

Article

A Study on the Application Mechanism of Heart-to-Heart Conversations Conducted by Career-Oriented College Counselors in Ideological and Political Education

Taixin Gao^{1,*}

¹ Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou, China

* Correspondence: Taixin Gao, Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou, China

Abstract: Against the backdrop of the continuous refinement of the ideological and political education system in universities during the new era, college counselors—acting as the key implementers of student ideological education—play a fundamental and indispensable role in guiding students' thinking, shaping their core values, and correcting their behaviors through dedicated heart-to-heart conversations. Vocational undergraduate education uniquely emphasizes both applied talent cultivation and professional competency enhancement, thereby imposing significantly higher demands for targeted, pragmatic, and highly practical approaches to ideological education. As a highly flexible and personalized educational approach, counselor-led conversations successfully achieve implicit ideological education through deep emotional engagement, proactive psychological counseling, and structured value-oriented guidance. Grounded in the foundational theories of ideological education, interpersonal communication, and modern educational management, this comprehensive study critically analyzes the practical foundations and contemporary challenges of conducting such conversations within vocational undergraduate institutions. Furthermore, it systematically explores their underlying operational mechanisms from a holistic systemic perspective. To address current limitations, this research proposes an innovative operational framework comprising "goal orientation, content stratification, diversified methods, collaborative implementation, and evaluation feedback," alongside actionable optimization strategies. The research ultimately concludes that systematically improving the counseling mechanism substantially enhances the relevance, accessibility, and overall effectiveness of ideological education. This enhancement provides crucial, long-term support for vocational universities in successfully fulfilling their core institutional mission of fostering moral integrity and promoting the holistic development of their student bodies.

Keywords: vocational education; college counselors; student counseling; ideological education; educational management

Received: 25 December 2025

Revised: 12 February 2026

Accepted: 23 February 2026

Published: 28 February 2026



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

With the ongoing refinement of the structure of higher education in China, vocational undergraduate education has emerged as an essential pillar within the framework of applied talent cultivation. These institutions are tasked with the dual responsibility of fostering professional skills and embedding ideological and political education into their curricula. This dual focus ensures that students are not only equipped with technical expertise but also develop holistically in terms of their value systems, ethical standards, and sense of social responsibility. The integration of ideological and political education is particularly significant as it aligns with the broader educational objective of nurturing virtue and character [1]. Over time, the methods of implementing such education have evolved significantly. While traditional approaches relied heavily on classroom instruction, contemporary practices are shifting toward more diverse, everyday, and implicit strategies. These new methods aim to seamlessly integrate ideological and

political education into students' daily lives, making it a more organic and impactful part of their overall development.

Counseling sessions play a pivotal role in the management of university students and the delivery of ideological and political education. These sessions act as a critical interface between institutional objectives and the individual developmental needs of students. Through direct, face-to-face interactions, counselors are able to engage students emotionally, provide guidance on values, and address their immediate concerns. This personalized approach enables counselors to gain a deeper understanding of students' ideological perspectives, respond to their practical challenges, and support their overall well-being and growth. However, vocational undergraduate institutions face unique challenges in this regard. The diverse backgrounds of students, their strong focus on career-oriented goals, and their varied psychological needs create complexities in counseling practices. Common issues include a lack of precision in addressing individual needs, insufficiently developed mechanisms for effective counseling, and the absence of clear metrics to evaluate the outcomes of these sessions. Addressing these challenges requires a systematic examination of the mechanisms through which counseling sessions are applied in ideological and political education [1]. Such an analysis is crucial for improving the quality and effectiveness of these practices, ensuring that they meet the specific needs of vocational undergraduate students while contributing to their comprehensive development.

