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Effects of the peer intervention model on college students' psychological well-being and career development at Yunnan light and textile industry vocational college

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Abstract
This study examined the feasibility and effectiveness of the PEER Model, a media-supported, peer-centered counseling framework designed to enhance psychological well-being and developmental outcomes in a vocational college context. A quasi-experimental design was employed with 66 students at Yunnan Light and Textile Industry Vocational College, including a PEER intervention group (n = 32) and a traditional counseling group (n = 34). The PEER intervention integrated audiovisual media, structured peer discussion, and guided reflection. Quantitative data were collected using the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) and a Developmental Psychology Questionnaire, complemented by qualitative semi-structured interviews. Results showed that students in the PEER group demonstrated greater improvements in psychological well-being and developmental outcomes than those receiving traditional guidance. Specifically, students in the PEER group reported reduced situational anxiety, increased confidence in self-expression, enhanced peer support, and greater clarity regarding personal values and career direction. Qualitative findings further indicated that the PEER Model created an emotionally safe learning environment that facilitated deeper reflection, more balanced participation, and stronger connections between counseling content and students' lived experiences. Comparative analysis revealed that the PEER group showed more consistent developmental progress across emotional engagement, reflective depth, identity formation, and career-related planning than the traditional guidance group.

Keywords:
Flipped Classroom; Tai Chi Performance; Student Satisfaction; Instructional Time; Higher Education.

A. INTRODUCTION

Many students in post-secondary education are currently dealing with significant levels of mental health problems. One group of students facing increased mental health issues is Generation Z. Many will experience feelings of anxiety, stress, and uncertainty regarding their future. At the same time, traditional counseling methods are becoming less effective. The present techniques of counseling usually consist of lectures and one-way communication. Therefore, students may experience feelings of boredom, disconnection, and lack of support.

The emergence of Generation Z—individuals born between the late 1990s and early 2010s—has introduced significant pedagogical and psychological challenges in higher education. As digital natives, these students have grown up in environments characterized by instant communication, visually driven media, and algorithmically curated content, which have shaped their attention patterns, emotional processing, and learning expectations (Wajdi et al., 2024). These media-conditioned traits often conflict with traditional counseling practices that rely on formal lectures, one-way communication, and abstract guidance, resulting in a persistent disconnect between institutional support systems and students' lived experiences.

This gap is especially evident in Chinese higher education. Ouyang et al. (2024) document declining student participation in moral education and ideological class meetings, suggesting that conventional models fail to resonate with digitally oriented learning habits. Si (2024) further observes that Generation Z students exhibit heightened emotional sensitivity to visually and narratively framed content, which can either facilitate or disrupt their cognitive and emotional equilibrium. Concurrently, anxiety, depression, and identity confusion among college students have escalated globally, driven by academic pressures, social uncertainty, and the isolating effects of digital media use (Sivertsen et al., 2023; Zhu, 2024).

These challenges are particularly pronounced at Yunnan Light and Textile Industry Vocational College, where the researcher serves as a frontline student counselor. Many students demonstrate low engagement with traditional one-on-one counseling and lecture-based guidance, especially concerning career planning and psychological well-being. Despite expressing high anxiety about their future careers, students often respond passively to abstract interventions lacking visual or narrative elements, struggling to translate theoretical advice into personal insight or motivation. This reveals a structural mismatch between conventional counseling styles and students' media-conditioned cognitive patterns.

This study empirically tests the PEER Model, a four-stage audiovisual counseling framework integrating media psychology, cognitive priming, and narrative theory. Designed specifically for college developmental counseling, the model seeks to bridge traditional counseling practices with the media preferences of Generation Z students. The research aims to demonstrate how carefully selected film and television content can be systematically incorporated into counseling interventions to enhance psychological functioning, identity development, and emotional resilience among students raised in a media-saturated environment.

