

## OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL COUNSELING COMPETENCIES FOR GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS - LESSONS FOR VIETNAM

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In the context of modern schooling, the role of teachers in supporting students' mental health has become increasingly important. This paper reviews studies on developing school counselling competencies for general education teachers to draw lessons for Vietnam. Through a literature review method, the paper analyzes the essential competency components for counselling work, models, and methods of developing counselling competencies that have been applied in various countries. Based on these findings, the paper recommends designing training programs to enhance teachers' counselling competencies, contributing to building a healthy school environment that supports students' comprehensive psychological development.

**Keywords:** Psychological counseling; psychological counseling capacity; psychological counseling capacity development model.

### 1. Introduction

In the modern social context, students' mental health is an increasing concern for both parents and schools. Research indicates that stress, academic pressures, and mental health issues can harm students' performance and overall growth (Stevenson *et al.*, 1997; Weist *et al.*, 2005; Zhang, 2021). This is particularly worrying as school mental health issues become more complex due to growing negative influences from society, family, and surrounding environments. In Vietnam, over the past decade, educational authorities have increasingly focused on school-based psychological counselling activities, notably with Circular 31/2017/TT-BGDĐT, which provides guidelines for implementing psychological counselling for students in general education, issued by the Minister of Education and Training (effective as of February 2, 2018).

Teachers play an important role in providing interventions that promote mental health in schools, although teacher training often leaves them feeling underprepared in this area (Antoniou *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, continuous professional development for teachers to meet new professional demands has become essential in the current context. This paper systematically reviews research on developing counselling competencies for teachers, both domestically and internationally, to draw lessons that support the advancement of training programs to develop these competencies in teachers.

## **2. Research methodology**

### **2.1. Research objectives**

This paper focuses on clarifying the following issues:

- Analyzing perspectives on the components of school counselling competencies for general education teachers and factors influencing their development.
- Assessing the approaches and models used to develop school counselling competencies in general education teachers.
- Drawing lessons for Vietnam in training and developing school counselling competencies for teachers.

### **2.2. Data collection methods**

We systematically reviewed and assessed articles in both English and Vietnamese published within the past five years in reputable databases, including Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus, as well as respected Vietnamese educational journals such as the Journal of Vietnamese Education and the Journal of Vietnamese Educational Science. The study searched and filtered articles using keywords such as “school counselling competencies”, “development of counselling competencies for teachers”, and “counselling competency development models for general education teachers”. As a result, 50 research studies relevant to the topics of interest were selected and categorized into the following groups.

## **3. Theoretical overview**

### **3.1. Concept of school counselling and school counselling competencies**

School counselling competencies in teachers are among the critical skills enabling them to fulfil their roles as knowledge transmitters and as mentors guiding students' mental and emotional well-being. Specific definitions of these competencies include:

Romasz *et al.* (2004) identified that a teacher's counselling competencies encompass detecting and recognizing students' psychological difficulties, applying techniques such as empathy, guidance, and feedback, and developing suitable counselling themes.

According to Dumitru (2015), school psychological counselling (also known as school counselling) is a support activity aimed at helping students with challenging life circumstances. It provides psychological support in specific school situations, such as truancy, dropping out, repeating grades, violence, and deviant behaviours like theft and aggression, to improve students' mental health and enhance their quality of life.

Trang (2018) defines counselling competency as the practical application of the counsellor's knowledge, skills, and positive attitude. Through interactive processes, the counsellor supports individuals facing psychological difficulties in resolving their issues.

Son (2018) describe counselling (or psychological counselling) for students in teaching and education within schools as psychological support that helps students gain better self-awareness, understand their family circumstances, and navigate social relationships. This, in turn, boosts positive emotions and enables students to make independent decisions in challenging situations they may face at school.

Shan Hu (2021) emphasizes that teachers' counselling competence is the ability to guide and nurture students' psychological development, provide counselling, and supervise students' self-regulation and psychological control in educational practices. This helps students manage negative psychological issues, promoting a healthy, happy lifestyle.

