
Exploration and Reflection on the Communication Ability: A Pilot Study

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Abstract

At present communication ability of counselors is more important for students to have a smooth education period in university life. The current study aimed to identify the exploration and reflection on the communication ability of university counselors from China. This study applied a mixed-mode research method. For thesis development, the current study has conducted a pilot study on the measurement scale reliability and tests the measurements of this research. Based on the mixed-mode pilot analysis this study has identified that every variable has strong consistency. Regarding the communication abilities of Chinese counselors, role play, involvement, academic challenges, psychology, and self-efficacy are among the significant findings uncovered by the mixed-mode pilot analysis. Future research and practice in the fields of education, personal development, and decision-making may be influenced by these insights.

Keywords: *Roleplay, Teaching therapeutic skills, Psychological challenges, Self-efficacy, Communication ability*

1. Introduction

The foundation of successful counseling, particularly within the university context, lies in the implementation of effective communication strategies. This is particularly crucial due to the presence of diverse student populations who actively seek assistance in various aspects of their academic, personal, and emotional welfare. The responsibilities of university counselors have expanded beyond the provision of guidance, encompassing the need for them to possess exceptional communication skills that facilitate the development of trust, empathy, and comprehension in their interactions with students (Anandavalli et al., 2020).

With a history spanning over 2,000 years, the higher education system in China is regarded as one of the most ancient systems globally. The origins of higher education in China can be traced back to the fourth century BCE when Confucius founded a private academy (Marginson, 2021). During

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the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE), a variety of higher education institutions emerged, including the Guo Zi Jian, which catered to the education of the emperor's sons, and the Tai Xue, an institute dedicated to supreme learning (Gilgan, 2022). These institutions primarily focused on the study of classical texts from the Confucian school as the core content of their curriculum. During the later period of the Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE), a significant development took place in the organization of the Confucian classics. These texts were restructured in a manner that established a comprehensive knowledge system, which was deemed essential for all students who aspired to attain the esteemed position of scholar-officials within the imperial civil service (Hartman, 2023). During the late Qing Dynasty, the legitimacy and viability of traditional institutions of higher learning experienced a gradual decline as China faced humiliation due to military incursions by Japan and Western powers. The development of education, in China was closely connected to Western influences during a period marked by reform and self-improvement movements (Lo & Pan 2021).

Based on a report published by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2019 the total number of education institutions (HEIs) in the country was recorded as 2,956. Researchers identified a total of 2,688 institutions of education (HEIs) out of which 257 were colleges (Zhang et al., 2022). A comprehensive compilation of institutions revealed that there were 828 offering postgraduate programs and 1,265 offering bachelor's degree programs. Additionally, there were a total of 757 state colleges and universities including 257 independent institutions and one specialized institution for adult education. According to data provided by the Ministry of Education (MOE) the number of students enrolled in education increased by 1.69 million to reach a total of 40.02 million students (Alhouti, 2020). However, despite the expansion in education establishments (HEIs), it is evident that the current system falls short of adequately addressing the educational needs of approximately 85 percent of individuals, within the college age group (Xiong et al., 2022).

Currently, even though the notion of counselors being respected and students being loved still seems to be intact there has been a sense of detachment, between college and university advisors and students. While polite conversations may continue an unsettling coldness has permeated the environment decline in affectionate interaction between counselors and students, known as a "cold spell," is a concerning issue in the educational environment. This trend is characterized by apathetic relationships, reduced communication, and a shift towards marketization. Effective communication is crucial in the counselor-student relationship, which plays a vital role in guiding and supporting students in their pursuit of higher education. This complex matter involves language barriers, cultural diversity, technological advancements, and the stigma surrounding mental health. Everyone in the higher education system—students, counselors, and faculty—is affected by these variables. For this goal to be accomplished, students and counselors must communicate well.

As the counselor-student connection deteriorates due to ineffective communication, the focus shifts from the real problem to meaningless small talk. Anxieties are heightened by the change from an informal, friendly dynamic to a formal, cold one. Immediate action is required to reverse the deterioration in dependability and friendliness (Li, 2020; Hu et al., 2019). Counselors have an additional hurdle because of the diverse cultural origins and practices of children from different regions of China. Misunderstandings damaged relationships, and lost chances to help can arise from disregarding or failing to acknowledge these cultural differences (Li, 2020). The "digital divide" describes the current state of affairs in which students and guidance counselors are at odds due to technological factors. Students, in contrast to counselors, may have been born after the internet, but they are digital natives who have grown up with it. As their preferred methods of communication change, guidance professionals will need to adapt their approach to effectively engage them. For instance, one of the major problems is divided by technology (Li, 2020).

