

Developing and Validating a Localized Burnout Scale for Higher Vocational College Counselors in Guangdong, China

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ABSTRACT

This study develops and validates a localized burnout scale for higher vocational college counselors in Guangdong, China. Existing instruments such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) are widely used but show cultural and contextual limitations in non-Western educational environments. To address these gaps, a three-phase research design was adopted: item generation through theoretical synthesis and expert review, pilot testing with statistical refinement, and large-scale validation with 6,622 counselors across 93 higher vocational colleges. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) revealed a five-factor structure consisting of Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalisation, Reduced Personal Accomplishment, Work Resources and Demands Imbalance, and Role Conflict and Ambiguity. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) confirmed excellent fit indices (RMSEA < 0.08; CFI > 0.92), with high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85\text{--}0.93$). Convergent and discriminant validity were established, confirming the robustness of the instrument. The localized scale captures stressors overlooked by Western models, including ideological-political responsibilities, administrative overload, and industry-education integration. This validated tool offers education authorities a reliable framework to monitor counselor well-being, design interventions, and strengthen workforce sustainability. Methodologically, the study advances cross-cultural scale validation; practically, it supports evidence-based reforms in vocational education in China.

Keywords Burnout; Higher Vocational Education; Counselors; Psychometric Validation, Guangdong

INTRODUCTION

Burnout has emerged as a pressing challenge in the field of education across the globe. Teachers, counselors, and administrators often face high demands with limited resources, leading to emotional exhaustion, reduced professional efficacy, and prolonged psychological strain. Recognizing its severity, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified burnout as an occupational phenomenon in the ICD-11, defining it as chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed (WHO, 2019). Among educators, burnout is linked to diminished job commitment, impaired mental health, and reduced capacity to support students effectively (Maslach & Leiter, 2022). These consequences highlight the importance of addressing burnout not only at the individual level but also as a structural challenge within educational systems.

In China, higher vocational education plays a central role in preparing a skilled workforce for national socio-economic development. With more than 16.7 million students enrolled in 2022 nearly one-third of China's total higher education population vocational institutions continue to expand in scale and strategic importance (Ministry of Education, 2023). Counselors are pivotal to this system, undertaking responsibilities that include student management, psychological support, ideological-political education, and coordination of industry-education integration. Recent reports estimate that approximately 240,800 full-time counselors serve in vocational colleges nationwide, yet many face multiple overlapping roles and heavy administrative duties (MOE, 2023). Such complexity intensifies their vulnerability to burnout, particularly as expectations placed upon them extend far beyond conventional counseling practices.

Current evidence indicates that burnout among vocational counselors has reached concerning levels. Surveys report that more than half of counselors experience moderate to high burnout, accompanied by increasing

turnover intentions among both early-career counselors and long-serving staff managing long-term work stress (MOE, 2023). The implications are substantial: counselor burnout undermines the quality of student guidance, weakens mental health support, and affects the broader mission of vocational education, which seeks to prepare learners for evolving labor market demands (Wang & Li, 2021). Addressing burnout is therefore essential for sustaining the stability, effectiveness, and human capital mission of China's vocational sector.

Although Western instruments such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) are widely used, their applicability in the Chinese vocational context remains limited. Certain constructs for example, "depersonalisation" misalign with Confucian cultural values emphasizing empathy, relational harmony, and moral responsibility in education (Yu, 2022). Moreover, these instruments often overlook localized stressors faced by vocational counselors, including ideological-political responsibilities, administrative overload due to policy intensification, and the growing pressure of cross-border collaborations within the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area (Chen & Feng, 2022). These limitations underscore the need for a culturally grounded and context-specific measurement tool.

In response to this gap, the present study develops and validates a localized burnout scale tailored specifically for higher vocational college counselors in Guangdong Province. By integrating universal burnout dimensions with culturally and institutionally relevant constructs, the scale aims to provide a more accurate and context-sensitive assessment. This research employs a rigorous three-phase design—item generation through theoretical synthesis and expert consultation, pilot testing with psychometric refinement, and large-scale validation involving over 6,600 counselors. The objective is to equip educational institutions and policymakers with a reliable instrument that can guide burnout monitoring, inform targeted interventions, and support counselor well-being. Ultimately, this study contributes to the advancement of cross-cultural measurement and offers practical solutions to a growing global concern.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of burnout among educators has been shaped by multiple theoretical and empirical contributions over the past four decades. Early research by Maslach and colleagues defined burnout as a three-dimensional construct consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment, and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) subsequently became the most widely used assessment tool worldwide (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). While these dimensions have been influential in shaping global scholarship, scholars have questioned their universal applicability, particularly in non-Western contexts where cultural norms and work structures differ significantly (Schaufeli, 2017).

In the Chinese higher education landscape, vocational college counselors face a unique set of stressors not adequately captured by Western instruments. Studies highlight that beyond teaching-related tasks, these counselors assume additional responsibilities such as ideological-political education, student management, and administrative reporting (Li & Wu, 2021). The overlap of these roles often leads to role conflict and ambiguity, both of which are known predictors of occupational burnout (Kahn et al., 1964; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The growing literature therefore emphasizes the need to contextualize measurement tools in line with local realities.

Another stream of scholarship has underscored the importance of cultural adaptation in psychometric research. Yu (2022), for example, argues that constructs like depersonalisation contradict Confucian values of empathy and moral responsibility in education. Similarly, Chen and Feng (2022) demonstrate that localized stressors—such as cross-border collaboration in the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area—contribute significantly to counselor strain but are absent in established Western scales. This evidence highlights the necessity of developing measurement instruments that balance universality with cultural specificity.

In terms of methodological approaches, researchers have increasingly turned to rigorous psychometric validation procedures to ensure reliability and validity of burnout instruments across cultural contexts. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) remain the most widely applied statistical techniques for establishing construct validity (Hair et al., 2021). Additionally, the incorporation of reliability indices such as Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) provides robust evidence of

internal consistency and convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). These practices are essential for producing instruments that can withstand empirical scrutiny and be effectively applied in large-scale educational research.

Taken together, the literature suggests that while existing instruments like the MBI have been instrumental in advancing the study of burnout globally, their limitations in non-Western settings call for localized alternatives. For counselors in Chinese higher vocational education, a measurement scale that integrates both established burnout dimensions and culturally embedded stressors is crucial. This study addresses this gap by developing and validating a localized burnout scale, thereby contributing to both cross-cultural psychometrics and the practical improvement of counselor well-being in vocational education settings.