### ***3.2. The role of teachers' competency in school psychological counselling***

Teachers' competency in school psychological counselling is crucial in supporting students' intellectual and mental development. Gourneau (2005) notes that teachers have a long-lasting impact on students' lives and promote positive psychological elements in students. McLeod (2015) similarly recognizes teachers as central figures in students' social integration and emotional regulation, serving as role models for emotional management. According to Gray (2015), teachers have several key roles, such as (a) identifying students' psychological trauma and challenges, (b) fostering positive thoughts and healthy lifestyles and becoming inspirational guides, and (c) serving as mentors to guide appropriate behaviour and lifestyles.

Behrani (2021) argues that understanding, empathy, flexibility, sensitivity, active listening, and respecting diversity are essential in educating students. Teachers should encourage students to express their thoughts, establish a mutually trusting atmosphere, and show encouragement, empathy, and respect to achieve educational goals.

### ***3.3. Overview of developing teachers' competency in school psychological counselling***

Domestically and internationally, studies recognize the significant role of developing teachers' competency in school psychological counselling, as this is a key factor determining the quality of counselling in schools. Research in this area has focused on what to develop and how to structure teachers' professional competencies.

**Research on components of counselling competency in school psychology:** According to Brown *et al.* (2019), school psychological counselling competency includes 1) Identifying students' psychological difficulties (recognizing and assessing psychological challenges faced by students); 2) Utilizing counselling skills with students (listening skills, questioning skills, empathy skills, guidance skills, feedback skills, observation skills, and the ability to create and maintain counselling records); 3) Developing counselling themes for students. This view aligns with Romasz *et al.* (2004), who structure psychological counselling competency around three main components - identifying psychological challenges, applying counselling and support skills, and developing educational themes. These components highlight essential individual competencies for effectively guiding students.

Darling-Hammond *et al.* (2017) propose that counselling competency assessment is based on a teacher's counselling abilities, professional presence, and ethical behaviour.

According to Sorokina (2002), the structure of teachers' psychological counselling competency includes (1) a motivational component, gradually developed through dedication, understanding, and a passion for the profession; (2) a system of professional skills: skills in analyzing and identifying students' psychological difficulties or traumas, specialized diagnostic skills, psychological intervention and support skills, as well as skills in monitoring and adjustment. Trang (2018) suggests that an individual's competency is developed and demonstrated through specific activities, evaluated based on the results achieved in those activities. Components of school psychological counselling competency include: 1) possessing knowledge and understanding in the field of psychological counselling; 2) a positive attitude, readiness for change, and the ability to overcome difficulties; and 3) the ability to carry out counselling activities effectively to achieve intended goals.

**Facing the development of school psychological counselling competency:**

Anthony Yeo (1993) states that those involved in counselling need systematic training in counselling knowledge. Essential foundational knowledge for counsellors includes understanding social science, particularly human behaviour, human psychological development, and the individuals they support, along with career guidance awareness. Doa (2020) stated that foundational knowledge in school psychological counselling is one of the most influential factors in counselling skills. Research by Roeser (2000) shows that if teachers feel underprepared to conduct student psychological counselling, it can lead to a sense of burden and work-related stress. Poor mental health among teachers severely limits their motivation and attitude toward supporting students psychologically.

Studies by Kidger *et al.* (2010) and Lippo *et al.* (2014), using surveys, found that many teachers and leagues do not view school psychological counselling as part of their job responsibilities. Teachers struggling with mental health issues, job dissatisfaction, or feeling overburdened may not prioritize this activity's quality. Research by Han & Weiss (2005), Ball & Anderson-Butcher (2014), and Ransford *et al.* (2009) emphasizes that mental health stress, burnout, and job-related efficacy - also impact the success of counselling implementation.

