

# Psychological Resilience Cultivation in Local Applied University Based on Building Resilient Ecosystem

## —A Case Study of Zhanjiang University of Science and Technology

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### Abstract

Against the backdrop of ongoing social transformation and the massification of higher education, college students in local application-oriented universities face unique challenges related to academic adaptation, employment anxiety, and interpersonal relationships. Their mental health issues are becoming increasingly complex and emerging at a younger age. The traditional “problem-intervention” model of psychological counseling has struggled to meet the comprehensive developmental needs of all students. This paper, grounded in positive psychology, introduces the conceptual framework of “Resilient Ecology.” Drawing on the educational counseling practices of the Psychological Center at Zhanjiang University of Science and Technology, it explores systematic pathways to cultivate college students’ psychological resilience across three interconnected levels: individual empowerment, relational networks, and campus culture. The study demonstrates that constructing a “prevention-development-intervention” trinity system, which embeds resilience cultivation into the entire process of student development, can effectively enhance students’ psychological capital and adaptability. This approach provides a replicable paradigm for mental health work in local application-oriented universities.

### Keywords

College Student Mental Health; Educational Counseling; Psychological Resilience; Resilient Ecology; Local Application-Oriented University.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the mental health of college students has become a critical issue of societal concern. Data from the “2022 Report on the Mental Health Status of College Students” reveals that over 21% of college students are at risk of depression, with anxiety being particularly pronounced among graduating cohorts. For local application-oriented universities, this challenge is intensified by diverse student backgrounds, complex family circumstances, and a strong emphasis on career preparation. Students in these institutions often face distinct pressures related to university transition, career planning, and interpersonal navigation.

Zhanjiang University of Science and Technology (ZJUST), located in western Guangdong, is a typical application-oriented institution. Its student body largely originates from second- and third-tier cities and rural areas within the province; many are first-generation college students. This demographic often exhibits significant disparities in psychological adaptability and access to supportive resources.

Traditional mental health services in higher education have predominantly focused on crisis intervention and problem remediation, with counseling centers functioning in a “firefighting” role. While essential, this model has notable limitations: (1) limited resources prevent it from

reaching all students; (2) it is reactive, intervening only after significant symptoms appear; and (3) it overlooks the inherent psychological growth potential within students. Therefore, exploring a more proactive, systematic, and developmental model for mental health educational counseling has become an urgent necessity.

## **2. Psychological Resilience: A Theoretical Shift from Problem Repair to Strength Activation**

Psychological resilience—the ability to adapt effectively in the face of adversity, trauma, stress, or significant life events—is a foundational concept for this new paradigm. This framework diverges from traditional psychopathology, which focuses on vulnerability, to instead emphasize inherent capacities for recovery and growth.

The American Psychological Association (APA) identifies core components of resilience as social support, adaptive coping skills, goal orientation, and positive thinking. Building on this, Masten and colleagues proposed the “ordinary magic” theory, arguing that resilience is not a rare trait but stems from the normal functioning of basic human adaptive systems—including healthy family bonds, effective school environments, and positive peer relationships. This perspective offers a crucial insight for university mental health work: rather than focusing solely on repairing deficits in a minority of “problem students,” efforts should be directed toward optimizing the environment for all students, thereby activating their innate adaptive systems [1].

For local application-oriented universities like ZJUST, cultivating psychological resilience holds special significance. Application-oriented education emphasizes practical competence and social adaptability, and psychological resilience is precisely the core competency students need to transition from “campus life” to “social life.” Students with higher resilience can adjust their strategies more quickly after job search setbacks, handle conflicts more effectively in team collaborations, and demonstrate greater flexibility when facing career transitions [2].

## **3. The “Resilient Ecology” Framework: A Systemic Reconstruction of Educational Counseling in Local Application-Oriented Universities**

Based on resilience theory, positive psychology, and the practical experience of the ZJUST Psychological Center, this paper proposes the “Resilient Ecology” framework. This framework conceptualizes the cultivation of student resilience as a dynamic, interconnected ecosystem supported by three synergistic levels: the individual, relational networks, and the institutional environment.

### **3.1. The Individual Level: From the Counseling Room to Developmental Workshops**

The traditional model positions students as “help-seekers” entering a counseling room, which can inadvertently reinforce a “problem” identity. To counter this, the ZJUST Psychological Center has strategically transformed some of its counseling resources into developmental and preventive group activities, primarily through the “Resilience Growth Workshop” series.