Theoretical Foundations of Burnout

The earliest and most widely recognized conceptualization of burnout is Maslach's Three-Dimensional Model, which defines the syndrome as comprising emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). Emotional exhaustion occurs when individuals feel drained of psychological resources, often due to prolonged exposure to stressors. Depersonalisation, in contrast, manifests as a sense of detachment or negative attitudes toward that one serve, which is particularly detrimental in educational settings where empathy is central. Reduced personal accomplishment refers to a diminished sense of professional efficacy and achievement. Together, these three dimensions capture the progressive deterioration of energy, attitude, and competence that characterizes burnout. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), derived from this model, has been widely applied across disciplines and countries. However, critics argue that while the model effectively describes symptoms, it does not fully explain the underlying causes of burnout (Schaufeli, 2017). Nonetheless, the three-dimensional framework remains a cornerstone for subsequent theories.

Building on broader stress research, Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory provides another influential lens for understanding burnout. According to COR, stress arises when individuals perceive a loss of valued resources—such as time, energy, or social support—or when available resources are insufficient to meet demands (Hobfoll, 1989). For educators and counselors, the continuous investment of emotional and cognitive resources in student guidance, administrative tasks, and institutional obligations can quickly exceed their capacity for recovery. When resource loss outweighs gain, exhaustion and withdrawal behaviors follow, leading to burnout. Importantly, COR theory highlights the dynamic nature of burnout, viewing it not only as a state but also as a process of resource depletion over time. This perspective is particularly relevant for vocational college counselors in China, who face heavy workloads and limited institutional support. The framework underscores the importance of interventions that replenish resources, such as professional development, social recognition, and workload management.

Role Theory offers yet another explanation by focusing on the psychological strain caused by conflicting or ambiguous role expectations. First proposed by Kahn and colleagues (1964), the theory suggests that when employees face incompatible demands or unclear responsibilities, they experience chronic tension that can evolve into burnout. In the case of vocational counselors, roles often extend far beyond traditional counseling to include ideological-political instruction, administrative reporting, and industry-education coordination. Such overlapping duties create role conflict, while frequent policy changes contribute to role ambiguity. Both conditions are strongly associated with stress and emotional exhaustion. Studies in Chinese educational institutions show that counselors report difficulty balancing student-centered care with bureaucratic requirements, reinforcing the relevance of role theory (Li & Wu, 2021). The framework suggests that burnout can be mitigated by clarifying job expectations and reducing incompatible demands. Thus, Role Theory provides insight into the organizational structures that exacerbate counselor strain.

Another significant framework is Siegrist's Effort–Reward Imbalance (ERI) Theory, which emphasizes the role of fairness and reciprocity in occupational health. The theory posits that when employees invest high effort without receiving adequate rewards—whether in terms of salary, recognition, or career opportunities—stress and burnout ensue (Siegrist, 1996). For counselors, the mismatch between their heavy workload and limited institutional recognition can fuel feelings of underappreciation and frustration. This imbalance not only undermines motivation but also contributes to emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions. Research shows

that educators working under conditions of high effort but low reward demonstrate higher levels of psychological distress and physical health problems (Tsutsumi & Kawakami, 2004). Within Chinese vocational colleges, where performance evaluation often emphasizes compliance with administrative directives rather than the quality of student care, the ERI model offers a powerful explanation for rising burnout levels. It highlights the need for systems that reward effort equitably to sustain professional well-being.

Finally, the Demand–Control Model proposed by Karasek (1979) sheds light on the relationship between job demands and decision-making authority. The model suggests that when job demands are high but autonomy is low, employees are more likely to experience psychological strain. For counselors, heavy workloads combined with limited influence over institutional policies or procedures create precisely such conditions. Without the ability to shape their work environment, counselors often feel trapped, intensifying the risk of burnout. This framework complements the others by emphasizing structural power imbalances as a root cause of stress. Taken together, these theories provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding burnout: Maslach’s model describes its symptoms, COR theory explains its resource dynamics, Role Theory highlights organizational complexity, ERI theory exposes inequities, and the Demand–Control Model emphasizes autonomy. Collectively, they show why vocational counselors, who face scarce resources, conflicting responsibilities, inequitable recognition, and low autonomy, are uniquely vulnerable to burnout.

Limitations of Existing Research on Burnout Scales in China

This study is limited by its geographic scope, as participants were drawn only from Guangdong province. In addition, the study relied solely on self-reported measures, which may introduce common method bias and social desirability effects. The cross-sectional design also prevents the assessment of test–retest reliability or predictive validity over time. Furthermore, the scale was developed specifically for higher vocational college counselors and may not be generalizable to other education sectors. Research on burnout assessment in China began relatively late and has been primarily characterised by the localisation and revision of international scales (Su et al., 2021). While these efforts represent significant progress, they also reveal important limitations in theoretical foundations, methodological design, and cultural adaptation.

Reliance on Western Models

Most Chinese burnout studies still rely heavily on Western theoretical frameworks, particularly Maslach’s three-dimensional model of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment. Even though local adaptations of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) have been validated in China, such reliance risks overlooking culturally specific factors such as relational pressure and the role of “face-saving” culture (Bai et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2021).

Limited Occupational Scope

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Research Design Constraints

Most studies use cross-sectional designs, providing only snapshots of burnout prevalence rather than tracking its development over time. The lack of longitudinal studies restricts understanding of how burnout evolves and the long-term effectiveness of interventions (Yu, 2023; Xie et al., 2024).

Inadequate Expansion of Dimensions

Although some attempts have been made to expand burnout measurement beyond the traditional three factors, the majority of scales remain confined to the classic structure. This limitation prevents the capture of context-

specific burnout features, such as research fatigue among university staff and digital-era workplace stressors (Guo & Xu, 2022; Wang et al., 2024).

Ambiguity in Scoring and Validation

Burnout instruments frequently use Likert-type scales, but scoring thresholds remain inconsistent. The absence of standardised cut-off points reduces comparability across studies and weakens diagnostic value. Furthermore, validation efforts often prioritise reliability and surface validity, with insufficient attention to predictive or criterion-related validity (Xu et al., 2021; Bai et al., 2025).

Digitalisation and Interdisciplinary Gaps

The rapid digital transformation of workplaces reshapes burnout risk factors, yet existing tools insufficiently address these challenges. Moreover, burnout research in China remains largely confined to psychology and management, with limited integration of sociology, physiology, or anthropology, thereby constraining interdisciplinary insights (Xie et al., 2024; Peng et al., 2023).