Additionally, studies by Weare (2006) and Penuel *et al.* (2007) highlight other factors influencing the development of teaching competency, such as programs (content, duration, methods). Specifically, studies indicate that training programs lasting 50-60 hours continuously significantly impact teachers' practical competencies.

**Models for developing teachers' school psychological counselling competency:**

According to Gaible & Burns (2005), professional development in school psychological counselling involves creating environments and conditions for teachers to foster continuous professional growth, enabling them to support students effectively on mental health issues. Gaible proposes three distinct models for teacher professional development: the standardized model, the on-site training model, and the self-training model. These models offer strategies to meet different requirements for teachers.

Hertz (2010) proposed the informal EdCamp conference model as an alternative for professional development. This model promotes an open, participant-driven approach, allowing teachers to engage in discussions, share their experiences, and collaboratively

address topics of interest or concern by using platforms such as Skype, Twitter, Facebook, and blogs for conversations and interactions.

**Content and methods for developing school-based psychological counselling competencies in teachers:** According to Hargreaves (2000), professional development is a continuous, long-term process that is a shared responsibility between individual teachers and organizations. Providing teachers with the necessary conditions and resources for developing their skills is essential to support and encourage their ability to implement prevention strategies and intervene in cases of psychological difficulties and challenges students face in the classroom (Durlak & Dupre, 2008). Clark (2001) highlighted four main factors to consider when enhancing professional skills within the school environment: curriculum development, personal development, management development, and school development.

Authors such as Bayar (2014), Blank & de las Alas (2009), and Penuel *et al.* (2007) emphasized that improving school counselling competencies should focus on specific content: using active learning strategies, appropriate duration and follow-up, necessary support conditions, providing mentoring services, and utilizing high-quality instructors and trainers.

Darling-Hammond *et al.* (2017) valued specific effective methods for improving psychological counselling skills, such as coaching, case intervention practice, evaluation through hypothetical situations, or video case analysis. Quantitative analysis by Sutherland *et al.* (2015) showed that coaching is a highly advantageous method for enhancing counselling skills, with a recommended duration of 45-60 hours for training sessions. Hamre *et al.* (2012) reviewed training courses to enhance teachers' counselling skills, revealing that building online resources and conducting online training sessions significantly benefits teachers' skill enhancement.

Several studies by Edgar (2013), Hemmeter *et al.* (2018), and Owens *et al.* (2014), among others, suggested increasing the effectiveness of teacher training through interactive learning. Developing counselling competencies requires teachers to actively participate in training rather than passively receiving information. An active, hands-on approach, including role-playing, model observation and analysis, and opportunities for discussion and reflection, fosters skill development (Hamre *et al.*, 2012; Silva & Gimbert, 2001; Suldo *et al.*, 2014).

In Becker *et al.* (2014), studies showed that online training sessions combined with direct interaction yield results equivalent to entirely in-person sessions. The method of coaching and the organizational approach allowing teachers to experience and practice skills (whether directly or indirectly) strongly influence the effectiveness of teachers' professional skills.

#### **4. Key lessons for Vietnam in enhancing school counselling competencies for teachers**

##### ***4.1. Identifying and establishing a framework of competencies and evaluation criteria for teacher counselling skills***

Recognizing and establishing a framework of counselling competencies for teachers is essential in promoting practical training and professional development. Firstly,

a clear framework identifies the skills and qualities teachers need to fulfil their psychological counselling responsibilities, forming the basis for developing training programs that meet real-world needs. The framework also enables the classification of skill and competency levels, allowing for the design of personalized training pathways that address each teacher's skill level and growth needs. Furthermore, setting specific competency criteria facilitates transparency and fairness in evaluating the results of training and self-improvement efforts, providing a foundation to adjust training content and methods accordingly. Moreover, when teachers understand the competency framework and evaluation criteria, they gain a clear direction for professional development, thus increasing motivation to learn and continuously enhancing their psychological counselling skills. In this way, identifying and establishing a competency framework not only underpins training activities but also fosters teachers' sustainable growth in providing psychological support to students.

