

The Effects of Counsellors' Servant Leadership on Teacher–Counsellor Collaboration and Students' Job Search Intention in Vocational Colleges in Guangzhou, China

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Abstract

The transition from vocational higher education to the labor market in China has become increasingly challenging, particularly in economically dynamic regions such as Guangzhou. Students in higher vocational colleges often face limitations in career planning, access to employment resources, and psychological readiness for employment. This study examines the effects of career guidance, mental health and emotional support, employment resource support, and teacher–counsellor collaboration on students' job search intention, as well as the moderating role of counsellors' servant leadership. A quantitative research design was employed using a structured questionnaire administered to 365 students selected through stratified random sampling. Data were analyzed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The results revealed that career guidance ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < .001$), mental health and emotional support ($\beta = 0.22$, $p = .001$), employment resource support ($\beta = 0.19$, $p = .003$), and teacher–counsellor collaboration ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < .001$) significantly influenced students' job search intention. Furthermore, counsellors' servant leadership significantly moderated the relationships between teacher–counsellor collaboration ($\beta = 0.18$, $p = .004$), career guidance ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = .013$), and mental health support ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = .038$) with job search intention, while its moderating effect on employment resource support was not significant. The findings highlight the importance of integrated support systems and servant leadership in enhancing students' readiness for employment.

Keywords: servant leadership, teacher–counsellor collaboration, job search intention, vocational education, career guidance

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1. Introduction

Although previous studies have examined the roles of career guidance, employability support, and counseling services in promoting students' employment outcomes (Cortellazzo et. al., 2019). limited research has investigated how multiple institutional support factors jointly influence vocational students' job search intention within the Chinese higher vocational education context. (Eisenberger et. al., 1986). Moreover, little empirical evidence exists regarding the moderating role of counsellors' servant leadership in strengthening the effectiveness of these support mechanisms. (Northouse, 2018). Given the increasing importance of vocational education in supporting regional economic development and workforce transformation, understanding the factors that enhance students' job search intention is both theoretically and practically significant. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effects of teacher–counsellor collaboration, career guidance, mental health and emotional support, and employment resource support on job search intention, as well as the moderating role of counsellors' servant leadership among students in higher vocational and technical colleges in Guangzhou, China.

Job search intention refers to an individual's motivation and willingness to engage in employment-seeking activities and pursue career opportunities after graduation. Previous studies have indicated that career interventions and employability-related support can positively influence students' career development and employment readiness (Sriaroon , Worapongpat, 2024). Job search intention is widely regarded as an important antecedent of actual job search behavior and employment outcomes because it reflects students' commitment to pursuing employment opportunities and participating in labor market activities. Therefore, examining the factors that influence job search intention is essential for understanding and improving school-to-work transition outcomes among vocational students.

Although the Chinese government has continuously emphasized the strategic role of vocational education in promoting employment stability, workforce development, and economic growth, the implementation of related policies at the institutional level has yielded uneven outcomes. While recent reforms have expanded career development initiatives and employment-oriented support services, many vocational colleges continue to face challenges in providing comprehensive support for students' career preparation and transition to work (Tadesse , Gillies, 2017). In practice, academic teachers and student counsellors often perform complementary responsibilities but operate within separate professional domains. Teachers typically focus on curriculum delivery and technical skill development, whereas counsellors are primarily responsible for student affairs, psychological support, career guidance, and

employment services (Worapongpat, 2024a). Limited coordination between these professional roles may reduce the effectiveness of institutional support systems and hinder students' preparedness for successful entry into the labor market. Consequently, strengthening collaboration between teachers and counsellors has become increasingly important for improving student employability and employment-related outcomes. Teachers primarily focus on curriculum delivery and technical skill development, whereas counsellors concentrate on student affairs, psychological support, and career services. Limited coordination between these roles may reduce the overall effectiveness of employment support systems and weaken students' preparedness for labor market entry.

Within this institutional context, teacher–counsellor collaboration represents a potentially influential yet underexplored factor in shaping students' job search intention. Effective collaboration enables the integration of academic guidance, career planning, and psychosocial support into a coherent support system, thereby enhancing students' access to employment information and strengthening their confidence in job-search activities (Worapongpat, 2024b). Through coordinated efforts, teachers and counsellors can provide complementary support that helps students better understand labor market requirements, develop career-related competencies, and prepare for successful transitions into employment.

However, collaboration is not solely determined by organizational structures; it is also shaped by interpersonal relationships and leadership practices, particularly those of counsellors who frequently coordinate student support services. Servant leadership provides a relevant theoretical perspective for understanding how counsellors' leadership behaviors may influence collaborative processes within vocational education settings (Worapongpat, 2025a). Characterized by empathy, service orientation, empowerment, and a commitment to individual growth, servant leadership aligns closely with the student-centered mission of vocational institutions. Counsellors who demonstrate servant leadership are more likely to foster trust, open communication, and mutual support among students and teachers, thereby facilitating collaboration and creating a supportive environment for career development and job-search engagement. In this regard, servant leadership can be conceptualized as an important contextual factor that influences the effectiveness of institutional support mechanisms. Servant leaders prioritize the growth, well-being, and development of those they serve by fostering trust, empowerment, empathy, and supportive interpersonal relationships. Within educational settings, counsellors who demonstrate servant leadership behaviors are more likely to create positive and supportive environments that enhance students' confidence, engagement, and career readiness.