Summary and Future Directions

In summary, although Chinese scholars have made important advances in adapting and validating burnout instruments, key gaps remain. Future research should:

- Reduce reliance on Western models and integrate indigenous constructs.
- Broaden occupational coverage to reflect diverse and digitalised professions.
- Employ longitudinal designs to track burnout progression and intervention outcomes.
- Refine measurement dimensions to capture culturally specific and emerging stressors.
- Standardise scoring thresholds and strengthen predictive validity.
- Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration for a holistic understanding of burnout.

Such efforts will support the development of more culturally sensitive and practically useful burnout assessment tools to guide workplace health management in China.

METHODOLOGY RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a systematic three-phase research design to ensure the development of a valid and reliable measurement instrument. The first phase focused on item generation, which was carried out through an in-depth review of relevant theoretical frameworks and existing literature, supplemented by insights obtained from expert interviews. This process ensured that the preliminary pool of items reflected both conceptual clarity and contextual relevance.

The second phase involved content validation and pilot testing, which adopted a Delphi expert review process to evaluate the representativeness, clarity, and appropriateness of the items. Based on the consensus of experts, redundant or ambiguous items were refined or eliminated. A small-scale pilot survey was subsequently conducted to test the practicality and comprehensibility of the instrument, followed by item purification to strengthen its psychometric soundness.

The third phase encompassed large-scale validation through the administration of the revised instrument to a broader sample. Data from this stage were subjected to both exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to establish the underlying factor structure and to verify model fit. In addition, the reliability of the instrument was assessed using internal consistency measures such as Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, while various forms of validity—including convergent, discriminant, and construct

validity—were rigorously evaluated. This comprehensive three-phase approach ensured that the final instrument was theoretically grounded, empirically robust, and suitable for application in diverse research and practical contexts.

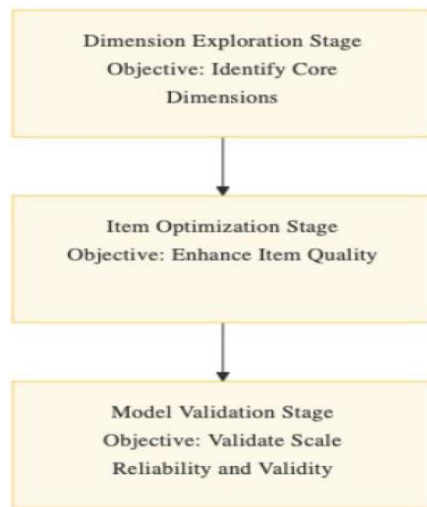


Fig.1 Adapted from the DeVellis-Boateng Three-Stage Theory for Developing a Burnout Measurement Instrument for Higher Education Counsellors

Data Collection and Analysis

This study employed a rigorous four-stage data collection framework designed to align with established psychometric development standards and ethical guidelines for social survey research. The process consisted of theoretical construction, expert content validation, small-scale pre-testing, and large-scale formal surveying, each stage incorporating systematic quality-control measures to ensure reliability, validity, and cultural relevance.

In the theoretical construction stage, multi-dimensional theoretical models such as conservation of resources theory and job–person fit theory were integrated to establish an initial measurement item bank. International scales were adapted into local occupational contexts, particularly the work scenarios of senior counsellors, thereby ensuring theoretical comprehensiveness and contextual sensitivity.

The expert content validity stage convened a multidisciplinary panel including researchers, administrators, and senior counsellors to assess the relevance, clarity, and representativeness of the items. Using predefined validity criteria, the panel refined or eliminated items to enhance scale accuracy.

The small-scale pre-testing stage involved the administration of a pilot questionnaire via an electronic platform to counsellors from higher vocational colleges in Guangdong Province. Automated quality-control mechanisms identified abnormal response patterns, while item analysis was used to remove weak items, thus improving psychometric robustness.

The large-scale formal survey stage implemented a stratified sampling strategy across different regions and institutional types. Advanced encryption technologies safeguarded data transmission, and anonymisation procedures ensured compliance with the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPL). Rigorous monitoring techniques, including response-pattern analysis and contradiction checks, guaranteed high-quality data, resulting in a reliable and valid dataset for analysis.

The present study employed a four-stage mixed-analysis framework, strictly following established psychometric norms (DeVellis, 2016) and ethical standards for social survey research. The framework integrated both qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure methodological rigor and contextual validity.

Stage 1: Content Validity Analysis

In the first stage, a cross-disciplinary panel of experts, including theoretical scholars and practitioners, was convened to evaluate the preliminary item pool. A three-dimensional evaluation system was employed, focusing on relevance, semantic clarity, and theoretical alignment. Following the recommendations of Polit and Beck (2006), the Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated, and items that did not meet the minimum thresholds were revised or eliminated. This process ensured that the retained items possessed both conceptual clarity and cultural appropriateness, significantly strengthening the content validity of the instrument (Yusoff, 2019).

Stage 2: Pre-Test Analysis

The second stage involved a small-sample pilot study to diagnose the psychometric performance of the items. Three core diagnostic techniques were applied: the item discrimination index (e.g., critical ratio analysis), item-total score correlation, and factor loading strength. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to provide an initial validation of the scale structure, while reliability testing offered a preliminary assessment of internal consistency. This stage followed the iterative paradigm of “theory → empirical optimization → model validation”, which integrates qualitative expert judgment with quantitative psychometric testing (Kalkbrenner, 2020).

Stage 3: Formal Investigation and Validation

The third stage was a large-scale validation study, which implemented a stratified sampling strategy to ensure representativeness across higher vocational institutions in Guangdong Province. To minimize the risk of common-method bias, Harman’s single-factor test was employed. The psychometric properties of the scale were rigorously assessed through a dual-track approach combining Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Reliability was examined via Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability, while convergent validity (standardized factor loadings, Average Variance Extracted) and discriminant validity were systematically evaluated (Hair et al., 2020).

Stage 4: Status Quo and Relationship Analysis

The final stage employed descriptive and inferential statistics to present the distribution of burnout levels among respondents. Measures of central tendency and variability were used to describe the data, while correlation analyses were conducted to explore associations between demographic characteristics and burnout dimensions. These results provided evidence-based insights into burnout risk factors and informed the development of targeted intervention strategies.