2. Theoretical Basis and Practical Significance of Counselors' Heart-to-Heart Conversations

2.1. The Internal Composition and Value Manifestation of the Theoretical Foundation of Ideological and Political Education

The essence of ideological and political education lies in conducting systematic and organized educational activities aimed at guiding learners to gradually develop a scientific worldview, outlook on life, and value system that aligns with societal development needs. Within this overarching theoretical framework, counseling sessions conducted by counselors serve as a crucial practical component and micro-level vehicle within the ideological education system. This approach vividly embodies the modern educational philosophy of "people-orientedness," moving beyond traditional one-way indoctrination to emphasize deep, detailed, and personalized communication that respects individual differences while fostering gradual guidance in students' values and positive transformation of their mindset. Counseling sessions are not merely platforms for information exchange or routine communication; their fundamental significance lies in being a subtle process of value transmission and meaning construction. Through these interactions, counselors establish emotional connections and gain mutual recognition, creating essential psychological bridges for subsequent ideological resonance and value alignment [2, 3]. This process facilitates the gradual internalization of values and beliefs, achieving an educational effect akin to "subtle yet profound influence." Furthermore, the personalized nature of these conversations allows counselors to address individual challenges and concerns, tailoring their guidance to the unique circumstances of each student. By fostering trust and understanding, these sessions contribute to the development of a supportive environment that encourages students to critically reflect on their perspectives and align their values with broader societal goals. This dynamic interplay between emotional connection and intellectual engagement underscores the transformative potential of counselor-led conversations within the ideological education framework.

2.2. Analysis of Educational Interaction Mechanisms from the Perspective of Communication Theory

Modern communication theory emphasizes that the successful exchange of information is contingent upon the establishment of mutual trust between communicators and the maintenance of a continuous, positive feedback loop. In the context of educational

interactions, heart-to-heart conversations between counselors and students exemplify a profound form of two-way communication. These dialogues transcend basic exchanges such as "you speak, I listen" or "I instruct you to act." Instead, they involve counselors engaging in proactive and genuine listening, providing timely and constructive feedback, and offering tailored guidance informed by this feedback. Through these actions, counselors facilitate the collaborative construction of meaning at cognitive, emotional, and value-based levels. This dynamic interaction process is educationally significant, as it integrates theoretical learning with practical development. Counselors play a multifaceted role in this framework, acting not only as transmitters of essential knowledge and concepts but also as architects of an equitable and trusting relationship with students [4, 5]. Furthermore, they serve as pivotal guides in fostering students' personal growth and shaping their value systems. By fulfilling these roles, counselors transform heart-to-heart conversations into a critical mechanism for bridging abstract educational theories with the tangible nurturing of learners' development. This approach underscores the importance of creating an environment where trust and collaboration are central to the educational experience.

2.3. Practical Needs and Response Strategies for Vocational Undergraduate Education in Specific Contexts

Vocational undergraduate education plays a pivotal role within China's higher education system, emphasizing unique educational models that integrate industry and academia, foster collaboration between institutions and enterprises, and align theoretical instruction with practical training. Students in this framework often exhibit strong career-oriented aspirations and a pronounced need to develop practical skills. However, they also encounter a range of challenges, including rigorous academic assessments, the acquisition of specialized skills, intense competition in the job market, adaptation to workplace environments, and potential psychological adjustment difficulties. These challenges create a complex set of pressures that demand innovative approaches to support their development. Traditional methods of ideological and political education, which often rely on generalized and didactic strategies, have proven insufficient in addressing the nuanced needs of vocational undergraduates. In this context, personalized methodologies such as heart-to-heart conversations emerge as particularly effective. These conversations enable educators to provide tailored guidance that aligns with each student's individual career aspirations, practical concerns, and psychological state. By fostering a deeper connection and understanding, this approach enhances the relevance and accessibility of ideological education, making it more impactful. Furthermore, it supports the holistic growth of students by addressing their unique developmental needs, ensuring they are better equipped to navigate the complexities of their academic and professional journeys [6].