**The Adaptation Bootcamp for First-Year Students:** This program employs experiential learning methods—including situational simulations, role-playing, and group discussions—to help incoming students identify stressors, develop positive self-talk, cultivate basic emotion regulation skills, and build peer support networks. [3] It reframes the challenges of university transition as a shared, manageable experience.

**Workplace Psychological Resilience for Junior and Senior Students:** Focused on job-seeking pressure, role transition, and professional identity, this group counseling initiative integrates

resilience training with career preparation. [4-5] It includes mock interviews, career scenario analysis, and discussions on managing rejection and uncertainty, helping students view setbacks as inherent parts of the career exploration process [6].

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Mini-Courses: Recognizing the high prevalence of academic and exam-related anxiety, the center offers short-term MBSR courses. These teach students practical techniques for managing physiological stress responses and enhancing present-moment awareness, which are vital for maintaining composure under pressure.

These workshops do not replace individual counseling; rather, they create a tiered service model encompassing developmental services—preventive education—intervention counseling. Preliminary data indicates that students who participate in these workshops are more likely to proactively seek support when facing academic or interpersonal stress and report significantly shorter durations of negative emotional episodes [7].

### 3.2. The Relational Level: Constructing a Three-Tiered Support Network

Resilience theory consistently highlights the critical role of social support. In a university setting, a student's core support network comprises dormitory roommates, classmates, academic advisors, instructors, and family members. [8] However, these nodes are often fragmented and operate in silos.

The ZJUST Psychological Center has taken deliberate steps to build an integrated, three-tiered support network:

**Dormitory Level: The "Psychological Liaison" System.** Each dormitory selects a student to serve as a psychological liaison. These liaisons receive foundational training in mental health literacy and communication skills. Their role is not to act as "junior counselors" but to function as observers and connectors—identifying subtle changes in roommates' moods, offering initial support, and, most importantly, encouraging and facilitating access to professional help when needed.

**Class Level: The "Mentor Psychological Empowerment Program."** This initiative provides systematic training for class advisors and counselors. The focus is on enhancing core competencies: identifying early signs of psychological distress, practicing empathic communication, organizing class activities that foster cohesion and a sense of belonging, and understanding when to refer a student for specialized support. Regular "Psychological Health-Themed Class Meetings" are now a standard component of the academic calendar, embedding resilience-related discussions into routine student life.

**Family Level: Parental Engagement and Education.** Recognizing the diverse family backgrounds of its students, the center actively works to bridge the gap between home and university. It offers "Parent University" sessions (both online and in-person), distributes regular newsletters on psychological topics, and conducts home visits in special cases. The primary goal is to shift the parental role from "academic supervisor" to "emotional supporter." Special attention is given to families from rural areas or with histories of separation, guiding them toward healthier and more supportive parent-child communication patterns.

### 3.3. The Environmental Level: Fostering a "Resilience-Friendly" Campus Culture

Campus culture acts as a powerful, implicit curriculum for resilience. ZJUST, located in western Guangdong, possesses a rich regional culture shaped by coastal traditions and the unique "Red Earth" heritage. The Psychological Center, in collaboration with the Office of Student Affairs, the Youth League Committee, and various academic schools, has initiated projects that leverage these local cultural assets for psychological education.

**"Resilience Stories" Campaign:** The university actively collects and disseminates authentic narratives of faculty, staff, alumni, and current students who have navigated adversity—be it

academic failure, financial hardship, family challenges, or personal loss. These stories are shared through campus media, billboards, and the official WeChat public account, fostering a campus narrative that reframes setbacks as potential opportunities for growth.

**“Failure Week” Festival:** Inspired by similar initiatives at international universities, this annual event creates a safe, destigmatized space for discussing failure. Successful alumni and respected faculty share their experiences with professional rejection, entrepreneurial failures, academic setbacks, and personal disappointments. This helps students deconstruct the pressure to maintain a “perfect” image and normalize the experience of failure as a universal and valuable part of the learning process.

**Development of Nature-Based Healing Spaces:** Leveraging the campus’s natural assets—such as a scenic lakeside area, tree-lined paths, and quiet gardens—the university has designated “Psychological Decompression Trails” and “Reflective Corners.” These spaces are designed to encourage students to engage in self-regulation through nature-based activities, quiet contemplation, or informal peer interaction, providing an easily accessible alternative to more structured therapeutic settings.