Therefore, acknowledging and confronting these obstacles is not merely a scholarly pursuit; it is an urgent practical necessity that has extensive ramifications. The advancement of Chinese society, the academic and personal development of students, and the future of Chinese higher education are all intrinsically linked to the resolution of these communication issues. Researchers, educators, legislators, and other pertinent stakeholders must work together to close the communication gap. To restore the counselor-student relationship, they must provide a setting where the two parties may interact, comprehend, and support one another. Doing this will aid in the growth of a more resilient, vibrant, and revolutionary Chinese higher education system that equips students to become well-rounded, engaged members of society.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Role Play

The research concentrates specifically on role-playing within counseling scenarios, a prevalent component of postgraduate psychology courses and clinical master's degree programs. Existing research focuses primarily on standard client approaches and reveals that students generally value such interactions (HORTON, 2021; Kühne et al., 2020). Although these role-playing methods are prevalent in smaller postgraduate courses, they are typically absent from undergraduate psychology curricula, particularly for online students, due to cost and practicality concerns. The study investigates the potential of emergent technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality to offer more adaptable and scalable role-play experiences. The overall objective of the research is to improve the communication skills of university counselors by utilizing innovative technological solutions for effective role-play training (Horton et al., 2022; Park et al., 2019).

According to Rismi (2020) the numerous facets of role-play, including its triadic nature, are highlighted. In this strategy, participants may assume any of the three roles of counselor, client, or observer. Research suggests that role-play should be grounded in empirical data and best practices even though it can be used conveniently by teachers because of its flexibility. The team's content

analysis in this study is one of several studies that show the relevance of role-play in filling gaps in counselor education. For instance, mental health Horton et al (2022) found that interviewing and diagnostic skills improved significantly when compared with other learning approaches through role-playing. Again, Rismi's (2020) findings revealed a need for tangible examples to accompany counselors' intangible attitudes and abilities. A solution to gatekeeping challenges could be fostered through Jacobs et al (2020) argued that one way to overcome the challenges of gatekeeping in counseling programs is through the use of role-playing which allows instructors to see what their students are capable of doing and how they behave.

2.2 Teaching Therapeutic Skills

To acquire therapeutic expertise in the context of mental health education, there is a need to change from theoretical classroom teaching to practical, live implementations that could breed contradictory student experiences. The main idea is to produce competent and confident professionals but it may not be easy to understand user perspectives and apply the acquired skills (Li et al., 2020). This approach, endorsed by scholars like Rogers, centers on existential comprehension and takes a therapeutic position (Donovan & Mullen, 2019). Zare et al. (2020) argue that COVID-19 has had huge effects on economies, healthcare systems, as well as personal well-being. In early 2020, the World Health Organisation identified COVID-19 as a global public emergency. Subsequently, the disease rapidly disseminated throughout the world, resulting in the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives and the suffering of millions. The pandemic has not only presented physical health risks but has also engendered psychological challenges (Rønning & Bjørkly, 2019; Li et al., 2020; Shapira et al., 2021).

In addition to practical techniques, ethical considerations, cultural sensitivity, and therapeutic theories, university counselors in Shangrao, China are instructed in a program that incorporates continuous professional development. Training programs empower counselors with these multidimensional skills, which not only facilitate effective student support but also equip them to impart these invaluable skills to future university counseling professionals. The implementation of this comprehensive strategy cultivates a setting where the well-being and individual growth of students take precedence (Qidwai et al., 2019; Donovan & Mullen, 2019).

2.3 Involvement

There are two major themes identified by Froiland (2020) that emerge from the qualitative data: teachers' ways of enhancing students' motivation and the need for some background. However, it is amazing that students overestimated their views about the impact of gamification in learning despite a few classes using m-learning tools. This means that even a little inclusion of these methods in teaching can highly influence how learners rate the session as a whole (Meniado, 2023). This study aims at bringing together advocacy for technology integration by teachers with practical tips on how to do this effectively. These findings have significant implications for policy-makers

and educators who are considering integrating Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) applications like Kahoot! and Padlet in similar educational settings. In other words, deliberately integrating mobile learning applications within limited capacities can improve students' evaluations of the holistic education process (Chen, 2021; Greenhalgh et al., 2019; Mahmud et al., 2023).