Overall, this study constructed an innovative framework that integrates dynamic optimization mechanisms, cultural context embedding, and hybrid validation systems. Using a multi-indicator joint decision-making model, expert judgment, item analysis, and factor validation were systematically combined to refine the scale. Furthermore, the embedding of localized constructs such as the “administrative-teaching double-shouldering” role ensured measurement equivalence between Western theoretical models and the Chinese higher vocational education context. This closed-loop framework of “theoretical construction → empirical optimization → model validation” reflects international best practices in scale development while ensuring cultural adaptability and empirical robustness.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Item pool construction is the starting point of scale development, aiming at integrating theoretical foundations and practical experiences, and screening out highly relevant items to the research concept through theoretical analyses and literature reviews. The goal of this process is to generate a set of comprehensive, accurate and representative items through a systematic approach to comprehensively cover the dimensions of the research concept, which provides rich materials for the subsequent validation of the scale and ensures the completeness and scientific of the scale in terms of content.

Theoretical Foundations of Burnout Measurement

The theoretical basis of burnout measurement in this study is grounded in three major frameworks: Conservation of Resources Theory, Job–Person Fit Theory, and the Social Competence Model. These theories provide the conceptual foundation for understanding the antecedents, manifestations, and consequences of burnout, as well as guiding the development of measurement instruments that are both valid and culturally adaptive.

Conservation of Resources Theory

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, originally proposed by Hobfoll (1989), is one of the most influential frameworks for understanding the mechanisms underlying burnout. The central premise of COR theory is that individuals strive to acquire, maintain, and protect valued resources, which include material resources (e.g., income, tools), social resources (e.g., co-worker support, friendships), personal resources (e.g., skills, self-efficacy), and energy resources (e.g., time, vitality). Burnout occurs when these resources are threatened, lost, or when individuals perceive an imbalance between resource investment and return (Halbesleben et al., 2021; Chen & Feng, 2022).

In the workplace, counsellors in higher vocational colleges are highly vulnerable to burnout due to insufficient resources such as time, energy, or training opportunities. For instance, an excessive workload without adequate organisational support can lead to emotional exhaustion (Chen & Zhang, 2022). Moreover, COR theory emphasises that resource loss is disproportionately more impactful than resource gain. This implies that counsellors facing chronic resource depletion may adopt defensive coping strategies such as disengagement or reduced work effort, further exacerbating burnout (Go et al., 2023). Preventive strategies therefore must focus not only on reducing work demands but also on enhancing and replenishing key resources through supportive leadership, efficient work processes, and staff development opportunities (Tang et al., 2023).

Job–Person Fit Theory

Job–Person Fit Theory (JPFT), derived from the broader Person–Environment Fit perspective, highlights the alignment between individual characteristics and work environment demands (Kristof-Brown et al., 2021). This theory posits that burnout emerges when mismatches occur between a counsellor's skills, values, or interests and the tasks or values emphasised by the institution (Edwards & Cable, 2022; Li et al., 2023).

For example, counsellors with academic research interests but limited administrative skills may struggle in roles heavily weighted toward student management and disciplinary responsibilities. Such misalignment diminishes job motivation and increases burnout risk. Furthermore, JPFT extends beyond skills matching to include value congruence. When counsellors prioritise student-centred values but operate within environments that emphasise administrative efficiency, value dissonance can amplify emotional strain and job dissatisfaction (Edwards & Rothbard, 2022; Cable & DeRue, 2023). By identifying mismatches between personal attributes and job requirements, JPFT provides practical direction for interventions, such as optimising workload allocation, enhancing professional development, and aligning institutional policies with counsellors' intrinsic values (Kristof-Brown & Billsberry, 2021).

Social Competence Model

The Social Competence Model (SCM) focuses on the relationship between job competence and burnout, suggesting that perceived competence influences both job satisfaction and susceptibility to emotional exhaustion (Bakker & Demerouti, 2021; Cho, 2022). Competence encompasses actual skills and self-perceived abilities to meet job demands. Studies have shown that counsellors who perceive themselves as competent are more engaged and report greater job satisfaction, whereas those with low perceived competence are more resistant to job demands and prone to burnout (Shi & Lei, 2023; Liu & Zhou, 2024).

In the context of higher vocational education, counsellors often manage diverse student issues, requiring advanced skills in communication, counselling, and crisis intervention (Wu, 2022). Newly recruited counsellors in particular may lack experience and training, leading to diminished self-efficacy and higher levels of emotional

exhaustion within the first year of service (Deng et al., 2024). Organisational support also plays a vital role in enhancing perceived competence. For instance, structured training programmes, peer support systems, and competency-based performance evaluations have been shown to reduce burnout by improving counsellors' self-efficacy (Zhou & Li, 2023; Xu et al., 2024). A recent competency development programme in Guangdong Province reduced counsellor burnout levels by 28% through monthly workshops, mentorship, and case supervision (Guangdong Education Bureau, 2024).

International Burnout Assessment Scales

In addition to theoretical models, this study draws upon established burnout measurement instruments developed internationally. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981), remains the most widely used and validated tool, comprising three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment. Numerous studies have confirmed its reliability and validity across occupational groups (Garcia-Arroyo et al., 2022). However, criticisms remain regarding its limited applicability outside healthcare contexts. For instance, some depersonalisation items designed for medical settings are unsuitable for teachers and require adaptation to avoid underestimating affective engagement (Li & Wang, 2021; Zhang et al., 2023). Recent revisions, such as the MBI-ES for educators and validations of the MBI-HSS for healthcare workers in post-pandemic contexts, highlight ongoing efforts to adapt the tool to diverse professions (Schaufeli, 2021; Leiter & Maslach, 2023).

Table II MBI Scale

Dimension	Title Item
Emotional exhaustion	I feel like I'm running out of steam at work
	Work is wearing me down
	I feel emotionally drained from my job
	After a day's work, I feel exhausted
	When I wake up in the morning and think about starting another day of work, I feel tired
	I'm bored with my job
	Work has made me moody
	I feel like I'm being bled dry at work
	I feel emotionally drained at work
Depersonalisation	I have a cold attitude towards certain service users or workmates
	I'm becoming a little impatient with the people I work with
	I treat the people I work with like objects, without emotion
	I'm not interested in the problems and needs of the people I work with
	I think the people I work with are deliberately trying to get me in trouble
	I feel that I have achieved a lot of valuable results in my work

A reduced sense of personal fulfilment	I'm satisfied with my job performance
	I feel that I am a very capable person in the workplace
	I am able to utilise my talents to the fullest in my work
	I don't see the point in what I do
	I'm disappointed with the results of my work
	I don't feel like I've accomplished much at work
	I feel like I don't get the recognition I deserve for the work I do

Burnout Measure (BM)

The Burnout Measure (BM), also known as the Pines and Aronson Scale, is a unidimensional self-report instrument designed to assess the severity of burnout (Pines & Aronson, 1988). The scale comprises 21 items that ask respondents: “In the past month, have you experienced any of the following?” Items address aspects such as exhaustion, reduced service delivery, and physical as well as psychological strain in the workplace.