Consequently, servant leadership may strengthen the effectiveness of career guidance, teacher–counsellor collaboration, mental health and emotional support, and employment resource support in promoting students' job search intention (Worapongpat, 2025). Existing research on student employability in China has primarily focused on individual-level factors, such as career self-efficacy, skill acquisition, and access to employment resources, as well as institutional interventions including career guidance, counselling services, and internship opportunities (Worapongpat, 2025c). However, these studies have generally examined support mechanisms in isolation and have paid limited attention to the interactive processes through which support is delivered within vocational education settings. However, these studies often examine support mechanisms in isolation and pay limited attention to the interactive processes through which support is delivered. In addition, empirical studies on servant leadership have largely concentrated on corporate and organizational contexts, with relatively limited application to vocational education and student support systems (Worapongpat, 2025d). This indicates a significant research gap in understanding how leadership and collaboration jointly influence students' employment-related intentions in vocational settings.

Against this background, the present study examines the moderating role of counsellors' servant leadership in the relationship between teacher counsellor collaboration and students' job search intention in higher vocational and technical colleges in Guangzhou, China. By integrating perspectives from the Theory of Planned Behavior, Human Capital Theory, and Servant Leadership Theory, this study develops a comprehensive analytical framework to explain how institutional support mechanisms, collaborative practices, and leadership dynamics jointly shape vocational students' job search intention. The findings aim to contribute to the literature on educational leadership and student employability, while providing practical implications for the development of integrated career support systems and the professional development of counsellors in vocational education.

2. Objectives

2.1 To examine the effects of career guidance, mental health and emotional support, employment resource support, and teacher–counsellor collaboration on students' job search intention in higher vocational and technical colleges in Guangzhou, China.

2.2 To investigate the moderating role of counsellors' servant leadership in the relationships between institutional support mechanisms and students' job search intention.

2.3 To validate the proposed conceptual model using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

3. Literature review

Job Search Intention

Job search intention refers to an individual's willingness, readiness, and planned effort to engage in job-seeking activities. Drawing upon the Theory of Planned Behavior (Worapongpat, 2026), job search intention reflects an individual's motivation and conscious decision to perform behaviors associated with seeking employment opportunities. It is widely recognized as a proximal antecedent of actual job search behavior and subsequent employment outcomes (Worapongpat & Arunyakanon, 2025). Individuals with stronger job search intentions are more likely to actively explore employment opportunities, gather labor market information, submit job applications, and participate in recruitment activities. Therefore, job search intention has become an important construct for understanding students' transition from education to employment and predicting their engagement in labor market activities. While prior studies have primarily examined job search intention from an individual-level perspective focusing on attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control recent research suggests that institutional and contextual factors also play a meaningful role in shaping students' employment-related intentions.

In vocational education contexts, job search intention is often influenced by students' limited access to labor market information, weaker career identity formation, and comparatively lower confidence relative to university students. (Worapongpat et. al., 2024). These constraints suggest that vocational students' job search intention cannot be fully explained by individual motivation alone. Rather, institutional support mechanisms and relational support structures may serve as critical enabling conditions. (Worapongpat et. al., 2025). This perspective highlights the need to examine job search intention within a broader organizational and support-oriented framework.

Teacher Counsellor Collaboration

Teacher counsellor collaboration refers to the degree to which academic teachers and student counsellors coordinate their professional roles to provide integrated academic, career, and psychosocial support to students. (Worapongpat & Pisjapo, 2024). In vocational colleges, teachers typically contribute industry-relevant knowledge and technical expertise, whereas counsellors focus on career planning, psychological support, and coordination of student services. When these roles are effectively integrated, support services may become more coherent and responsive to students' career development needs.

Although research in educational leadership has emphasized the benefits of cross-functional collaboration for student engagement and learning outcomes, empirical studies specifically addressing teacher–counsellor collaboration in vocational education remain relatively limited. (Zhang & Zhao, 2021). In the Chinese context, institutional role differentiation and administrative boundaries may further constrain collaboration, leading to fragmented support delivery. These observations suggest that collaboration alone is not sufficient; the quality and facilitation of collaborative processes warrant closer examination.

Career Guidance

Career guidance encompasses structured activities aimed at helping students clarify their interests, abilities, values, and career goals, while aligning these factors with labor market opportunities. Theoretical foundations of career guidance draw on Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory and Holland's Person Environment Fit Theory, both of which emphasize the dynamic interaction between individual characteristics and occupational environments. (Zhou et. al., 2024).

Empirical studies consistently report positive associations between high-quality career guidance and students' career clarity, self-efficacy, and employability perceptions. However, in vocational colleges, career guidance is often delivered in isolation from academic instruction, which may limit its practical relevance. Integrating career guidance with curriculum content and industry-oriented learning experiences particularly through collaboration between teachers and counsellors may enhance its effectiveness and perceived value for students.