In conducting an initial search, numerous possible frameworks were found in scholarly articles, and diverse research groups developed these frameworks by applying unique principles, theories, and use case priorities (Men et al., 2019). Given the current state of affairs, it seemed unlikely that a brand-new framework would be required. Instead, the current landscape could benefit from improved organization and accessibility, necessitating a taxonomy to classify and improve the efficacy of the existing frameworks (Hancock et al., 2019).

2.4 Academic Challenges

Liu et al. (2022) assert that within the realm of globalizing higher education, China has historically served as a "conventional provider" of foreign students, sending significant cohorts of students overseas for educational pursuits. Furthermore, there has been a growing focus on the formulation of higher education internationalization plans aimed at attracting international students. Known as "outward-oriented internationalization," this plan, which relates to the internationalization of higher education, is often referenced by Gardanova et al. (2023), Pekkala & van Zoonen (2021), and Haikalis et al. (2021).

Based on previous research, it has been found that female international students face greater difficulties in adjusting to their new environment compared to male international students. According to several studies, female students have a higher level of flexibility than their male counterparts. It appears, however, that data on the effects of variables like age, length of stay in a foreign nation, and education level on these adjustment difficulties is inconsistent. Gong et al. (2020) found no positive association between students' ages and their academic performance, suggesting that older pupils may have greater difficulty in the classroom. On the other hand, Ma et al. (2020) found that pupils who are seen as mature often do better in school.

2.5 Lifestyle

Primary prevention and early intervention strategies in students were shown to be beneficial by Zahdani et al. (2023) via lifestyle treatments, such as attending cultural events, changing one's attire, altering one's dietary choices, and establishing regular exercise routines. Finding out how common gestational diabetes (GDM) is in China, as well as what causes it and how to avoid it, is the goal of this study. Conducting successful research to promote physical and mental health and gaining a better knowledge of emerging infectious disease trends in China are the goals. Tsukahara et al. (2020), Wu et al. (2022), Whatnall et al. (2019), and Ketu and Mishra (2021) all state that this review's overarching goal is to aid students in their overall well-being and transition to new fields or cultures. Educational institutions and students must recognize the significance of these

communication barriers that result from lifestyle choices, as this knowledge empowers the implementation of proactive measures to resolve these concerns. Consequently, this endeavor improves the overall educational experience and the efficacy of communication (Rey et al., 2020).

2.6 Psychological

Psychological issues may affect students' emotional health and academic performance (Finch et al., 2020). Finding out whether or not PsyCap affects people's safety behavior would be valuable (Sood & Puri, 2022). However, there has only been a small number of empirical research that has investigated the effects that the sub-dimensions of PsyCap have on safety behavior in construction contexts. This has reduced the potential for PsyCap to enhance workplace safety performance. According to He et al.'s 2019 research, one way to increase academic performance is for schools to implement adaptable psychological capital training and intervention programs and for students to develop their communication skills (Abolmaali, 2020; Sydorenko et al., 2020).

Professional development of teachers of vocational education in the context of formation and development of their psychological and pedagogical competence helps to develop a comprehensive competence system of assessment, correction, modeling, and development of a professional subject of professional activity as a conscious movement of a specialist to a professional standard, lifelong self-improvement through formal and nonformal postgraduate education (Cattaneo et al., 2022). Professional development of teachers of vocational education helps to develop a comprehensive competence system of assessment, and correction, During the research that was conducted on the factors that influence the psychological and pedagogical development of teachers, it was discovered that these factors enable the continuous professional development of a specialist of the knowledge society as a subject of self-improvement and self-realization, who is prepared to solve innovative educational tasks, choose the trajectory of professional and personal development and non-formal education (Sydorenko et al., 2020).

2.7 Self-Efficacy as a mediator

The development of students' communication abilities is crucial for their academic, personal, and professional growth. According to Yildirim (2021), student communication proficiency refers to the amalgamation of their confidence, competence, and effectiveness in many modes of communication, including spoken, written, and nonverbal forms. In this specific setting, self-confidence and self-efficacy are of utmost importance. Students who believe in their abilities to communicate well are more inclined to contribute thoughtfully to class discussions, pose important questions, and express themselves clearly (Escribano et al., 2021). The development of strong communication skills is crucial because it equips students to effectively express themselves via many forms of expression, such as listening, speaking, writing, and non-verbal cues. Gaining knowledge in these areas affects one's academic path and greatly shapes one's career options

(Andriyani et al., 2022).