3. The Practical Challenges Faced by Counselors in Vocational Undergraduate Institutions during Heart-to-Heart Conversations

3.1. There Are Significant Deficiencies in the Relevance and Depth of the Content of Heart-To-Heart Conversations.

Currently, some counselors in vocational undergraduate institutions often prioritize routine administrative tasks during student counseling sessions, such as monitoring course attendance, disseminating activity notifications, and organizing daily arrangements. While these tasks are essential for maintaining institutional operations, they frequently overshadow the deeper, more personalized aspects of student counseling. Counselors may neglect to address critical areas such as shifts in students' ideological perspectives, variations in their psychological well-being, and the formulation of long-term career development strategies. This oversight results in counseling discussions that are often superficial and generalized, lacking the depth required to thoroughly analyze individual circumstances or provide tailored guidance. Furthermore, the absence of a structured approach to exploring students' unique challenges and aspirations diminishes

the overall impact of ideological education and value-oriented guidance [3, 7]. Without a concerted effort to delve into these deeper dimensions, counseling sessions fail to align with students' actual developmental needs, thereby limiting their effectiveness in fostering meaningful personal growth and professional preparedness.

3.2. A Systematic and Standardized Working Mechanism Has Not Yet Been Fully Established.

In numerous vocational undergraduate institutions, the absence of a comprehensive, systematic, and operational framework for counselors' heart-to-heart conversations has posed significant challenges. Specifically, there is a notable lack of unified institutional guidelines that clearly define the objectives, principles, and scope of these interactions. Without such guidelines, the purpose and direction of these conversations often remain ambiguous, leading to inconsistencies in their execution. Additionally, standardized procedures for preparation, implementation, and documentation are absent, which undermines the ability to ensure consistency and reliability in practice. The absence of clear procedural norms further exacerbates the issue by leaving counselors without a structured approach to follow, thereby increasing the likelihood of arbitrary decision-making. Moreover, the delineation of responsibilities among counselors is poorly defined, resulting in overlapping duties and unclear boundaries. These systemic shortcomings collectively contribute to a lack of stability and continuity, making it difficult to establish a reliable and effective mechanism for these conversations [6, 8].

3.3. The Professional Competencies and Training Support for Counselors Need to Be Enhanced.

Many counselors face challenges in effectively addressing the diverse and intricate psychological needs of students, including their emotional well-being, social interactions, and personal development. This limitation often stems from insufficient mastery of advanced psychological counseling techniques, refined communication strategies, and impactful guidance methods [9]. As a result, the overall quality and effectiveness of counseling sessions are diminished, reducing their ability to contribute meaningfully to students' holistic growth. Furthermore, the absence of a comprehensive and continuous training system for counselors exacerbates the issue. Current professional development opportunities are fragmented and lack the necessary resources to support sustained improvement in counseling competencies. Establishing a robust framework for ongoing training, coupled with access to specialized tools and methodologies, is essential to elevate the professional standards of counselors and ensure their ability to meet the evolving needs of students in educational settings.

3.4. There Is a Significant Lack of Scientific and Effective Evaluation Mechanisms as Well as Continuous Improvement Mechanisms.

The current evaluation mechanisms for heart-to-heart conversations are predominantly limited to surface-level assessments, such as verifying the completeness of conversation records or ensuring that the required frequency of interactions has been met. This approach primarily focuses on procedural compliance rather than substantive outcomes, resulting in a simplistic documentary evaluation process. There is a notable absence of a scientifically grounded, multi-dimensional framework capable of quantitatively and qualitatively assessing the actual educational impact of these conversations. Key areas such as students' ideological growth, psychological well-being, problem-solving abilities, and overall developmental progress remain inadequately evaluated. Without a robust evaluation and feedback system, it becomes challenging to accurately gauge the effectiveness of these interactions, document successful practices systematically, or identify and address existing shortcomings in a timely manner [10]. This deficiency not only limits the ability to measure outcomes but also hinders the iterative refinement and continuous improvement of the quality and impact of these conversations, ultimately reducing their potential to contribute meaningfully to student development.

4. Establishing the Mechanism for Applying Counselors' Heart-to-Heart Conversations in Ideological and Political Education

4.1. Goal-Oriented Guidance Mechanism

Focusing on moral cultivation and the comprehensive development of students as the primary objectives of educational initiatives, a structured framework for counseling sessions has been designed. This framework is rooted in fostering core values that align with broader societal principles and aims to support students' well-rounded growth [11, 12]. By establishing tiered and clearly defined objectives, the framework addresses multiple dimensions, including the guidance of ideological values, the provision of mental health support, and the facilitation of career development. Each dimension is carefully integrated to ensure that counseling activities remain aligned with the overarching educational goals. This systematic approach not only provides a clear direction for counselors but also ensures that students receive consistent and meaningful support. By maintaining a focus on these objectives, the framework promotes steady progress in nurturing students' intellectual, emotional, and professional capacities, thereby contributing to their holistic development within an educational context.