The unifying logic of these initiatives is to operationalize psychological resilience—transforming it from an abstract personal trait into a set of concrete, teachable skills and experiences that are visibly and palpably supported by the campus ecosystem.

## **4. Practical Reflections: Challenges and Boundaries**

In advancing the “Resilient Ecology” framework, the ZJUST Psychological Center has encountered several practical challenges that merit consideration.

### **4.1. The Dual Pressures of Resource Allocation and Professional Support**

Local application-oriented universities frequently face a shortage of full-time, licensed mental health professionals. Meeting the Ministry of Education’s recommended ratio of 1:4000 (counselor to student) remains a significant hurdle. In this context, the center’s strategy of shifting from being the primary “direct service provider” to an “empowerer and organizer” is necessary but carries risks. Effectively training and supervising a network of student liaisons, class advisors, and faculty requires a robust system of ongoing education and clinical oversight. Without this, there is a risk of non-specialists providing inadequate or even harmful support. The center has addressed this by developing a comprehensive training manual and a tiered supervision protocol, ensuring all support network members understand their scope of practice and the critical importance of referral pathways.

### **4.2. Cultural Context and Appropriateness**

Resilience theory, originating in Western psychology, requires careful cultural adaptation for application in Chinese higher education. For instance, Western models often emphasize self-expression and personal boundary setting, whereas many students from local contexts may be more inclined toward collectivism, familial duty, and emotional restraint. Balancing the encouragement of self-disclosure with respect for cultural norms of privacy and composure is a continuous challenge. In its workshops and counseling approaches, the center actively integrates culturally resonant concepts, such as “collective responsibility” and the pursuit of “family honor” (reframed positively), to make resilience-building more congruent with students’ values and experiences. Group activities are often framed as strengthening the collective, which aligns with the culturally valued goal of contributing to the group.

### **4.3. The Complexity and Long-Term Nature of Outcome Evaluation**

Assessing the impact of resilience cultivation is inherently challenging. Resilience is a long-term, often internal, capacity that does not lend itself easily to short-term quantitative metrics. The

center currently employs a mixed-methods evaluation approach: (1) Pre- and post-intervention assessments using standardized tools like the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC); (2) The development of individual student “growth portfolios” that track key milestones, coping strategies, and help-seeking behaviors; and (3) Qualitative interviews with participants to capture nuanced shifts in self-perception and coping styles. Initial data suggests significant improvements in “goal orientation,” “emotional stability,” and “help-seeking intention” among students who consistently engage with resilience programs. However, establishing a definitive causal link requires longitudinal studies with control groups, which remains a future priority.

## 5. Conclusion and Future Directions

Educational counseling in college student mental health must extend beyond merely solving “psychological problems” and actively strive to build “psychological capital.” This paper, grounded in the practical experience of ZJUST, has proposed the “Resilient Ecology” framework as a strategic approach to expanding resilience cultivation from the individual level to the relational and environmental levels. This represents a paradigm shift from problem remediation to strength activation.

This pathway holds particular significance for local application-oriented universities. Their mission is to cultivate graduates who are “capable, reliable, and effective” in the workforce. Psychological resilience is the foundational competency that enables students to navigate future uncertainty and achieve lifelong learning and development. By embedding resilience-building into the fabric of student life, these institutions are not just supporting mental health; they are directly contributing to the core objectives of their educational model.

Looking ahead, the ZJUST Psychological Center aims to further operationalize this framework through several key initiatives:

**Deepening Interdepartmental Collaboration:** The center will work more closely with academic schools, the Office of Academic Affairs, and the Career Development Center to integrate resilience competencies into the formal curriculum and co-curricular activities. This could involve embedding resilience modules into required courses or developing career-preparation programs that explicitly build coping skills.

**Developing a Comprehensive Digital Ecosystem:** Recognizing the importance of scalable, accessible resources, the center plans to develop a digital platform featuring self-help resources, psychoeducational content, a directory of on- and off-campus support services, and tools for self-monitoring. This will extend the reach of resilience-building resources beyond the physical walls of the center.

**Strengthening the Research-to-Practice Loop:** The center will intensify its data collection and analysis efforts to refine its interventions. This includes conducting longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of its programs on student retention, academic success, and post-graduation career outcomes. The goal is to build a robust evidence base that can inform best practices for other local application-oriented universities.

In conclusion, constructing a “Resilient Ecology” is not merely a mental health strategy; it is a comprehensive educational investment in the future adaptability and success of students in an increasingly complex world.

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