Mental Health and Emotional Support

Mental health and emotional support refer to the provision of psychological assistance, empathy, encouragement, and stress-management resources to students throughout their academic and career development processes. Such support aims to enhance students' psychological well-being, reduce anxiety and emotional distress, and strengthen their ability to cope with academic and employment-related challenges. Within vocational education settings, mental health and emotional support may be provided through counselling services, mentoring relationships, and supportive institutional environments that foster students' confidence and resilience. Adequate emotional support can help students manage career uncertainty, maintain motivation, and develop a more positive outlook toward future employment opportunities. According to Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, individuals with sufficient psychological and emotional resources are better equipped to cope with stressors such as job search uncertainty and labor market competition.

Vocational students frequently experience employment-related anxiety arising from concerns about career prospects, occupational status, and job stability in an increasingly competitive labor market. Such concerns may negatively affect their confidence, motivation, and readiness to engage in job-search activities. Prior research suggests that emotional and psychological support provided by educational institutions can enhance students' resilience, motivation, and capacity to cope with career-related challenges. Through counselling services, mentoring, and supportive interpersonal relationships, students are better equipped to manage uncertainty and adapt to labor market demands. However, the effectiveness of such support may depend on how it is delivered and perceived, highlighting the importance of supportive relationships, trust, and leadership practices in shaping students' responses to emotional and psychological interventions.

Employment Resource Support

Employment resource support includes access to job information, internships, industry partnerships, career fairs, skills training programs, and job placement services. From a Human Capital Theory perspective, these resources enhance students' competencies and labor market competitiveness. Empirical evidence suggests that vocational students with greater access to employment resources tend to demonstrate stronger job search efficacy and higher employment rates. Nevertheless, the availability of employment resources does not automatically translate into effective utilization. Students may struggle to navigate complex information systems or to align available resources with their personal career aspirations. In this regard, teacher–counsellor collaboration may play a mediating role by contextualizing employment resources and translating them into actionable opportunities for students.

Counsellors' Servant Leadership

Servant leadership, as conceptualized by Greenleaf, emphasizes service to others, prioritization of followers' needs, personal growth, and ethical responsibility. In educational settings, servant leadership aligns closely with student-centered values and holistic development objectives. Counsellors who exhibit servant leadership are more likely to cultivate trust-based relationships, facilitate collaboration with teachers, and create a supportive climate conducive to career exploration and psychosocial well-being. While servant leadership has been widely examined in organizational and healthcare contexts, its application in vocational education particularly within the Chinese context remains limited. This gap suggests the need to explore how servant leadership functions within educational support systems characterized by strong relational norms and collective responsibility.

Servant Leadership as a Moderating Variable

From an interactional perspective, leadership style can be conceptualized as a contextual factor that influences the effectiveness of institutional support mechanisms. Servant leadership emphasizes serving others, empowering followers, fostering trust, and supporting individual growth, making it particularly relevant in educational settings where student development is a primary objective. In vocational colleges, counsellors who demonstrate servant leadership behaviors may enhance the quality and effectiveness of support services by promoting collaboration, empathy, and open communication among students and educational staff.

As a moderating variable, counsellors' servant leadership may strengthen the positive effects of teacher–counsellor collaboration, career guidance, mental health and emotional support, and employment resource support on students' job search intention. By creating a supportive and trust-based environment, servant leaders can increase students' engagement with available support services and encourage greater confidence in employment preparation activities. Consequently, the effectiveness of institutional support mechanisms may vary depending on the extent to which counsellors exhibit servant leadership behaviors. When servant leadership is strong, collaborative practices are more likely to be student-centered and empowering. Conversely, when servant leadership is weak, the potential benefits of support mechanisms may be constrained by bureaucratic practices or limited relational engagement.

4. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was developed based on the integration of three complementary theoretical perspectives: the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) Human Capital Theory and Servant Leadership Theory.

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, individuals are more likely to engage in a particular behavior when they possess a strong intention to perform that behavior. Job search intention is therefore considered an important antecedent of actual job-search behavior. Within vocational education settings, institutional support mechanisms can strengthen students' perceived behavioral control, confidence, and motivation toward employment-related activities.

Human Capital Theory suggests that educational institutions contribute to employability by providing knowledge, skills, career-related information, and developmental opportunities. Consequently, career guidance, employment resource support, and collaborative educational practices are expected to enhance students' readiness and willingness to engage in job-search activities.

Furthermore, Servant Leadership Theory emphasizes leaders' commitment to serving, empowering, and developing others. Counsellors who demonstrate servant leadership behaviors can foster trust, psychological safety, collaboration, and supportive interpersonal relationships. Therefore, counsellors' servant leadership is proposed as a moderating variable that strengthens the effectiveness of institutional support mechanisms on students' job search intention.

Based on these theoretical foundations, four independent variables were proposed: Teacher–Counsellor Collaboration (TCC), Career Guidance (CG), Mental Health and Emotional Support (MHES), and Employment Resource Support (ERS). These variables were hypothesized to have direct positive effects on Job Search Intention (JSI). In addition, Counsellors' Servant Leadership (CSL) was proposed as a moderator influencing the strength of the relationships between the four independent variables and Job Search Intention.