4.2. Content Layering Mechanism

The content layering mechanism is designed to address the varying developmental stages students encounter throughout their academic journey. These stages, which include the adaptation phase in lower grades, the growth phase in middle grades, and the development phase in upper grades, are characterized by distinct learning needs and challenges. To effectively cater to these differences, the core content of counseling sessions is systematically categorized into three primary types: ideological guidance, psychological support, and developmental assistance. This structured approach ensures that the educational content is tailored to align closely with the unique circumstances and immediate priorities of students at each stage [2]. By adopting this method, the relevance and impact of educational support are significantly enhanced, fostering a more personalized and effective learning environment. Furthermore, this categorization allows educators to address not only academic concerns but also broader aspects of personal and career development, ensuring a holistic approach to student growth and well-being.

4.3. Multifaceted Methodological Mechanisms

In the practical implementation of heart-to-heart conversations, significant emphasis is placed on the comprehensive application and flexible employment of various scientific and humanized approaches to enhance educational interactions. These methods include the emotional communication technique, which fosters trust and emotional resonance between participants, thereby creating a foundation for meaningful dialogue. Another approach involves the use of case-based guidance, where typical examples are employed to stimulate reflection and critical thinking, allowing individuals to draw insights from relatable scenarios. Additionally, the problem-oriented method focuses on identifying and addressing specific real-world challenges, ensuring that discussions remain relevant and solution-driven. Furthermore, the growth tracking method plays a pivotal role by continuously monitoring and evaluating students' developmental progress, enabling educators to adapt their strategies to meet evolving needs. By integrating these diverse methodologies dynamically, the overall relevance, adaptability, and effectiveness of heart-to-heart conversations are significantly enhanced, leading to a more impactful and holistic educational experience.

4.4. Collaborative Coordination Mechanism

The establishment and continuous improvement of a collaborative education system are essential for fostering a comprehensive and effective approach to ideological and political education. This system is designed to integrate the specialized expertise of various stakeholders, including counselors who provide ideological education, subject teachers who offer academic guidance, mental health specialists who deliver professional psychological support, and corporate mentors who contribute industry-specific insights. By creating robust platforms for information sharing and developing efficient communication channels, this mechanism ensures seamless coordination among diverse

educational entities [5]. Such integration allows for the pooling of resources and expertise, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of educational initiatives. Furthermore, the collaborative approach promotes a deeper alignment of educational objectives, ensuring that all participants work synergistically to address the multifaceted needs of learners. This holistic strategy not only strengthens the impact of ideological and political education but also broadens its reach and applicability across various contexts.

4.5. Evaluation and Feedback Mechanism

A scientific, dynamic, and sustainable evaluation and feedback system is essential for ensuring the continuous improvement of counseling mechanisms. Such a system should integrate both process evaluation and outcome evaluation in a cohesive manner. Process evaluation focuses on assessing the quality and effectiveness of the counseling sessions as they occur, while outcome evaluation examines the tangible results and long-term impacts of these sessions. By conducting comprehensive assessments across multiple dimensions, including the quality of counseling interactions, students' authentic feedback, observable behavioral changes, and their overall developmental progress, the system can provide a holistic understanding of its effectiveness. Furthermore, dynamic tracking mechanisms should be employed to monitor ongoing progress and identify areas for improvement. This approach facilitates the establishment of a closed-loop process encompassing planning, implementation, evaluation, feedback, and subsequent refinement. Such a framework ensures that the counseling system evolves continuously, fostering enhanced educational outcomes and supporting the long-term growth of students.