Compared to the multidimensional structure of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), the BM is simpler and more efficient for detecting early signs of burnout (Kim et al., 2023). However, its one-dimensional design has been criticised for failing to fully capture the complexity of burnout, which is widely recognised as a multidimensional construct. For instance, the item “I am tired” may blur the distinction between burnout and depressive symptoms, thereby undermining discriminant validity (Boswell et al., 2022; Smith & Lee, 2022).

Cross-cultural adaptation of the BM has also raised challenges. Language and cultural nuances can affect how respondents interpret items. For example, in Chinese society, where “work dedication” is a dominant cultural norm, individuals may underestimate or underreport their burnout symptoms (Zhao et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). To enhance cultural validity, items such as “feeling powerless” have been revised to align with local meanings and to more accurately reflect subjective experiences of Chinese workers (Chen & Wang, 2023).

Recent evidence suggests that shortened forms of the BM may improve its utility. A BM-Short version has demonstrated effectiveness in screening for mental health risks during the COVID-19 pandemic, offering a practical tool for large-scale applications where rapid assessment is needed (Garcia et al., 2022). While the BM remains a valuable measure, its unidimensional structure highlights the importance of using it cautiously and, where possible, in combination with multidimensional instruments to achieve a more comprehensive assessment of burnout.

Table II BM scale

Dimension	Title Item
	Feeling tired.
	Feeling depressed.
	Had a great day.
	Feeling physically exhausted.
	Feeling emotionally drained.
	Feeling happy.

Burnout	Feeling exhausted.
	Feeling exhausted
	Feeling unhappy.
	Feeling atrophied.
	Feeling trapped.
	Feeling worthless.
	Feeling exhausted
	Getting annoyed.
	Disillusionment and resentment towards others.
	Feeling weak.
	Feeling desperate.
	Feeling rejected.
	Feeling optimistic.
	Feeling energised.
	Feeling anxious.

Content Validity – Expert Review & Pre-Survey

The table 3 presented outlines the dimensions and items used to measure burnout among counsellors in higher vocational colleges and universities in Guangdong Province. The development of these items was grounded in established burnout theories while also incorporating contextual stressors specific to the vocational education environment. The instrument consists of five main dimensions, namely Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalisation, Reduced Personal Accomplishment, Work Resources and Demands Imbalance, and Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity.

The first dimension, Emotional Exhaustion (EE), comprises eight items (EE1–EE8) that capture counsellors’ feelings of psychological and physical depletion caused by continuous student-related responsibilities. These items reflect exhaustion at the end of the workday, anxiety when anticipating interactions with students, and an overall sense of depleted emotional resources. For example, EE4 emphasises the difficulty counsellors face in sustaining positive emotions while managing students’ behavioural and emotional needs. This domain is significant because emotional exhaustion is widely recognised as the central component of burnout, indicating diminished energy and capacity to meet professional demands (Garcia-Arroyo et al., 2022; Halbesleben et al., 2021).

The second dimension, Depersonalisation (DE), includes eight items (DE1–DE8) that assess the degree of emotional detachment counsellors may develop towards students. The items highlight counsellors’ indifference, impatience with repeated complaints, and lack of concern for student success. Depersonalisation is considered a defensive coping strategy, whereby counsellors emotionally withdraw to protect themselves from overwhelming demands (Schaufeli, 2021). However, such detachment can negatively impact student–counsellor relationships and reduce the quality of student support (Zhang et al., 2023).

The third dimension, Reduced Personal Accomplishment (RPA), also contains eight items (RPA1–RPA8). This dimension measures counsellors’ self-perceived ineffectiveness and diminished sense of achievement in their roles. Items such as “I do not feel that I have achieved anything in my work” (RPA1) and “I feel that I have not

received the recognition I deserve for my work” (RPA2) reflect the lack of fulfilment and recognition counsellors experience, particularly in student management and communication with stakeholders such as parents and administrators. Reduced personal accomplishment reflects not only counsellors’ career dissatisfaction but also the potential long-term impact on professional motivation and career development (Li et al., 2023; Liu & Zhou, 2024).

The fourth dimension, Work Resources and Demands Imbalance (WRDI), adds a contextualised perspective to traditional burnout models. This dimension comprises eight items (WRDI1–WRDI8) that assess counsellors’ perceptions of workload, time pressure, insufficient support, and inadequate recognition. The items highlight structural challenges such as excessive administrative duties, lack of communication channels, and insufficient autonomy in policy implementation. In the vocational college context, where counsellors often undertake both academic and administrative responsibilities, the imbalance between job demands and available resources emerges as a significant predictor of stress and burnout (Tang et al., 2023; Peng et al., 2023).

Finally, the fifth dimension, Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity (RCRA), consists of eight items (RCRA1–RCRA8) that reflect the strain of multiple and overlapping responsibilities. Counsellors often serve simultaneously as teachers, administrators, and mentors, leading to conflicting expectations and unclear responsibilities. The items in this dimension emphasise the pressure of switching roles frequently, confusion caused by inconsistent expectations, and feelings of helplessness due to role ambiguity. This domain captures the unique occupational challenges of counsellors in vocational institutions, where institutional demands often exceed professional boundaries (Wang & Zhang, 2022; Deng et al., 2024).

In summary, the burnout instrument expands upon traditional models by incorporating dimensions that address both psychological symptoms (emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, reduced accomplishment) and structural-contextual stressors (work resources imbalance, role conflict/ambiguity). This comprehensive design not only enhances the content validity of the scale but also ensures cultural and occupational relevance. The instrument therefore provides a robust tool for evaluating counsellors’ burnout levels in the context of Chinese higher vocational education, while also offering insights for targeted interventions to improve professional well-being and institutional support.