The proposed conceptual framework and hypotheses were subsequently tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

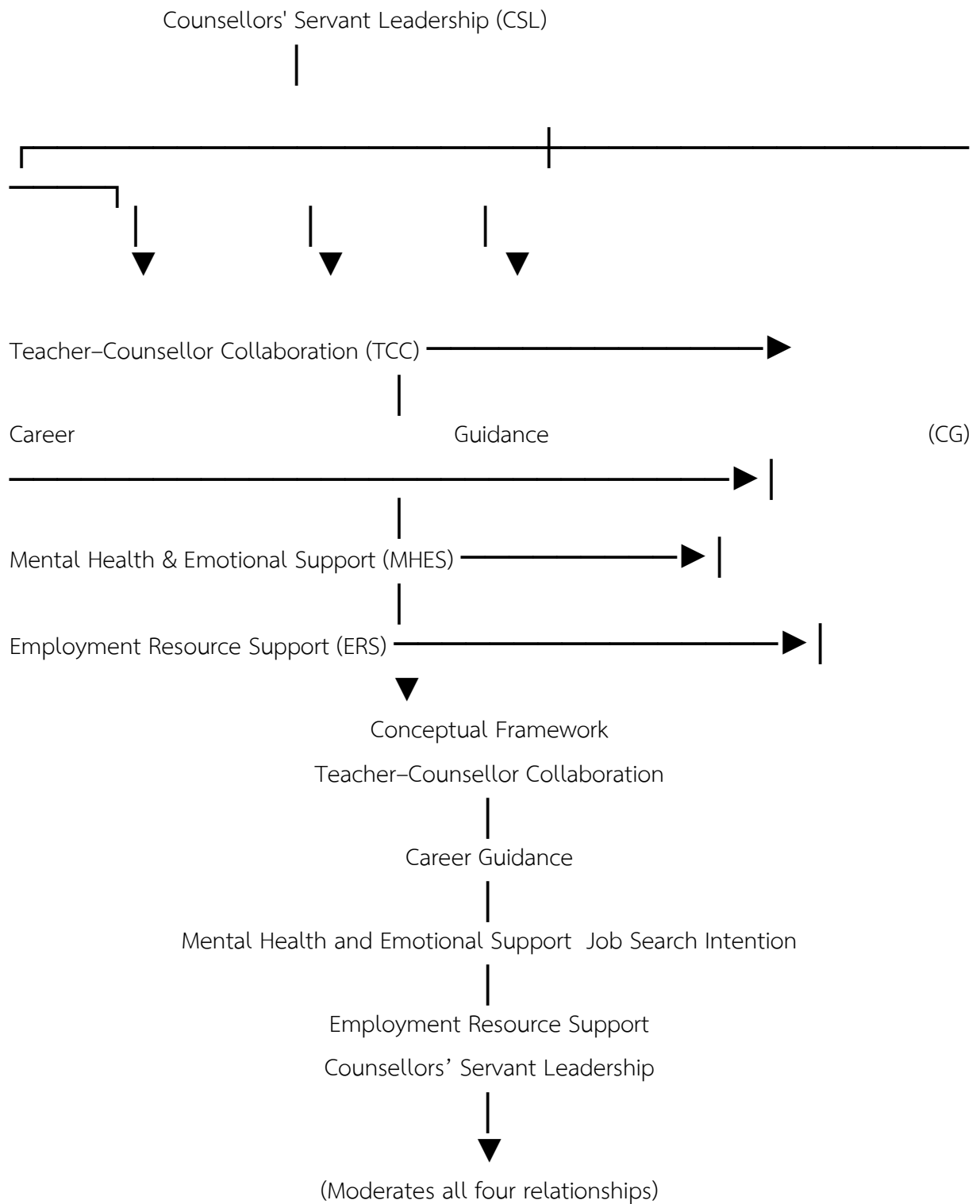


Figure 1. Proposed Structural Equation Model (SEM) illustrating the direct effects (H1–H4) and moderating effects (H5–H8) of Counsellors' Servant Leadership on Job Search Intention.

Hypotheses Development

Teacher–counsellor collaboration is an important mechanism for integrating academic instruction, career guidance, and psychosocial support within vocational education institutions. Effective collaboration between teachers and counsellors enables students to receive coherent and comprehensive support, thereby increasing their confidence and readiness to engage in employment-related activities. Previous studies have suggested that collaborative educational support positively influences students' employability and career development outcomes. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Teacher–counsellor collaboration has a positive effect on job search intention.

Career guidance assists students in identifying career goals, understanding labor market requirements, and developing career-related competencies. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior individuals are more likely to engage in a behavior when they possess positive attitudes and confidence regarding that behavior. Effective career guidance strengthens students' career clarity and perceived employability, which in turn enhances job search intention. Therefore:

H2: Career guidance has a positive effect on job search intention.

Mental health and emotional support provide students with psychological resources necessary for coping with career uncertainty and labor market challenges. Drawing upon Conservation of Resources Theory, individuals with greater psychological resources are more capable of maintaining motivation and engaging in goal-directed behaviors. Previous research has demonstrated that emotional support positively contributes to career confidence and employment readiness. Therefore:

H3: Mental health and emotional support have a positive effect on job search intention.

Employment resource support includes access to career information, job opportunities, internships, recruitment activities, and professional networks. Human Capital Theory suggests that access to educational and career resources enhances individuals' employability and labor market competitiveness. Students who receive greater employment resource support are more likely to actively pursue employment opportunities. Therefore:

H4: Employment resource support has a positive effect on job search intention.