5. Optimizing the Practical Approaches for Counselors' Heart-to-Heart Conversations

5.1. Establish and Improve a Systematic Framework for Regular Heart-To-Heart Conversations

Efforts are being directed toward the development of a systematic, institutionalized, and standardized long-term mechanism to facilitate heart-to-heart conversations. This approach involves clearly defining the baseline frequency of such interactions across various scenarios to ensure consistency and effectiveness [13]. Additionally, specific guidelines for maintaining standardized documentation are being outlined to enhance accountability and traceability. A comprehensive workflow is being designed to cover all stages of the process, from initiation to feedback, ensuring that these conversations are conducted in a structured and methodical manner. By embedding these practices into regular operations, the aim is to foster a sustainable and continuous framework that supports meaningful communication and addresses individual needs comprehensively and effectively.

5.2. Comprehensively Enhance Counselors' Comprehensive Professional Competencies

By implementing structured and thematic training programs, counselors can systematically enhance their professional skills in a targeted manner. Regular case study sessions provide opportunities to analyze real-world scenarios, fostering a deeper understanding of practical challenges and solutions. Additionally, workshops focused on improving psychological counseling techniques enable counselors to refine their abilities in addressing diverse psychological needs. These initiatives also emphasize the development of effective communication strategies and the capacity to guide individuals in aligning their personal values with broader ideological frameworks. This comprehensive approach ensures that counselors are well-equipped to meet the multifaceted demands of their roles, ultimately contributing to their professional growth and the betterment of the communities they serve.

5.3. Strengthening the Supporting Role of Information Technology in Educational Development

By utilizing advanced information platforms to systematically record and integrate comprehensive data on students' growth trajectories, educational institutions can gain valuable insights into their developmental patterns. Through the application of sophisticated data analysis techniques, it becomes possible to monitor students' ideological and behavioral progress in real time, enabling a more nuanced understanding

of their needs. This approach facilitates the delivery of targeted and precise counseling sessions, tailored to address individual challenges and foster personal growth. Furthermore, the integration of intelligent interpretation tools ensures that interventions are both timely and effective, contributing to the overall enhancement of educational outcomes.

5.4. Further Advancing Personalized and Precision-Oriented Educational Models

Tailored guidance and differentiated counseling should be implemented to address the diverse academic stages, developmental needs, and demographic characteristics of students. This approach aims to establish a refined and personalized system of ideological and political education, integrating practical guidance that is uniquely customized for each individual [14]. By adopting strategies such as "one policy per student" and "one plan per student," educational institutions can better support the holistic development of learners. This model emphasizes adaptability and responsiveness, ensuring that educational interventions align closely with the unique circumstances and aspirations of each student, thereby enhancing overall educational outcomes.

5.5. Strengthen School-Enterprise Collaboration to Create a Synergistic Educational Effort

Vocational undergraduate education benefits significantly from fostering close collaboration between schools and enterprises. By actively engaging corporate mentors and industry professionals in students' career planning and development processes, educational institutions can enhance the alignment of academic training with real-world professional demands. This approach ensures that counseling sessions are not only theoretically sound but also practically relevant, thereby improving their overall effectiveness. Furthermore, integrating industry expertise into educational frameworks helps students gain insights into current market trends, develop critical skills, and better understand the expectations of potential employers, ultimately preparing them for successful transitions into the workforce [3, 15].

6. Comprehensive Analysis and Evaluation of Implementation Outcomes

Through ongoing optimization of mechanisms and multidimensional practical exploration, the integral role of counselors in fostering meaningful and impactful dialogues within the ideological and political education system has been significantly reinforced. These efforts have led to notable advancements in students' alignment with ideological principles and their development of a clear value orientation. Furthermore, mechanisms designed to identify, intervene in, and address psychological challenges have become increasingly responsive and efficient, ensuring timely support for students in need. The guidance provided for personalized career development plans has also evolved into a more systematic and structured approach, offering students clearer pathways to achieve their professional aspirations [4]. Collectively, these improvements have substantially enhanced the practical effectiveness and overall impact of ideological and political education initiatives. Simultaneously, the professional capabilities and ethical standards of the counseling team have undergone continuous refinement, contributing to the advancement of scientific precision and rigor in their methodologies. These developments have played a crucial role in establishing and perfecting a comprehensive, whole-process, and multidimensional educational framework, thereby fostering a positive and supportive educational ecosystem that promotes holistic student development and long-term success.