Table III Content Validity – Expert Review & Pre-Survey)

Dimension	Code	Item
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	EE1	I feel physically and mentally exhausted by my work, especially when dealing with students.
	EE2	At the end of the day, I often feel exhausted, especially after dealing with students.
	EE3	The thought of facing the students the next day made me feel anxious and stressed.
	EE4	I feel that I have exhausted all my emotional resources in my work, especially when dealing with students' emotional problems.
	EE5	I felt that it was becoming increasingly difficult for me to maintain a positive mood at work, especially when dealing with students.
	EE6	I feel that I no longer have the extra emotion in my work to care about my students' learning and life.
	EE7	I feel that I no longer have the extra emotion at work to care about my colleagues' work stress.

	EE8	I felt that it was becoming increasingly difficult for me to cope with the mood swings of my students at work.
Depersonalisation (DE)	DE1	I was indifferent to my students' problems, especially when they made the same mistakes over and over again.
	DE2	I am impatient with students' complaints, especially when they are unhappy with the programme or management practices.
	DE3	I felt indifferent to my students' difficulties, especially when their learning was affected by personal reasons.
	DE4	I get tired of students' needs, especially when they ask for help so often.
	DE5	I don't understand my students' emotional reactions, especially when they show strong emotions.
	DE6	I am not interested in the success of my students, even when they are making academic progress.
	DE7	I am concerned about students' failures, especially when they do poorly in exams or competitions.
	DE8	I don't recognise students' efforts, especially when they put in a lot of work and the results are not obvious.
Reduced Personal Accomplishment (RPA)	RPA1	I do not feel that I have achieved anything in my work, especially in the area of student management and education.
	RPA2	I feel that I have not received the recognition I deserve for my work, especially when dealing with students.
	RPA3	I don't feel that I get the support I need to do my job, especially when it comes to communicating with students' parents, leaders and colleagues.
	RPA4	I don't feel like I'm getting my money's worth at work, especially after putting in a lot of time and effort.
	RPA5	I feel that I am not treated with the respect I deserve at work, especially when dealing with students and colleagues.
	RPA6	I feel that I have not been given the opportunities for development at work that I deserve, especially in terms of career advancement and training.
	RPA7	I feel that I am not getting the career development I deserve at work, especially when faced with career bottlenecks.
	RPA8	I don't feel like I get the sense of fulfilment I deserve at work, even after completing important tasks.
Work Resources and Demands Imbalance (WRDI)	WRDI1	I feel that the workload is excessive and beyond my capacity, especially when dealing with student affairs and administrative work.

	WRDI2	I feel that the long working hours affect my personal life, especially when I have to work overtime to deal with urgent problems with students.
	WRDI3	The lack of sufficient time and manpower to support me in the face of the high intensity of the task was a source of great stress.
	WRDI4	The lack of effective communication channels and team support made me feel isolated in the face of heavy tasks.
	WRDI5	I feel there is a lack of adequate support and resources at work, especially when dealing with students.
	WRDI6	I feel that there is a lack of adequate feedback and recognition at work, especially after completing important tasks.
	WRDI7	I feel that there is a lack of sufficient sense of control and autonomy in my work, especially when it comes to implementing school policies.
	WRDI8	I feel that there is a lack of sufficient equity and fairness in the workplace, especially in the allocation of resources and opportunities for promotion.
Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity (RCRA)	RCRA1	I feel that I have to deal with multiple roles at work at the same time, such as teacher, administrator and counsellor, which puts a lot of pressure on me.
	RCRA2	I felt confused by the inconsistency of expectations between different roles at work.
	RCRA3	I feel that there is a lack of clarity of responsibilities at work, which makes me feel helpless.
	RCRA4	I feel that I have to switch between different roles at work quite often, which makes me feel tired.
	RCRA5	I feel that conflict between different roles at work affects my productivity.
	RCRA6	I find it difficult to balance student management and teaching duties in my work, which makes me feel anxious.
	RCRA7	I feel confused by the overlap of responsibilities between different roles at work.
	RCRA8	I feel that there are too many expectations between the different roles at work, which makes me feel overstressed.

Descriptive Analysis of Expert Review of the Scale Item Correlations

Table 4 presents the results of the descriptive analysis of expert evaluations on the scale items, covering five main dimensions of burnout: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalisation, Reduced Personal Accomplishment, Work Resources and Demands Imbalance, and Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity. Each item was assessed for minimum and maximum values, mean scores, and standard deviations to determine its level of relevance, clarity, and appropriateness for inclusion in the final scale.

For the Emotional Exhaustion (EE) dimension, all items demonstrated consistently high mean values, ranging from 4.00 to 4.78, indicating strong expert agreement on the importance of these items. Items EE1, EE6, and EE8, for example, reached a mean of 4.78, reflecting high consensus that emotional exhaustion—particularly in student-related contexts—is a critical indicator of burnout among counsellors. However, EE7 scored comparatively lower (mean = 4.00, SD = 1.12), suggesting variability in expert perceptions regarding the counsellors’ emotional investment in colleagues’ stress.

Within the Depersonalisation (DE) dimension, the items generally yielded high mean values (3.67–4.67). DE8 (“I don’t recognise students’ efforts”) scored the highest mean of 4.67, indicating strong recognition of its significance, while DE2 (“I am impatient with students’ complaints”) received the lowest mean of 3.67, showing moderate but acceptable expert agreement. The relatively higher standard deviation for DE2 (SD = 0.87) highlights some divergence in expert views on the degree to which this item represents depersonalisation in the Chinese vocational context.

For the Reduced Personal Accomplishment (RPA) dimension, the majority of items showed high mean scores (3.78–4.67). Items RPA6 (“I feel that I have not been given the opportunities for development at work”) achieved the highest mean (4.67), suggesting strong consensus that career advancement opportunities are a key contributor to burnout. Conversely, RPA7 (“I feel that I am not getting the career development I deserve”) had the lowest mean (3.78, SD = 0.97), indicating that while relevant, experts differed in the degree to which this item reflects burnout.

The Work Resources and Demands Imbalance (WRDI) dimension displayed overall strong agreement, with mean scores ranging from 3.89 to 4.44. Items WRDI2, WRDI6, WRDI7, and WRDI8 scored particularly high (means ≥ 4.44), underscoring the importance of workload, autonomy, recognition, and fairness in understanding burnout. However, WRDI4 (“I feel helpless by the demands of my role when responsibilities are not clear”) recorded the lowest mean (3.89, SD = 1.17), revealing substantial variation among experts about its clarity and importance.

Finally, for the Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity (RCRA) dimension, most items scored highly, with means ranging from 4.00 to 4.67. Items RCRA4 (“I feel that I have to switch between different roles at work quite often”) and RCRA7 (“I feel confused by the overlap of responsibilities between different roles at work”) reached means of 4.67 and 4.56 respectively, indicating strong consensus. By contrast, RCRA3 and RCRA8 scored slightly lower (means = 4.00), suggesting that while relevant, their representation of burnout may be perceived differently across experts.