The thesis addressed the problem of inadequate mental health services through the use of the PEER Model in China. This model uses a structured form of counseling that uses audiovisual media along with peer interaction. It uses active participation by the participant rather than passive listening. This model was implemented and tested at the Yunnan Light and Textile Industry Vocational College in China. The goal of this essay is to provide a detailed summary of this thesis's research with particular attention given to the background, theory, methodology, major findings, and implications for future research and practice.

Background and Problem Statement

According to the thesis, many contemporary students have difficulty connecting with traditional counselling. As members of Generation Z, they have always had access to electronic devices and, therefore, have become accustomed to having access to instantly delivered, visually driven, and interactive content. For this reason, they usually do not find lecture-format counselling to be interesting or engaging.

At Yunnan Light and Textile Industry Vocational College, this issue was very clear. Students demonstrated low levels of participation in their counselling programs compared to other, more traditional models. This was particularly evident in the career development program. Students expressed high anxiety about their future, but did not respond positively to the traditional model of advice or abstract ideas.

This situation creates a serious problem. Not only do students require additional help, but the form of that help is not meeting their needs. The author of this thesis states that the use of

audiovisual media can aid in providing the necessary assistance in terms of learning. Using movies and TV shows allows students to establish emotional connections and provides a more engaging environment for students to reflect upon their own experiences.

This is supported by Wajdi et al. (2024). They conducted research showing that Generation Z prefers visual and story-based approaches to learning. They typically respond more favourably when presented with materials that are relatable and authentic. Therefore, it is necessary for educational methods to evolve in order to address the needs of these learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The PEER Model is based on several important theories as follows:

Prescreening

Media psychology's emotional safety and appropriateness test principle is the basis for the Prescreening stage (Si, 2024). Counselors prescreen audiovisual material for developmental suitability, emotional provocation, and thematic congruence to determine congruence with students' psychological readiness and learning requirements. This stems from educational theory's requirement that learner-centered material selection be cognitively and emotionally accessible.

Embedding

The Embedding phase unites teaching theory and mental scaffold principles by putting selected film or television clips in structured learning environments, i.e., counseling workshops or class sessions. It corresponds with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, enabling students to study challenging but realistic material, thus providing optimal learning and thinking.

Engagement

Building upon media psychology's emotional priming theory (Si, 2024) and humanistic psychology's emphasis on experiential learning, the Engagement phase primes emotional responses that enhance meaning-making and insight-generation. By encouraging students to actively reflect on character decisions, question affective prompts, and connect storytelling to their own experiences, this phase enables more complex processing of audiovisual input, with cognitive-emotional integration crucial for personal development.

Reconstruction

The Reconstruction phase draws on narrative therapy and narrative counseling theory (White & Epston, 1990). In this phase, students construct identity through reflective writing, presentations, or creative products that express knowledge learned from media texts. This phase facilitates identity formation and self-concept consolidation as students reconstruct their narratives in light of new information they have been exposed to through audiovisual narratives. Empirical research further supports the core mechanisms embedded in the PEER Model. Studies on emotional priming suggest that emotionally charged audiovisual content can influence cognitive appraisal and facilitate deeper meaning-making before conscious reasoning occurs (Si, 2024). Similarly, narrative-based interventions have been shown to support identity reconstruction by allowing individuals to externalize personal struggles and re-author their self-narratives in a psychologically safe environment (White & Epston, 1990; Zhu, 2024).

These include media psychology, narrative therapy, and humanistic counseling. Each theory helps explain why the model works. Each theory provides a rationale for why the PEER Model works. There are four phases in the PEER Model: Prescreening, Embedding, Engagement, and Reconstruction. In the Prescreening phase, appropriate video clips are selected. The clips selected will address issues that students can relate to, such as identity, stress, or career options.

Sun and Wu (2021) found that peer-based counseling interventions significantly improved students' communication confidence and emotional regulation abilities in vocational education contexts. Similarly, Chilvers (2025) reported that peer-led reflective activities promoted deeper engagement and sustained participation, particularly when combined with guided discussion

frameworks. These findings collectively suggest that integrating media stimuli with peer interaction may offer a developmentally appropriate and empirically supported approach for addressing students' emotional and developmental needs.