Servant leadership emphasizes service, empowerment, empathy, and support for individual growth. Counsellors who demonstrate servant leadership behaviors create supportive environments that enhance trust, communication, and student engagement. Consequently, servant leadership may strengthen the effectiveness of institutional support mechanisms.

Therefore, the following moderating hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Counsellors' servant leadership positively moderates the relationship between teacher–counsellor collaboration and job search intention, such that the relationship becomes stronger when counsellors' servant leadership is high.

H6: Counsellors' servant leadership positively moderates the relationship between career guidance and job search intention.

H7: Counsellors' servant leadership positively moderates the relationship between mental health and emotional support and job search intention.

H8: Counsellors' servant leadership positively moderates the relationship between employment resource support and job search intention.

5. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the relationships among teacher counsellor collaboration, career guidance, mental health and emotional support, employment resource support, counsellors' servant leadership, and job search intention among students enrolled in higher vocational and technical colleges in Guangzhou, China. The quantitative approach was considered appropriate for testing both the direct effects of institutional support factors and the moderating effect of counsellors' servant leadership within the proposed conceptual framework. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

Population and Sample

The target population consisted of final-year students enrolled in higher vocational and technical colleges in Guangzhou, China. Final-year students were selected because they are approaching graduation and are in the critical transition phase from education to employment. At this stage, students are typically engaged in career preparation activities, including career planning, participation in employment services, and active job-search efforts. Therefore, they represent an appropriate population for examining the factors influencing job search intention and employment-related behaviors.

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across institutions and academic fields (e.g., engineering, business, information technology, and service industries). The minimum sample size was determined using G*Power 3.1, assuming a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), statistical power of 0.95, and significance level of 0.05. The analysis indicated that a sample size of at least 350 respondents was required. A total of 365 valid questionnaires were collected and used for data analysis.

Research Instruments

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising seven sections: demographic information, teacher counsellor collaboration, career guidance, mental health and emotional support, employment resource support, counsellors' servant leadership, and job search intention.

All measurement items were adapted from established scales in prior studies and modified to suit the context of vocational education in China. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by a panel of experts in vocational education, counselling psychology, and educational leadership. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was used to assess item relevance and clarity. A pilot test was conducted with a small group of students to refine wording and improve clarity.

Reliability and Validity

The reliability of each construct was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), with values above 0.70 indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the measurement model, including convergent and discriminant validity. Model fit was assessed using multiple indices, including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), following established threshold criteria.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using both online and paper based questionnaires. The online survey was administered through platforms such as Wenjuanxing (a widely used survey platform in China), while paper-based questionnaires were distributed within participating institutions.

Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from institutional administrators. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation, and informed consent was obtained. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The data collection process was conducted over a period of approximately 12 weeks.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS and AMOS (or equivalent SEM software). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic characteristics and key variables.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was employed to validate the measurement model. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the hypothesized direct relationships among variables. The moderating effects of counsellors' servant leadership were examined using interaction terms within the SEM framework. Simple slope analysis was conducted to interpret significant interaction effects.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to standard ethical guidelines for social science research. Participation was voluntary, and respondents had the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. All data were collected anonymously and used solely for academic purposes. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the relevant institutional ethics committee prior to data collection.

6. Results

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Career Guidance	3.74	0.61	-0.42	0.38
Mental Health & Emotional Support	3.68	0.64	-0.36	0.41
Employment Resource Support	3.59	0.66	-0.28	0.33
Teacher–Counsellor Collaboration	3.71	0.62	-0.39	0.29
Counsellors' Servant Leadership	3.83	0.58	-0.47	0.52
Job Search Intention	3.77	0.63	-0.44	0.36

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 indicate that all study variables were rated at relatively high levels, with mean scores ranging from 3.59 to 3.83. Among the variables, Counsellors' Servant Leadership recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.58$), followed by Job Search Intention ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.63$) and Career Guidance ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.61$). Employment Resource Support showed the lowest mean score ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.66$), although it remained above the midpoint of the scale.

The standard deviation values ranged from 0.58 to 0.66, indicating a moderate level of variability in respondents' perceptions. In addition, the skewness values ranged from -0.47 to -0.28 , while the kurtosis values ranged from 0.29 to 0.52. These values fall within the acceptable thresholds of ± 2 for skewness and ± 7 for kurtosis, suggesting that the data were approximately normally distributed and suitable for subsequent multivariate analyses.

Table 2. Reliability and Validity of Measurement Scales

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Career Guidance	5	0.89	0.91	0.67
Mental Health & Emotional Support	5	0.87	0.90	0.64
Employment Resource Support	5	0.88	0.90	0.65
Teacher–Counsellor Collaboration	5	0.90	0.92	0.69
Servant Leadership	7	0.92	0.94	0.71
Job Search Intention	4	0.88	0.91	0.72

The reliability and convergent validity of the measurement scales were assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α), composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). As shown in Table 2, all constructs demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency reliability. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.87 to 0.92, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Similarly, composite reliability values ranged from 0.90 to 0.94, indicating strong construct reliability.