In summary, the descriptive analysis confirmed that the vast majority of scale items were considered appropriate, with mean scores exceeding 4.00 in most cases. This provides evidence of strong content validity, as expert reviewers agreed on the items’ relevance and clarity. Items with slightly lower mean scores and higher standard deviations (e.g., EE7, DE2, RPA7, WRDI4) will require careful consideration in the subsequent pilot testing phase to ensure clarity and alignment with the cultural and occupational context of counsellors in Guangdong Province.

Table IV Descriptive Analysis of the Results of the Expert Review of the Scale Item Correlations

Dimension	Code	Title Item	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
Emotional Exhaustion	EE1	I feel physically and mentally exhausted by my work, especially when dealing with students.	4.00	5.00	4.78	0.44
	EE2	At the end of the day, I often feel exhausted, especially after dealing with students.	3.00	5.00	4.67	0.71

	EE3	The thought of facing the students the next day made me feel anxious and stressed.	3.00	5.00	4.33	0.71
	EE4	I feel that I have exhausted all my emotional resources in my work, especially when dealing with students' emotional problems.	4.00	5.00	4.67	0.50
	EE5	I felt that it was becoming increasingly difficult for me to maintain a positive mood at work, especially when dealing with students.	3.00	5.00	4.67	0.71
	EE6	I feel that I no longer have the extra emotion in my work to care about my students' learning and life.	4.00	5.00	4.78	0.44
	EE7	I feel that I no longer have the extra emotion at work to care about my colleagues' work stress.	2.00	5.00	4.00	1.12
	EE8	I felt that it was becoming increasingly difficult for me to cope with the mood swings of my students at work.	4.00	5.00	4.78	0.44
Depersonalisation	DE1	I was indifferent to my students' problems, especially when they made the same mistakes over and over again.	4.00	5.00	4.56	0.53
	DE2	I am impatient with students' complaints, especially when they are unhappy with the programme or management practices.	2.00	5.00	3.67	0.87
	DE3	I felt indifferent to my students' difficulties, especially when their learning was affected by personal reasons.	4.00	5.00	4.44	0.53
	DE4	I get tired of students' needs, especially when they ask for help so often.	4.00	5.00	4.56	0.53
	DE5	I don't understand my students' emotional reactions, especially when they show strong emotions.	4.00	5.00	4.44	0.53
	DE6	I am not interested in the success of my students, even when they are making academic progress.	4.00	5.00	4.33	0.50
	DE7	I am concerned about students' failures, especially when they do poorly in exams or competitions.	3.00	5.00	4.22	0.67
	DE8	I don't recognise students' efforts, especially when they put in a lot of work and the results are not obvious.	4.00	5.00	4.67	0.50

Reduced Personal Accomplishment	RPA1	I do not feel that I have achieved anything in my work, especially in the area of student management and education.	4.00	5.00	4.44	0.53
	RPA2	I feel that I have not received the recognition I deserve for my work, especially when dealing with students.	3.00	5.00	4.33	0.71
	RPA3	I don't feel that I get the support I need to do my job, especially when it comes to communicating with students' parents, leaders and colleagues.	3.00	5.00	4.44	0.73
	RPA4	I don't feel like I'm getting my money's worth at work, especially after putting in a lot of time and effort.	3.00	5.00	4.22	0.83
	RPA5	I feel that I am not treated with the respect I deserve at work, especially when dealing with students and colleagues.	2.00	5.00	4.44	1.01
	RPA6	I feel that I have not been given the opportunities for development at work that I deserve, especially in terms of career advancement and training.	3.00	5.00	4.67	0.71
	RPA7	I feel that I am not getting the career development I deserve at work, especially when faced with career bottlenecks.	2.00	5.00	3.78	0.97
	RPA8	I don't feel like I get the sense of fulfilment I deserve at work, even after completing important tasks.	3.00	5.00	4.22	0.67
Work Resources and Demands Imbalance	WRDI1	I feel that the workload is excessive and beyond my capacity, especially when dealing with student affairs and administrative work.	3.00	5.00	4.33	0.71
	WRDI2	I feel that the long working hours affect my personal life, especially when I have to work overtime to deal with urgent problems with students.	3.00	5.00	4.44	0.73
	WRDI3	I find the conflict of roles at work confusing, especially when I have to co-ordinate the work of different departments.	3.00	5.00	4.11	0.93
	WRDI4	I feel helpless by the demands of my role at work, especially when responsibilities are not clear.	2.00	5.00	3.89	1.17

	WRDI5	I feel there is a lack of adequate support and resources at work, especially when dealing with students.	3.00	5.00	4.33	0.71
	WRDI6	I feel that there is a lack of adequate feedback and recognition at work, especially after completing important tasks.	3.00	5.00	4.44	0.88
	WRDI7	I feel that there is a lack of sufficient sense of control and autonomy in my work, especially when it comes to implementing school policies.	2.00	5.00	4.44	1.01
	WRDI8	I feel that there is a lack of sufficient equity and fairness in the workplace, especially in the allocation of resources and opportunities for promotion.	3.00	5.00	4.44	0.73
Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity	RCRA1	I feel that I have to deal with multiple roles at work at the same time, such as teacher, administrator and counsellor, which puts a lot of pressure on me.	4.00	5.00	4.56	0.53
	RCRA2	I felt confused by the inconsistency of expectations between different roles at work.	3.00	5.00	4.44	0.88
	RCRA3	I feel that there is a lack of clarity of responsibilities at work, which makes me feel helpless.	3.00	5.00	4.00	0.87
	RCRA4	I feel that I have to switch between different roles at work quite often, which makes me feel tired.	4.00	5.00	4.67	0.50
	RCRA5	I feel that conflict between different roles at work affects my productivity.	3.00	5.00	4.56	0.73
	RCRA6	I find it difficult to balance student management and teaching duties in my work, which makes me feel anxious.	3.00	5.00	4.11	0.93
	RCRA7	I feel confused by the overlap of responsibilities between different roles at work.	4.00	5.00	4.56	0.53
	RCRA8	I feel that there are too many expectations between the different roles at work, which makes me feel overstressed.	2.00	5.00	4.00	1.00

DISCUSSION

This study systematically establishes a five-dimensional framework for understanding burnout among counsellors in higher vocational colleges and universities in Guangdong Province. The framework emerged from the integration of multiple established theories with localised practice, offering both theoretical innovation and

practical value. By expanding beyond the traditional international three-dimensional burnout model, this research aligns the ecological characteristics of vocational education with Chinese cultural and institutional contexts, resulting in a more comprehensive and culturally adapted explanatory system.