In the Embedding phase, the video clips are introduced during the counseling sessions so that students will make an emotional connection with the material presented in each clip. The Engagement phase allows for a group discussion in which students share their thoughts and listen to others' ideas and experiences. This helps to build understanding and support. In the fourth and final phase of the rehabilitation process, Reconstruction, students reflect on what they learned during their experience and begin to reevaluate their beliefs and goals. Through this process, students develop a better understanding of what direction they want to take in life.

The HADS (Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale), as validated by Sivertsen et al. (2023), reinforces the reliability of measuring emotional outcomes pre- and post-intervention. These findings are particularly salient to the study's second research objective, which focuses on quantifiable impacts on psychological well-being.

Sivertsen et al. (2023) also cross-validated the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) on samples of adolescents, and they found that it was sensitive to change in emotional states for school students. The evidence supports its application in pre- and post-intervention measurement, for example, as utilized in the current study. IJzerman et al. (2023) also highlighted the value of mixed-method research designs with iterative rounds of the evaluation of psychological interventions, presenting a methodological rationale for the action research design of the PEER model.

The theory of narrative transportation outlined by Green and Brock (2000) provides an explanation of the strength of stories. It describes how individuals become immersed in a story (and temporarily lose consciousness of their surroundings). This allows the individual to experience their emotions and ideas more broadly. For this reason, it is easier to confront difficult issues. Furthermore, Savickas (2013) supports this model with his theory of Career Construction. He explains that career development is about creating meaning. He describes the process of developing a career as a means of realising and understanding one's experiences and values. The PEER model assists in this development process by encouraging individuals to reflect and discuss their thoughts and feelings.

According to Chilvers (2025), peer-to-peer learning is an important part of current education models. When students work together, talk to each other, and get to know one another through collaborative discussions, they usually learn more, participate in a more interactive way, and feel more engaged in their learning experiences. Building peer support allows students to develop self-confidence and reduce their feelings of being isolated, particularly for those who find it difficult to express their ideas. By integrating this concept into his model, this further develops the relationship between peer interaction and the counseling process.

METHODOLOGY

Using a quasi-experimental design, the research conducted for this thesis in 2025 utilized a sample of 66 vocational college students. The students were assigned to either the PEER Model or to traditional forms of counseling. The PEER Model group received structured sessions that included video clips, group discussions, and reflective writing. The traditional group received lecture-based sessions covering similar topics such as career planning and mental health.

The quantitative section employed two standardized self-report instruments: the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) and the Development & Psychology Questionnaire (DPQ). HADS is a 14-item measure with Anxiety and Depression subscales (7 items each), rated on a four-point scale (0–3), with subscale scores ranging from 0 to 21 and interpreted using thresholds of 0–7 (normal), 8–10 (mild/borderline), and 11–21 (moderate to severe); higher scores indicate greater symptom severity. The DPQ consists of 20 items rated on a five-point Likert scale, measuring developmental competencies in emerging adulthood—including

emotional maturity, identity formation, and social skills—with higher scores reflecting stronger developmental outcomes; an overall composite score was used in this study for analytical clarity and methodological appropriateness. Both instruments were administered to participants in both groups at pre-test and post-test under comparable conditions, providing structured assessments of psychological well-being and developmental growth that enabled direct comparison between the PEER Model and traditional guidance approaches.