Bourne et al. (2021) state that when people learn from other people a phenomenon known as vicarious experience and when people actively master a task, also known as enactive mastery experience individuals may increase their confidence in skills. Additionally, it is beneficial to actively study and analyze the accomplishments and shortcomings of others to mimic their successful behaviors; this will assist improve self-efficacy (Andriyani et al., 2022; Duradoni et al., 2022). This relates to their capacity to systematically achieve organizational or professional goals via the use of social media channels. "Through using social media, I can enhance my relationships with important individuals" was one of the statements included in the study scale that measured this (Pekkala & van Zoonen, 2021).

Understanding different cultural communication norms is an important part of developing cross-cultural competency, which is crucial in today's globally linked society (Pekkala & van Zoonen, 2021). In addition to having a significant impact on their academic performance, students' ability to communicate effectively helps them acquire important life skills that benefit their careers, communities, and themselves. Consequently, the mastery of effective communication holds immense significance in shaping their educational journey (Zainab et al., 2021).

2.8 Communication Ability

Distance learning has included several techniques, including correspondence courses, instructional television, and video conferencing, as noted by Ilardo and Speciale (2020). The mail system served as the primary means of contact between educational institutions and pupils. In the last several decades, distant learning has included many contemporary communication methods (He et al., 2019). Currently, there is a tendency to use many terms interchangeably, such as remote education, distance learning, e-learning, Web-based instruction, virtual schools, and online learning, to encompass the expansive, dynamic, and even perplexing domain of unconventional pedagogy (Hancock et al., 2022).

The term under consideration is sometimes used interchangeably with online learning, e-learning, or distance education. In this educational approach, students and instructors are geographically separated during instructional sessions, relying on online technology to enable communication and enhance the learning process (Coutts et al., 2019). The contemporary modes of online learning significantly differ from the traditional methods of remote education, such as television broadcasts and videoconferencing, as seen in previous generations (Ge et al., 2022). In the present day, distant learning can cater to student groups who are not reached by conventional classrooms, as it offers enhanced opportunities in terms of choice, tutoring, and supplementary services (Del et al., 2019).

According to Coutts et al. (2019), a significant proportion of educational institutions in the United

States, specifically 75% of colleges and universities and over 50% of K-12 districts, utilize the products and services offered by Blackboard. Additionally, it has been reported that approximately 80% of the world's leading academic institutions rely on Blackboard tools, as indicated by the Times Higher Education Reputation Ranking. According to Cao et al. (2022), research has indicated that policymakers have employed logical reasoning to argue that if online instruction is comparable to traditional instruction in terms of student outcomes, then the implementation of online education initiatives could be justified on the grounds of cost-effectiveness or the necessity to offer educational opportunities to learners in situations where in-person instruction is impractical (Shorey et al., 2019; Zare et al., 2020; Donovan & Mullen, 2019). Only by studying the problems reflected in the teaching practice to the theoretical level can we find an effective way to solve the problems. Only by explaining and constructing our teaching experience from the theoretical level can we realize the theoretical improvement of teaching practice (Guo et al., 2019). Educational theory can not only help teachers find teaching problems, analyze teaching problems, and solve teaching problems but also keep teachers thinking and updating. Therefore, continuous learning of educational theory is an inexhaustible motivation for teachers to reflect (Hancock et al., 2019).

2.9 Conceptual Framework

Based on Marx's pragmatic perspective on communication and interaction current study has developed a framework. Where, role play, teaching therapeutic skills, involvement, academic challenges, lifestyle, and psychological challenges act as independent variables (Liu et al., 2022). Whereas, self-efficacy acts as a mediator between IV and DV (communication ability) (González-Lloret, 2019).