The findings highlight that Resource Conservation Theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Halbesleben et al., 2021) effectively explains the persistent phenomenon of emotional exhaustion among counsellors. In particular, continuous exposure to students' psychological crises and emotional demands depletes counsellors' emotional resources, leading to exhaustion that is more enduring and context-specific than reported in Western studies. This outcome is consistent with prior research demonstrating that resource depletion is central to the development of burnout (Chen & Feng, 2022; Lee et al., 2023).

Role theory further enhances the understanding of depersonalisation, here reinterpreted as the emotional detachment observed in teacher–student interactions. Unlike the traditional Western concept of alienation, which may imply a rejection of students, depersonalisation among Chinese counsellors manifests as professionalised emotional distance, where counsellors respond to students' demands in a standardised, programmed manner. This distinction reflects the strong ethical expectations in Chinese education that prevent overt alienation while still allowing for subtle forms of emotional withdrawal (Zhang et al., 2023).

The study also contributes novel dimensions to burnout theory. The imbalance between work demands and available resources combines perspectives from Conservation of Resources Theory and Demand–Control Theory. It captures the systemic contradictions counsellors face in contexts of high student–teacher ratios and insufficient institutional support. Similarly, the role conflict and ambiguity dimension integrates Role Theory and the Competency Model, emphasising the structural dilemmas produced when administrative tasks overshadow counsellors' professional and developmental functions. These findings mirror evidence from recent Chinese studies that counsellors face unique pressures stemming from expanded administrative duties and poorly defined job expectations (Liu et al., 2023; Wang & Zhang, 2022).

The dimension of reduced personal accomplishment is also reinforced by the effort–reward imbalance model, underscoring the psychological consequences of inadequate recognition, poor career advancement opportunities, and limited development pathways. This resonates with research showing that lack of career development is a significant predictor of burnout in education professionals (Li et al., 2023; Deng et al., 2024). Collectively, these five dimensions form a burnout mechanism characterised by the progression from environmental pressures → resource depletion → role dysfunction → value dissolution, offering a holistic perspective that integrates both external organisational stressors and internal psychological responses.

Importantly, the localisation process was not merely linguistic but structural. Items inappropriate within the Chinese cultural and ethical framework were removed or restructured. For example, expressions such as “alienation from students”, which contradict educational ethics in China, were excluded. Instead, items were designed to reflect real and context-specific scenarios such as “frequent engagement in non-teaching administrative affairs” and “insufficient support in managing high-intensity student responsibilities.” The pre-survey data confirmed the salience of these dimensions, with resource imbalance and role conflict emerging as particularly pronounced issues among counsellors in Guangdong Province.

Overall, the study provides both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it transforms disparate Western burnout theories into a systematic explanatory model that is adapted to the vocational education ecology in China. This integrated framework bridges universal burnout concepts with local cultural realities, thereby enhancing cross-cultural validity. Practically, the model facilitates the precise identification of new occupational risk sources for counsellors, particularly under China's current policy of education–industry integration. This lays an empirical and theoretical foundation for policymakers and educational administrators to develop targeted intervention strategies aimed at reducing counsellor burnout and promoting sustainable professional well-being.

CONCLUSION

which examined whether the final version of the scale possesses competent measurement validity and theoretical structure, the findings from the third stage of the formal survey provide clear and convincing evidence. The

results demonstrate that the instrument exhibits strong psychometric properties, robust theoretical grounding, and broad applicability across institutional contexts in Guangdong Province.

From the perspective of measurement validity, the scale performed exceptionally well. The internal consistency reliability for all five core dimensions exceeded 0.85, surpassing the widely accepted threshold of 0.70, thereby affirming the stability of the instrument. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) confirmed the five-dimensional structure, with a cumulative variance explanation rate approaching 70% and item loadings consistently above 0.70. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) further validated the model fit, with the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) maintained at an ideal level of 0.076 and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) exceeding 0.88. Together, these findings confirm that the measurement model is both theoretically sound and statistically robust. Furthermore, the common method bias test revealed that the first factor accounted for less than 40% of variance, effectively ruling out systematic error as a threat to validity.

The validation of the theoretical structure also yielded strong results. Standardized factor loadings fell within the reasonable range of 0.65 to 0.84, while reliability indicators were consistently above 0.86. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each dimension exceeded the minimum requirement of 0.50, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was likewise supported, as the square root of AVE for each construct was greater than the inter-construct correlations, demonstrating that the dimensions are conceptually distinct.

Importantly, the model demonstrated cross-group applicability, maintaining stability across diverse subgroups, including institutional regions (66.9% Pearl River Delta), institutional types (61.7% public colleges), and participant demographics (61.7% with intermediate titles and 58.2% holding master's degrees). This wide-ranging stability underscores the adaptability of the scale for use in various institutional and demographic contexts within Guangdong's vocational education system.

Overall, the results confirm that the scale has successfully passed multidimensional validation. Its measurement accuracy is reflected in high reliability coefficients, strong factor loadings, and consistent validity indicators. Its theoretical innovation lies in advancing beyond the traditional three-dimensional burnout model by introducing two additional dimensions—work resources and demands imbalance and role conflict/ambiguity—which capture the unique occupational challenges faced by counsellors in vocational education. The empirical evidence from 483 valid responses provides not only a rigorous scientific tool for the assessment of burnout but also practical insights for intervention. Notably, the analysis revealed that burnout levels are particularly pronounced among counsellors with intermediate professional titles, suggesting that reforms to the title assessment mechanism may help alleviate mid-career stressors and reduce overall burnout risk.

In conclusion, the study establishes a culturally adapted, theoretically innovative, and empirically validated five-dimensional framework of counsellor burnout, offering both an academic contribution to burnout research and a practical foundation for targeted policy interventions in China's vocational education system. Future studies should consider validating the scale across multiple provinces or in other countries with similar vocational education systems to examine its cross-cultural stability. Longitudinal research is also recommended to establish predictive validity and monitor changes in burnout over time. Incorporating objective indicators such as workload records, turnover data, or administrative logs may help strengthen the robustness of future findings. Qualitative follow-up studies could further explore how localized stressors shape burnout in daily practice.

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