7. Conclusion

Heart-to-heart conversations conducted by counselors constitute an important practical pathway for student guidance and educational support in vocational undergraduate institutions. As a direct and interactive form of communication, these conversations help counselors understand students' academic pressures, psychological states, developmental needs, and value orientations in a timely manner, thereby improving the precision and responsiveness of educational work. An operational

mechanism that combines clear objectives, differentiated content arrangements, flexible communication methods, coordinated participation across departments, and continuous evaluation can substantially strengthen the overall effectiveness of student development initiatives. Such a mechanism not only improves the quality of daily counseling practice, but also promotes early identification of problems, targeted intervention, and sustained follow-up support. In future implementation, greater attention should be given to standardization, professional capacity building, and the appropriate use of digital tools so that these dialogue practices become more systematic, accessible, and evidence-informed. Through continuous refinement, heart-to-heart conversations can provide stable support for cultivating high-quality applied professionals with sound competencies, adaptability, and well-rounded development.

References

1. Y. Wang, "The Construction and Practice of Counselors Heart-to-Heart Talk Mode Based on Satya Iceberg Theory," *Journal of Sociology and Education*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2026.
2. D. Yuan and X. Lan, "Collaborative innovation strategy of college students' mental health education and ideological and political education in the new media era," *Psychiatria Danubina*, vol. 33, suppl. 8, pp. 515-516, 2021.
3. L. Bao, "Contemporary E-government in China: Investigating state citizen relations, interactions and power dynamics", Doctoral dissertation, Cardiff University, 2023.
4. S. N. Maola, F. Andela, R. A. Salsabila, N. S. Syairani, A. D. Rizqia, and P. M. Afendy, "Modernizing mental health: The role, ethics, and competencies of counseling in the digital age," *Journal of Education and Counseling (JECO)*, pp. 102-116, 2025.
5. P. Hou, H. Yang, and Z. Wang, "Role clarification and functional deepening of counselors in vocational undergraduate education: Implementation strategies from a student development theory perspective," *Journal of Asia Social Science Practice*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 1-24, 2025.
6. J. Su, "Research on the innovation path of breaking the cocoon effect of ideological and political education information in colleges and universities in the new media era," *Adult and Higher Education*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 48-53, 2024.
7. J. Lau and K. M. Ng, "Effectiveness and relevance of training for international counseling graduates: A qualitative inquiry," *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 87-105, 2012.
8. X. Wang, "On the role and impact of higher education regulations in the work of counselors in higher vocational colleges," in *The First International Symposium on Management and Social Sciences (ISMSS 2019)*, Atlantis Press, Apr. 2019, pp. 216-220.
9. R. Chao and G. E. Good, "Nontraditional students' perspectives on college education: A qualitative study," *Journal of College Counseling*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 5-12, 2004.
10. M. Pope, "A brief history of career counseling in the United States," *The Career Development Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 3, pp. 194-211, 2000.
11. D. Mayfield, "Finding Martha: Social networks that influence student enrollment into vocational education programs in the community college", University of Southern California, 2005.
12. N. Kantamneni, M. R. McCain, N. Shada, M. A. Hellwege, and J. Tate, "Contextual factors in the career development of prospective first-generation college students: An application of social cognitive career theory," *Journal of Career Assessment*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 183-196, 2018.
13. A. J. Sponaugle, *Attitudes of guidance counselors regarding vocational education*, The Ohio State University, 1972.
14. N. Acomi, O. Acomi, and R. Iancu, "The role of career counselors in vocational education," *Journal of Marine Technology and Environment*, vol. 1, pp. 9, 2023.
15. B. Xie, "Peer counselor training to improve the mental health level of higher vocational college students," *Psychiatria Danubina*, vol. 33, suppl. 12, pp. 44-44, 2021.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of Publisher and/or the editor(s). Publisher and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.