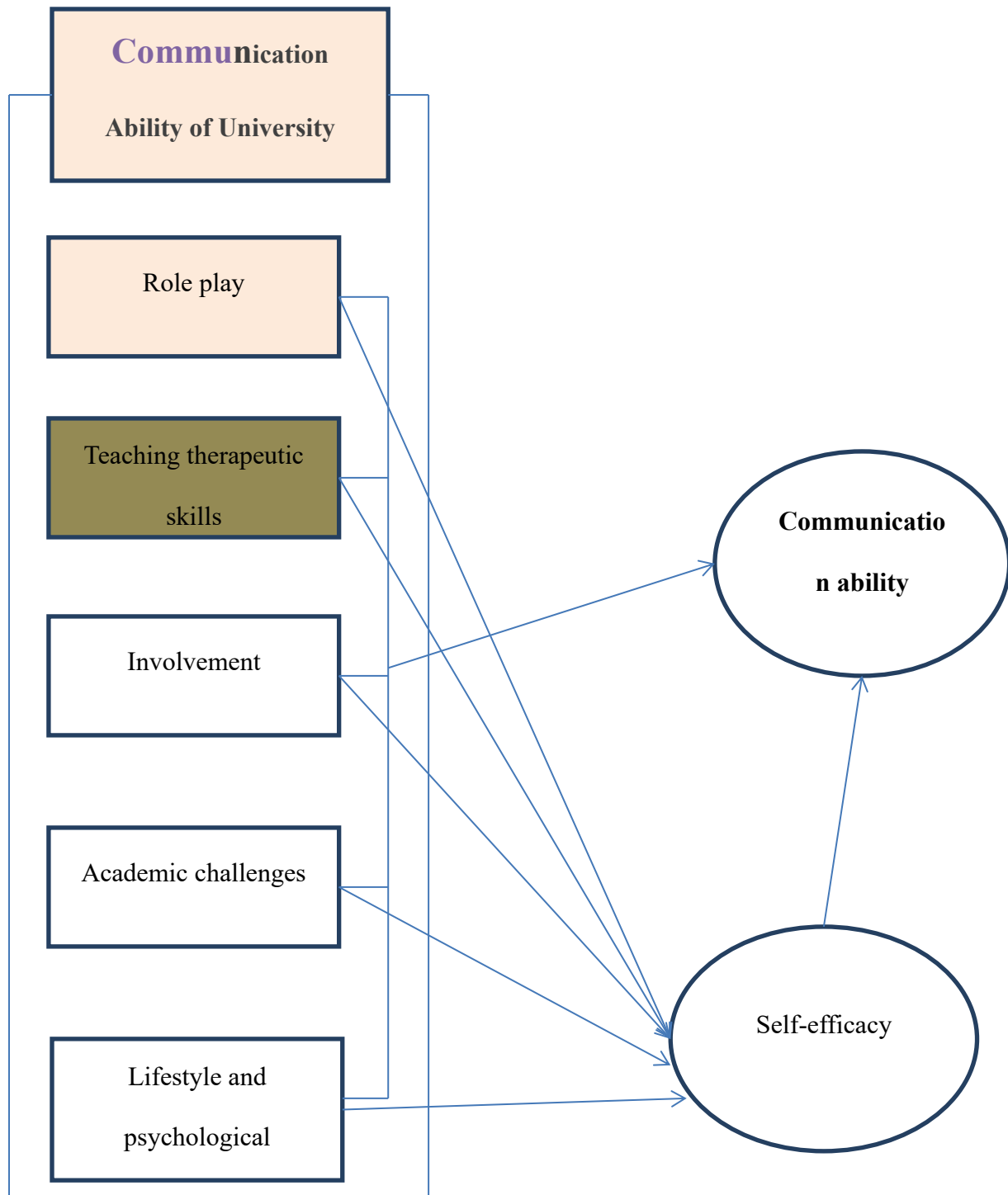


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. Method

This section provides a comprehensive outline of the research methodology used in the mixed-method study. The primary objective of this research is to examine and comprehend the communication skills of university counselors in the Shangrao area via the use of a mixed-method study design. This study will include both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to gather comprehensive data (Arias Valencia, 2022). For quantitative study, SPSS applied to evaluate these aspects in your research requires distinct processes. Where, for qualitative study, a thematic method has been applied. This study's demographic consists of university students enrolled in educational institutions located in the Chinese city of Shangrao. In the Shangrao region, these students represent a diverse cross-section of individuals pursuing higher education in a variety of disciplines and academic levels (Lin et al., 2022). The population of 6,579,714 students, consists of graduate students from various faculties and departments, each contributing unique perspectives and experiences to the communication-focused study (Cucas, 2022; Guest et al. 2020).

