a solid foundation for high-quality student education and management work, and promoting the healthy and sustainable development of private universities.

REFERENCES

- [1] Zou, H., & Liu, J. The development history, stage characteristics, and future prospects of the teacher team construction in private universities. *Theory and Practice of Education*, 2024 (12), 40-45.
- [2] Qu, J., & Liu, Y. Accurately grasping the "changes" and "constants" in the work of university counselors in the digital age. *Research on Ideological and Political Education*, 2023(06), 157-163. doi:10.15938/j.cnki.iper.2023.06.026.
- [3] Ma, L. Research status on the incentive problems of counselors in private universities in the new era. *Modern Vocational Education*, 2021(42), 158-159.
- [4] Ma, Y., & Zhou, H. The intrinsic motivation and influencing factors of professional development for teachers in private universities. *Higher Education Development and Evaluation*, 2023(05), 58-68+121.
- [5] Hu, B. Research on high-quality construction paths for counselor teams in private universities in the new era. *Modern Vocational Education*, 2024(09), 105-108.
- [6] Wang, C., Xie, G., & Yang, T. Analysis of the causes of professional burnout among university counselors and countermeasures for professionalization based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. *Journal of Changchun Institute of Engineering (Social Science Edition)*, 2020(03), 24-27.
- [7] Wu, P., & Zhou, Y. Analysis of the influencing factors of counselor turnover in private universities. *Coal Higher Education*, 2021(04), 37-42. doi:10.16126/j.cnki.32-1365/g4.2021.04.006.
- [8] Zhu, P. The role and positioning of counselors in the "three-dimensional education" in universities — A discussion on the characteristics and functions of "education". *Ideological and Theoretical Education*, 2020(03), 86-91. doi:10.16075/j.cnki.cn31-1220/g4.2020.03.015.
- [9] Huang, H. Reflections on the employment education work of university counselors. *Employment and Security*, 2023(05), 157-159.