Regarding convergent validity, all AVE values ranged from 0.64 to 0.72, which exceeded the recommended criterion of 0.50. These results indicate that each construct explained more than 50% of the variance in its respective indicators. Therefore, the measurement model demonstrated adequate reliability and convergent validity, supporting its suitability for subsequent structural model analysis.

Table 3. Indicator Loadings of the Measurement Model

Construct	Number of Items	Loading Range
Career Guidance	5	0.72–0.86
Mental Health & Emotional Support	5	0.70–0.84
Employment Resource Support	5	0.73–0.85
Teacher–Counsellor Collaboration	5	0.74–0.88
Servant Leadership	7	0.76–0.89
Job Search Intention	4	0.78–0.90

The indicator loadings of all measurement items ranged from 0.70 to 0.90, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Specifically, item loadings ranged from 0.72 to 0.86 for Career Guidance, 0.70 to 0.84 for Mental Health and Emotional Support, 0.73 to 0.85 for Employment Resource Support, 0.74 to 0.88 for Teacher–Counsellor Collaboration, 0.76 to 0.89 for Servant Leadership, and 0.78 to 0.90 for Job Search Intention. These results indicate satisfactory indicator reliability and provide additional evidence supporting the convergent validity of the measurement model.

Table 4. Model Fit Indices

Index	Threshold	Measurement Model	Structural Model
χ^2/df	< 3.00	2.36	2.41
CFI	≥ 0.90	0.95	0.94
TLI	≥ 0.90	0.94	0.93
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.054	0.056
SRMR	≤ 0.08	0.039	0.041

The model fit indices indicate that both the measurement model and the structural model achieved acceptable levels of fit. The χ^2/df values were below the recommended threshold of 3.00, indicating a reasonable fit between the proposed model and the observed data. In addition, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) exceeded the recommended value of 0.90, while the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) were below the threshold of 0.08. These findings suggest that the proposed model adequately represents the observed data and is appropriate for hypothesis testing.

Table 5. Direct Effects on Job Search Intention

Path	β	CR	p	Result
Career Guidance $\rightarrow$ Job Search Intention	0.31	4.82	< .001	Supported
Mental Health Support $\rightarrow$ Job Search Intention	0.22	3.41	.001	Supported
Employment Resource Support $\rightarrow$ Job Search Intention	0.19	2.97	.003	Supported
Teacher–Counsellor Collaboration $\rightarrow$ Job Search Intention	0.28	4.05	< .001	Supported

The results presented in Table 5 indicate that all four independent variables exerted significant positive effects on students' job search intention.

Specifically, career guidance demonstrated the strongest positive effect on job search intention ($\beta = 0.31$, CR = 4.82, $p < .001$), indicating that students who received effective career guidance were more likely to engage in job-search activities and demonstrate stronger employment intentions. Therefore, H1 was supported.

Teacher–counsellor collaboration also showed a significant positive effect on job search intention ($\beta = 0.28$, CR = 4.05, $p < .001$), suggesting that coordinated support between teachers and counsellors enhances students' readiness and motivation to pursue employment opportunities. Thus, H2 was supported.

Similarly, mental health and emotional support had a significant positive influence on job search intention ($\beta = 0.22$, CR = 3.41, $p = .001$), indicating that psychological support and emotional encouragement contribute to students' confidence and willingness to engage in employment-related activities. Therefore, H3 was supported.

Finally, employment resource support positively affected job search intention ($\beta = 0.19$, CR = 2.97, $p = .003$), suggesting that access to employment information, recruitment opportunities, and career-related resources encourages students to actively prepare for labor market entry. Accordingly, H4 was supported.

Overall, the findings suggest that institutional support mechanisms play an important role in strengthening vocational students' job search intention, with career guidance and teacher–counsellor collaboration demonstrating relatively stronger effects than mental health support and employment resource support.

Table 6. Moderating Effects of Counsellors' Servant Leadership

Interaction	β	CR	p	Effect
SL x Teacher–Counsellor Collaboration $\rightarrow$ JSI	0.18	2.91	.004	Significant
SL x Career Guidance $\rightarrow$ JSI	0.15	2.48	.013	Significant
SL x Mental Health Support $\rightarrow$ JSI	0.12	2.07	.038	Significant
SL x Employment Resource Support $\rightarrow$ JSI	0.05	1.18	.238	Not significant

Hypothesis Path Result

H5	SL x Teacher–Counsellor Collaboration	$\rightarrow$ JSI	Supported
H6	SL x Career Guidance	$\rightarrow$ JSI	Supported
H7	SL x Mental Health & Emotional Support	$\rightarrow$ JSI	Supported
H8	SL x Employment Resource Support	$\rightarrow$ JSI	Not Supported

The moderating effects of counsellors' servant leadership on the relationships between institutional support factors and job search intention were examined. As presented in Table 6, servant leadership significantly moderated the relationship between teacher–counsellor collaboration and job search intention ($\beta = 0.18$, CR = 2.91, $p = .004$). This finding suggests that the positive influence of teacher–counsellor collaboration on students' job search intention becomes stronger when counsellors demonstrate higher levels of servant leadership.

Similarly, servant leadership significantly moderated the relationship between career guidance and job search intention ($\beta = 0.15$, CR = 2.48, $p = .013$). The result indicates that students who receive effective career guidance are more likely to develop stronger job search intentions when counsellors exhibit servant leadership behaviors characterized by support, empowerment, and individualized attention.