Building upon the studies above, we propose that the components of school-based psychological counselling competencies include the following fundamental elements: 1) Identifying students' psychological difficulties (detecting and recognizing students' psychological challenges; assessing their psychological issues); 2) Utilizing psychological counselling skills for students (skills in listening, questioning, empathy, guidance, feedback, observation, and creating and maintaining school counselling records); 3) Developing counselling topics for students (integrating student counselling into specific teaching/educational topics; designing specialized student counselling topics); and 4) Supervising, supporting, and evaluating the feedback on the outcomes of student counselling. This framework serves as a foundation for organizations to compile and develop programs and content to enhance teachers' competencies in school-based psychological counselling.

#### ***4.2. Diversifying training models to enable continuous professional development for teachers based on job-context approaches***

Two main models are currently implemented in various countries to develop a team of teachers responsible for school-based psychological counselling for students. The first model involves training dedicated teachers specializing in school counselling and psychological therapy. In the United States, school psychologists receive intensive training covering theoretical and practical subjects. School psychologists typically complete a master's degree program (with at least 60 graduate credits) or a doctoral program (with at least 90 graduate credits), both of which include a supervised internship of 1,200 hours. They must be certified by the state where they work and may also be nationally certified by the National School Psychologist Certification Board (NSPCB). The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) sets standards for training, certification, professional practice, and ethics, underscoring the importance the U.S. places on the quality of personnel in school counselling.

The second model is the part-time model, common in developing countries, including Vietnam, where teachers take on dual roles. However, it is essential to establish training programs and standards for the duration and scope of the knowledge and skills teachers must acquire, as well as a management mechanism to evaluate and measure teachers' competencies in student counselling.

To enhance teachers' counselling competencies for students, a variety of training methods should be employed, including:



**Figure 1:** Models for enhancing teachers' competencies in school-based psychological counseling

**Professional development for teachers through training programs, workshops, and standardized professional development programs:** The primary goal of this model is to ensure consistency and effectiveness in delivering training content. This model uses a “cascade” or “spillover” approach to equip a large number of teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills. Typically, standardized models are implemented top-down through workshops, training sessions, and similar means. It includes training methods via in-person sessions, broadcast programs, or online platforms (Gaible & Burns, 2005). This model offers many benefits when used appropriately, allowing teachers to encounter new ideas, alternative approaches, and opportunities to connect with colleagues. Moreover, it serves as a tangible demonstration of a country's, provider's, or project's commitment to a specific action plan (Gaible & Burns, 2005).

**Building learning communities for on-site professional development:** This second model focuses on in-depth learning among groups of teachers within schools or specific areas. This approach aims to promote profound, lasting changes in teaching methods by providing collaborative learning opportunities within the local context. The

main goal is to facilitate teachers in sharing specialized professional issues and foster mutual professional development, in-person and online. The model requires establishing core members who take on leadership roles, motivating and inspiring their colleagues. This model concentrates on addressing the specific, real-world challenges each teacher faces when providing psychological counselling support to students. Additionally, it encourages personal initiatives and collaborative approaches to problem-solving, allowing for flexible, sustainable, and more specialized professional development among teachers. It provides continuous opportunities for professional learning within a community of educators (Gaible & Burns, 2005).

**Self-directed professional development:** The third approach to teacher professional development in psychological counseling focuses on independent learning, driven by teachers themselves. Self-directed development aims to enhance teachers' professional counselling competencies based on their interests and needs, utilizing resources like computers and the Internet. It provides flexibility and encourages teachers to take personal responsibility for their professional growth. In this model, teachers identify their professional development goals and select activities that help them achieve them. Many teachers also engage informally in self-directed professional development by learning from their own experiences, seeking advice from colleagues, and finding helpful lesson plans online (McGreal, 1983). Through this autonomous model, teachers actively initiate and design their own professional development programs, creating opportunities to share resources, exchange ideas, and discuss challenges and solutions with colleagues (Gaible & Burns, 2005).