3.1 Measurement Scale

This study aims to investigate many important characteristics by using particular questions derived from previous research. The factors being examined cover several characteristics that are pertinent to the university setting in Shangrao, China. The four measurement scales for Role-Play were adopted from Fletcher & Averill (1984). Three measurement scales for teaching therapeutic skills were adopted from the study of Li et al. (2022). The three scales of involvement have been adopted form (Bujold et al., 1997). The academic challenge has three scales, adopted (Cassidy, 2016). Three scales of lifestyle adopted form (Herrero et al., 2014). Three scales of psychology have been adopted form (Erdur-Baker et al., 2006). Self-efficacy's three measurement scale adopted form (Cassidy, 2016). Finally, the three measurement scales of communication ability have been adopted from (Norton, 1984). For this study, a total of 24 semi-structured interview questions were developed for interviews with university students.

4. Analysis of the Pilot study

A pilot test is a crucial element to justify the research questionnaires and interview questions. For this study, 8 samples for the qualitative study and 38 samples for the quantitative study were selected based on the 95% confidence interval of +- 10% from the actual sample size of 384 according to Hooper (2009). The Cronbach's Alpha statistic is an important instrument for assessing the internal consistency or reliability of measurement scales inside a questionnaire or test. In the conducted investigation, many factors were evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha. From the below table, it is clear that the independent variables' measurement scales are internally consistent with each other. However, only communication ability has a low score of the doubtful outcome.

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Role-Play	.785	4
Teaching Therapeutic Skills	.904	3
Involvement	.796	3
Academic Challenges	.732	3
Lifestyle	.877	3
Psychology	.890	3
Self-Efficacy	.871	3
Communication Ability	.670	4

Table 1: Cronbach's alpha

In the next step, the study conducted a pilot test on 8 samples for this study. The current study applied thematic analysis. The thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within a dataset of textual information. In this case, the study had 8 responses to various questions, and the study conducted a thematic analysis to uncover common themes and insights across the answers provided. The below table shows the themes and subthemes that have been identified in the written interview script.

Theme	Sub-Themes
Role-Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective Learning Tool - Influence on Perspective - Personal Growth
Teaching Therapeutic Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personalized Teaching Approach - Creating a Safe Learning Environment - Adapting Teaching Methods - Assessing Learning Progress - Overcoming Teaching Challenges
Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decision-Making Factors - Motivation for Involvement - Balancing Involvements - Managing Conflicts
Academic Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managing Workload - Coping with Stress - Learning and Growth
Lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on Well-Being - Personal Growth and Learning - Work-Life Balance
Psychology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Areas of Interest - Application in Personal and Professional Life

Self-Efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Definition and Recognition - Strategies for Building Self-Efficacy - Balancing Goals and Comfort Zone
Communication Ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-Perception of Communication - Adapting Communication Styles - Handling Communication Barriers

Table 2: Theme identification

Step 5: Reviewing and Defining Themes

Study refine and define the identified themes based on the content of the responses. The study ensures that each theme accurately captures the essence of the data.

5. Discussion

The analysis uncovered several common threads across the responses. Participants emphasized the value of experiential learning through role-play and its significant influence on personal growth and skill development. In the context of teaching therapeutic skills, a personalized approach and the creation of a safe learning environment were deemed essential for effective learning. Involvement decisions were guided by passion and a desire for positive impact, but participants acknowledged the challenges of balancing multiple commitments and managing conflicts (Hartman, 2023). Academic challenges were viewed as opportunities for growth and learning, with strategies for coping with stress and maintaining motivation shared among participants. Lifestyle choices prioritized well-being, personal growth, and work-life balance. Psychology played a vital role in participants' lives, providing them with valuable insights into human behavior and decision-making. The theme of self-efficacy emphasized the importance of self-belief in pursuing and achieving goals (Escribano et al., 2021).

Effective communication emerged as a crucial skill, with participants highlighting its significance in achieving desired outcomes. Overall, the findings suggest a strong emphasis on personal growth, resilience, and a holistic approach to well-being in the lives of the participants.

These results provide a rich understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives, shedding light on the importance of experiential learning, personalized teaching, and the balance between passion-driven involvement and effective time management (Zare et al., 2020). These insights can inform future research and practice in the areas of education, personal development, and decision-making. On the other hand, quantitative analysis has identified the internal consistency of the scales used for the study. Where it has been found that all the variable has strong internal consistencies. However, the communication ability has questionable internal consistency. This study has identified some crucial and effective outcomes through the mix mode analysis (Hancock et al., 2019).

7. Conclusion

The current study provides a pilot analysis result. This study applied the mixed-mode method for data collection and analysis purposes. The study provides some insights regarding communication ability of counselors in China. The study has identified the significant result regarding role play, involvement, academic challenges, psychology, self-efficacy and communication abilities in the context of students in China.

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