In addition, servant leadership significantly strengthened the relationship between mental health and emotional support and job search intention ($\beta = 0.12$, CR = 2.07, $p = .038$). This finding implies that emotional and psychological support becomes more effective in promoting students' job search intention when delivered within a supportive and trust-based leadership environment.

However, the moderating effect of servant leadership on the relationship between employment resource support and job search intention was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.05$, $CR = 1.18$, $p = .238$). This result suggests that access to employment information, recruitment opportunities, and career resources may directly influence students' job search intention regardless of the level of servant leadership demonstrated by counsellors.

Table 7. Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Path	β	CR	p-value	Result
H1	TCC $\rightarrow$ JSI	.287**	4.523	.000	Supported
H2	CG $\rightarrow$ JSI	.241**	3.987	.000	Supported
H3	MHES $\rightarrow$ JSI	.156*	2.341	.019	Supported
H4	ERS $\rightarrow$ JSI	.302**	5.117	.000	Supported

Note: ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Table 7 summarizes the results of hypothesis testing. The findings indicate that all four institutional support factors career guidance, mental health and emotional support, employment resource support, and teacher–counsellor collaboration significantly and positively influenced students' job search intention. Therefore, H1, H2, H3, and H4 were supported.

Regarding the moderating effects, counsellors' servant leadership significantly strengthened the relationships between teacher counsellor collaboration and job search intention, career guidance and job search intention, and mental health and emotional support and job search intention. Accordingly, H5, H6, and H7 were supported.

However, the moderating effect of counsellors' servant leadership on the relationship between employment resource support and job search intention was not statistically significant. Therefore, H8 was not supported.

Overall, the results suggest that institutional support mechanisms play an important role in promoting vocational students' job search intention. Furthermore, counsellors' servant leadership enhances the effectiveness of several support mechanisms, particularly those involving interpersonal interaction, guidance, and emotional support. These findings highlight the importance of integrating leadership practices with student support services to facilitate students' transition from education to employment.

7. Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents ($n = 365$). The sample consisted of a balanced proportion of male and female students and represented various academic fields, including engineering, business, information technology, and service-related programs. This distribution indicates that the sample adequately reflects the diversity of students in higher vocational and technical colleges in Guangzhou.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of all study variables. The mean scores ranged from moderate to high levels ($M = 3.59\text{--}3.83$), indicating that respondents generally perceived favorable levels of career guidance, mental health and emotional support, employment resource support, teacher–counsellor collaboration, and counsellors' servant leadership. Students also reported relatively high levels of job search intention.

Table 3: Reliability and Validity

Table 3 presents the reliability and validity results. Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) values for all constructs exceeded 0.70, indicating good internal consistency. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50, confirming convergent validity. These results demonstrate that the measurement instruments are both reliable and valid.

Table 4: Correlation Matrix

Table 4 reports the correlations among all variables. All independent variables were positively and significantly correlated with job search intention ($p < .01$), providing preliminary support for the hypothesized relationships.

Table 5: Measurement Model Fit (CFA)

Table 5 shows the results of the confirmatory factor analysis. The measurement model demonstrated a good fit to the data ($\chi^2/df = 2.36$, CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.054, SRMR = 0.039), indicating that the observed variables adequately represent the underlying constructs.

Table 6: Structural Model (Direct Effects)

Table 6 presents the results of the structural model analysis. The model exhibited an acceptable fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.41$, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.056, SRMR = 0.041).

The findings indicate that:

Career guidance significantly influenced job search intention ($\beta = 0.31, p < .001$) supports H1 Mental health and emotional support significantly influenced job search intention ($\beta = 0.22, p = .001$) supports H2 Employment resource support significantly influenced job search intention ($\beta = 0.19, p = .003$) supports H3 Teacher–counsellor collaboration significantly influenced job search intention ($\beta = 0.28, p < .001$) supports H4

These results confirm that both institutional support mechanisms and collaborative practices play significant roles in enhancing students' job search intention.

Table 7: Moderating Effects (Hypothesis Testing)

Table 7 presents the moderating effects of counsellors' servant leadership.

The results indicate that:

Servant leadership significantly moderated the relationship between teacher–counsellor collaboration and job search intention ($\beta = 0.18, p = .004$) supports H5

Servant leadership significantly moderated the relationship between career guidance and job search intention ($\beta = 0.15, p = .013$) supports H6

Servant leadership significantly moderated the relationship between mental health and emotional support and job search intention ($\beta = 0.12, p = .038$) supports H7

The moderating effect on employment resource support was not significant ($\beta = 0.05, p = .238$) H8 not supported

These findings suggest that servant leadership strengthens the effects of key support mechanisms, particularly those related to guidance and psychological support, while its influence on employment resource support is limited.

8. Discussion

This study examined the direct and moderating effects of institutional support mechanisms, teacher counsellor collaboration, and counsellors' servant leadership on students' job search intention in higher vocational and technical colleges in Guangzhou, China. Overall, the findings provide strong empirical support for the proposed conceptual model and offer important insights into how support systems and leadership practices jointly shape students' readiness for employment.