#### ***4.3. Innovating methods and forms of psychological counselling training for teachers***

Current training programs are mainly theoretical, with limited emphasis on practical application. Many teachers feel that the counselling knowledge they have learned is not enough to be effectively applied in real-life situations, and the current training formats are not diverse or flexible enough to encourage active participation from teachers. Innovating methods and forms of psychological counselling: Training for teachers is crucial in improving the overall quality of education. Teachers can help students overcome psychological difficulties and support their healthy intellectual and emotional development when equipped with adequate counselling knowledge and skills. Innovation in training methods makes the learning process more flexible and practical, thus better meeting the needs and realities of teachers in schools. New methods, such as learning through real-life scenarios, using technology, and peer learning, help teachers easily apply their knowledge in practice while fostering a friendly, supportive educational environment. As a result, teachers enhance their counselling skills and contribute to building a comprehensive education system that meets the psychological development needs of students in modern society.

Some directions for innovating the methods of enhancing psychological counselling capacity for teachers include:

**Focus on practice and experience:** Minimize theoretical content and increase the use of real-life scenarios, group activities, and practical exercises. Using real-life situations and simulation games allows teachers to practice and develop counselling skills.



**Application of technology and digital transformation in training:** Utilize online learning platforms, digital materials, and interactive digital tools, such as e-learning courses, video simulations of real-life scenarios, or applications that support psychological counselling. This allows teachers to access knowledge anytime and anywhere while offering flexibility and personalizing the learning path to match each teacher's abilities, needs, and experience.

**Encouraging peer learning and community knowledge-sharing:** Establish a psychological counselling community within schools or between schools, where teachers can exchange experiences and learn from one another. These activities help create a positive learning environment and share practical problem-solving strategies.

**Connecting and collaborating with psychological experts:** Increase the invitation of psychological experts to directly guide or provide counselling through seminars and special topics, allowing teachers to learn from those with practical experience and receive support in addressing challenges when counselling students.

**Continuous assessment and feedback:** Implement training programs with a continuous evaluation system, helping teachers track their progress and areas for improvement. Feedback from experts and peers will help them refine their skills and enhance the quality of counselling.

#### ***4.4. Creating motivational mechanisms to encourage teachers in psychological counselling for students***

Motivation is crucial in determining work effectiveness in general and specifically for teachers. Studies have shown that factors such as readiness, trust, and effort from teachers are key determinants in the effectiveness of school psychological counselling. Research also acknowledges that teachers are not always eager to apply new programs and methods, and in some cases, they may even resist performing counselling tasks at various levels (Eppler-Wolff *et al.*, 2019; Schultz *et al.*, 2015).

In management and organization, motivation is often discussed as a key factor that makes teachers work more effectively. According to a study by Ha (2022), in order to address the issue of creating motivation to enhance the effectiveness of teachers' professional and counselling activities, it is necessary to consider the factors that influence motivation creation:

**Factors related to the teachers themselves** (such as awareness, beliefs, enthusiasm, etc.);

**Factors within the psychological counselling activity itself** (such as proficiency in professional skills, the meaning of the work, the interest in the work, etc.);

**Factors related to management** (such as incentive mechanisms, understanding, recognition, appreciation, opportunities for career advancement, etc.).