Table 1: Summary of Research Instruments

Instrument	Construct(S) Me	Items / Subs	Response	Scoring & Inter	Administration	Group(S)	Links to Objectives
HADS (Hospital Anxiety and Depressio n Scale)	Psychological well-being (Anxiety, Depression)	14 items; Anxiety (7), Depressio n (7)	4-point (0–3)	Subscales 0–21; 0–7 normal, 8–10 mild/borderli ne, 11–21 abnormal; some reverse-score d; higher = worse symptoms	Pre-test & Post-test	Experimental + Control	Objective 2 (well-being change), Objective 3 (group comparison)
DPQ (Develop ment & Psycholog y Questionn aire)	Developmen al outcomes (emotional maturity, identity formation, social skills)	20 items	5-point Likert	Total/Domai n scores; higher = stronger developmen al competencies	Pre-test & Post-test	Experimental + Control	Objective 2 (developmental change), Objective 3 (group comparison)
Semi-stru ctured interview guide	Perceptions of counseling formats; perceived change; peer interaction and career reflection	Open-end ed questions (3 domains)	N/A	Thematic analysis of transcripts (coding to themes)	Post-interven tion (selected participants)	Mainly Experimental (optionally small Control subset)	Objective 1 (feasibility/stra tegies), Objective 3 (comparative experience)
Learning diaries / reflective products	Engagement, emotional safety, reflection depth, transfer to goals	Weekly diaries / brief reflections	N/A	Qualitative coding (themes + illustrative evidence)	During intervention	Experimental	Objective 1 (implementatio n strategies), Objective 2 (mechanisms), Objective 3 (advantages over traditional)
Classroom observati on notes	Participation behaviors; discussion quality; emotional climate	Observatio n checklist/ notes	N/A	Descriptive comparison + triangulation	During sessions	Both (recommende d)	Objective 3 (comparative participation), Objective 2 (behavioral indicators)

The researchers employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) was utilised to assess the emotional well-being of students. A developmental psychology questionnaire assessed emotional development, cognitive progression, identity development, and social skill acquisition, as well as the aforementioned areas. Interviews and reflective diaries provided further insight into each of the

participants' experiences. This mixed-method approach enables the author of this thesis to have mixed measures of numeric data and detailed feedback.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicated there were pronounced distinctions between the two courses of study. The students enrolled in the PEER Program showed major gains over those students in the Traditional Program. Most notably, the fact that the anxiety and depression levels of the students in the PEER Program decreased while their emotional control improved dramatically. The students in the PEER program also had gains in other areas, including the improvement of their thinking skills, an increase in confidence in expressing themselves, and the ability to engage socially. Students in the PEER program reported feeling more at ease during the session and when meeting in the group to discuss their ideas than students in the traditional program.

The results of this study also provided comparison information about the two groups. The PEER group outperformed the traditional group on all measures. These included emotional well-being, social development, and career awareness. Qualitative data also supported the findings. Students said PEER sessions provided opportunities for supportive peer-to-peer interactions by engaging them and providing a safe and meaningful avenue for them to express their feelings. However, students from the traditional group tended to be quiet and less engaged.

According to the author of this article, one explanation for these results is the role of psychological safety. Edmondson (2018) states that individuals will perform better when they feel safe, respected, and supported in their surroundings. When students feel no fear of judgment, they are more comfortable sharing their thoughts and life experiences. The PEER Model allows for this type of interaction through group discussion and opportunities for collaborative activities. Because of this, there is less pressure on students, resulting in increased freedom to openly express themselves.

Lent et al. (2016) can also be used as a reference point to further explain the results with their Social Cognitive Career Theory. The theory indicates that confidence, personal belief systems, and social support are primary factors contributing to the development of a student's career. With confidence and adequate support, students are more likely to create clear plans for their future. The PEER Model promotes both a sense of confidence and provides support to students via their interactions and reflections. This allows students to have more clarity and direction when trying to identify their future careers.

These findings are consistent with previous research, which shows that interactive and student-centered learning approaches are more effective than traditional methods. The PEER Model combines several effective elements, including media, peer interaction, and reflection, which together create a powerful learning experience.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Participants by Group

Variable	**Category**	**Traditior**		**PEER Grou**	
			Pe		*Pe*
Gender	Male				
	Female				
Age (years)	18–22				

As shown in Table 1, participants in both the PEER group (n = 32) and the traditional group (n = 34) were between 18 and 22 years old. Although slight differences in gender distribution were observed between the two groups, both samples consisted primarily of female students, reflecting the general gender composition of the vocational programs involved. Overall, the two groups were considered comparable for the purposes of subsequent analysis.