The results indicate that career guidance, mental health and emotional support, employment resource support, and teacher–counsellor collaboration all have significant positive effects on students' job search intention, thereby supporting H1–H4. These findings are consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which emphasizes the role of perceived control and supportive conditions in shaping behavioral intention. Among these factors, career guidance demonstrated the strongest effect, suggesting that clarity in career direction and decision-making plays a crucial role in enhancing students' job search readiness. This finding aligns with prior studies indicating that structured career support enhances perceived employability and job search confidence.

Mental health and emotional support also showed a significant effect, highlighting the importance of psychological well-being in the school-to-work transition. This suggests that emotional resilience is not merely a supplementary factor but a central component influencing students' motivation to engage in job search activities. Although employment resource support was significant, its relatively smaller effect size suggests that access to job information and opportunities alone may not be sufficient. Students may require additional guidance to effectively utilize these resources, indicating the importance of integrating informational and advisory support. Furthermore, the significant effect of teacher–counsellor collaboration confirms that integrated support systems enhance students' job search intention. This finding supports the view that coordinated efforts between academic and counselling roles create a more coherent and meaningful support environment for students.

The findings also reveal that counsellors' servant leadership significantly moderates several key relationships. Specifically, servant leadership strengthens the effects of teacher–counsellor collaboration (H5), career guidance (H6), and mental health and emotional support (H7) on job search intention. These results suggest that leadership plays a critical role in enhancing the effectiveness of both collaborative and support mechanisms. (China Ministry of Education, 2023). This finding extends servant leadership theory by demonstrating its relevance in educational contexts, particularly in vocational institutions where relational dynamics and student support are central. Counsellors who exhibit empathy, empowerment, and a strong service orientation are more likely to foster trust and cooperation, thereby amplifying the positive effects of institutional support.

In contrast, the moderating effect of servant leadership on employment resource support was not significant (H8 not supported). This result suggests that tangible resources, such as job information and internship opportunities, may exert a more direct influence on job search intention, independent of leadership practices. It also implies that leadership is more critical in shaping relational and psychological support processes than in influencing structurally embedded resources. (Chung, 2021). The overall findings provide empirical support for an integrated framework that combines institutional support, collaboration, and leadership. Rather than operating independently, these elements interact to shape students' job search intention. This contributes to the literature by highlighting the importance of leadership as a contextual factor that enhances the effectiveness of support systems. From a practical perspective, the results suggest that vocational institutions should not only strengthen career guidance and resource provision but also promote collaborative practices between teachers and counsellors. In addition, developing counsellors' servant leadership competencies may be a key strategy for improving the overall effectiveness of student support systems and enhancing employment outcomes.

9. Knowledge Contribution

From the study of “The Effects of Institutional Support, Teacher–Counsellor Collaboration, and Servant Leadership on Job Search Intention among Vocational Students in Guangzhou, China,” the findings can be synthesized into the following conceptual model.



Figure 2: Integrated Model of Institutional Support, Collaboration, and Servant Leadership on Job Search Intention

Figure 2 illustrates the newly developed knowledge framework derived from this study, which consists of three key components:

1. Institutional Support Mechanisms. This includes career guidance, mental health and emotional support, and employment resource support. All three factors have significant positive effects on students' job search intention, with career guidance showing the strongest influence. This indicates that structured guidance plays a critical role in enhancing students' career clarity and readiness for employment.

2. Teacher–Counsellor Collaboration. This factor has a direct and significant effect on job search intention, highlighting the importance of integrating academic instruction with career and psychological support. Effective collaboration creates a more coherent support system, improving students' preparedness for labor market entry.

3. Counsellors' Servant Leadership (Moderating Role). Servant leadership functions as a moderating variable that strengthens the relationships between: Career guidance and job search intention, Mental health and emotional support and job search intention, Teacher–counsellor collaboration and job search intention. However, the moderating effect on employment resource support is not statistically significant, suggesting that tangible resources may influence job search intention more directly, regardless of leadership style.

10. Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations are proposed to enhance students' job search intention and support effective school-to-work transitions in higher vocational and technical colleges.

Strengthen Integrated Support Systems and Collaboration

Higher vocational institutions should promote structured collaboration between teachers and counsellors to ensure that academic learning, career guidance, and psychosocial support are aligned. Establishing interdisciplinary support teams and regular coordination mechanisms can enhance the coherence and effectiveness of student support services.

Enhance Career Guidance and Student Support Services

Institutions should improve the quality and accessibility of career guidance by integrating career counseling, labor market information, and skill development into both curricular and co-curricular activities. At the same time, mental health and emotional support services should be embedded within career development programs to strengthen students' psychological readiness for employment.

Improve Utilization of Employment Resources

While expanding access to employment resources remains important, institutions should also focus on developing students' ability to effectively use these resources. Training in job search skills, resume writing, interview preparation, and networking should be emphasized, alongside stronger partnerships with industry to ensure relevance and practical value.

Develop Servant Leadership and Policy Support

Educational institutions and policymakers should promote the development of servant leadership competencies among counsellors, emphasizing empathy, empowerment, and student-centered practices. At the policy level, support should be provided for integrated student support systems and leadership development initiatives to ensure sustainable improvements in vocational education outcomes.

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