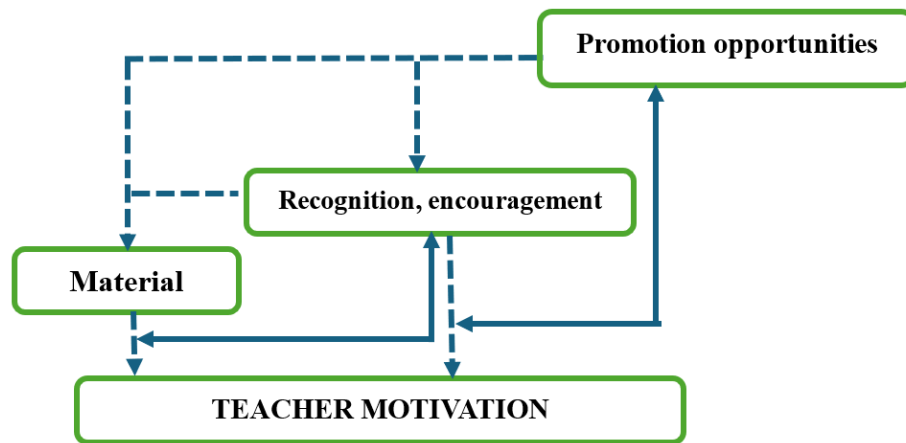
To motivate teachers, in management practices, several measures can be implemented to improve teachers' work performance, including:

**First, material incentives:** Many studies have shown that salary/income is a crucial factor, even the most fundamental motivation for fostering teacher engagement (Lipman, 2014). Therefore, policies and mechanisms should provide teachers with allowances or additional financial support, which can be a stronger motivator than praise

and encouragement. However, according to this study, praise and encouragement still have a significant motivational effect (Jasmi, 2012).

**Second, motivation through accurate assessment and recognition of effort:** As mentioned above, for the evaluation of performance to become an effective tool for motivating teachers, managers must establish a system of evaluation that is official, transparent, scientific, and straightforward. The evaluation system must include specific standards and criteria to be communicated to each teacher.

**Third, creating opportunities for teachers to engage in continuous professional development:** This involves fostering a friendly and enjoyable work environment, building a creative learning community, actively engaging in democratic discussions about professional expertise, and respecting differences.



**Figure 2:** *Model for enhancing motivation for teachers in school psychological counseling*

## 5. Conclusion

In modern society, with the challenges of student's mental health, developing psychological counselling skills for teachers is of utmost importance. Teachers need professional knowledge and be equipped with psychological skills to identify, intervene, and support students effectively. Research and international experience have shown that when teachers receive thorough Training and continue to develop their professional expertise, they can make a positive contribution to improving students' mental health and creating a healthy learning environment. Therefore, Vietnam needs to expand and enhance training models and methods for teachers to ensure they are better equipped to meet the demands of the current educational context.

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## TÓM TẮT

### TỔNG QUAN CÁC NGHIÊN CỨU VỀ PHÁT TRIỂN NĂNG LỰC TƯ VẤN TÂM LÝ HỌC ĐƯỜNG CHO GIÁO VIÊN PHỔ THÔNG – BÀI HỌC KINH NGHIỆM CHO VIỆT NAM

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Trong bối cảnh giáo dục hiện đại, vai trò của giáo viên trong việc hỗ trợ sức khỏe tâm thần của học sinh ngày càng trở nên quan trọng. Bài viết này tổng quan các nghiên cứu về phát triển năng lực tư vấn học đường cho giáo viên giáo dục phổ thông để rút ra bài học kinh nghiệm cho Việt Nam. Thông qua phương pháp tổng quan tài liệu, bài viết phân tích các thành phần năng lực thiết yếu cho công tác tư vấn, các mô hình và phương pháp phát triển năng lực tư vấn đã được áp dụng ở một số quốc gia. Dựa trên những phát hiện này, bài viết khuyến nghị thiết kế các chương trình đào tạo để nâng cao năng lực tư vấn của giáo viên, góp phần xây dựng môi trường trường học lành mạnh hỗ trợ sự phát triển tâm lý toàn diện của học sinh.

**Từ khoá:** Tư vấn tâm lý; năng lực tư vấn tâm lý; mô hình phát triển năng lực tư vấn tâm lý.