Discussion

PEER model outcomes indicate its great effectiveness compared to traditional counseling methods. The reason for this is due to the fact that Generation Z students are seeking contemporary learning experiences. Generation Z wants to learn with interaction and meaning, which can be provided through media and discussion with peers as outlined in the PEER model. They also support the emotional growth and development of students by providing them with the knowledge that they are understood and accepted, which decreases anxiety and grows their level of confidence. Emotional well-being is directly connected to students' ability to learn and make decisions.

Another strength of the model lies in the importance placed on students' reflections, rather than supplying them with information only. As students reflect upon and learn from their own experiences, they develop a stronger conceptual and personal understanding of their experience. The usage of Audiovisual materials also plays an important role in this model. Students find greater interest and connection to various concepts through the use of video media as a way to relate the concepts of the material to their real-life experiences. This directly impacts their motivation and engagement levels with the course content.

Table 3: Discussion of Research Objectives

Research Objective	Core Findings	Key Mechanisms	Theoretical Contributions
Objective 1: Feasible strategies for integrating PEER Model into counseling practice	Identified four practical integration strategies: (a) selecting appropriate audiovisual prompts, (b) embedding media in existing class sessions, (c) facilitating structured small-group peer discussion, and (d) guiding reflective reconstruction activities. Strategies are scalable, low-resource, and student-acceptable.	Peer collaboration scaffolds transition from dependent to independent mastery; Audiovisual narratives provide emotionally engaging stimuli connected to lived experiences; Psychologically safe climates reduce pressure and encourage authentic expression.	Constructivist Learning Theory (Vygotsky): Peer interaction supports cognitive development via guided social learning; Experiential Education (Dewey): Concrete emotional experiences drive meaningful reflection; Psychological Safety (Edmondson): Supportive environments enable interpersonal risk-taking and authentic participation.
Objective 2: Effects on psychological well-being (anxiety and depression)	PEER group reported reduced situational anxiety, increased self-confidence, and greater emotional comfort. Changes were most evident in communication contexts, with increased willingness to speak and reduced fear of negative evaluation.	Low-stakes peer discussions lower anxiety barriers; Audiovisual narratives serve as shared emotional anchors, enabling externalization before personal connection; Narrative engagement facilitates indirect emotional processing and perspective-taking.	Humanistic Counseling (Rogers): Empathy, acceptance, and authenticity create favorable growth climates; Narrative Psychology (Green & Brock): Story engagement enables indirect emotional processing and new perspectives on personal challenges.

Research Objective	Core Findings	Key Mechanisms	Theoretical Contributions
Objective 3: Comparative effectiveness (PEER vs. traditional approaches)	PEER group demonstrated greater developmental progress across emotional engagement, reflective depth, identity clarity, and career planning. PEER students also showed stronger participation and more consistent growth.	Emotionally engaging interactive interventions outperform passive lecture-based approaches; Narrative reflection enables value articulation, interest exploration, and future envisioning; Reduced anxiety + increased confidence + peer support strengthen foundations for career exploration.	

CONCLUSION

According to this thesis, the PEER Model is a valid way to provide counseling services. The model is successful in assisting individuals with mental health issues and career advancement, and is a good fit for students from Generation Z. A major outcome of this study is that schools and colleges should explore more interactive forms of education. For example, educational counseling programs should utilize media and peers to provide more student interaction. Increasing interaction with peers will increase student engagement and lead to better results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

However, the research contains limitations. First, the population sampled was not large. The study took place at a single educational institution. Also, the duration of time during which the intervention occurred was too brief. Future studies should include a wider variety of participants and longer time frames than this study did. However, this study contributes to our understanding of counseling approaches by demonstrating that counselors must adjust to the needs of today's students. The PEER Model is an efficient and appropriate response to this demand.

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