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Could AI Serve as a Counselor? Investigating the Basic Counseling Competencies of the AI Chatbot

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This study investigated the application of basic counseling skills by the AI chatbot and the conversational experiences they created, aiming to identify their potential roles and functions in counseling practices. ChatGPT served as the platform, and the chatbot underwent multi-stage prompt engineering to acquire counseling processes, fundamental skills, and conversational structures. This prompt tuning process focused on five core counseling skills: empathy, curiosity (not-knowing), open-ended questioning, reflection, and summarization. The AI chatbot was designed to avoid giving advice, instead fostering a supportive environment for positive self-exploration through open and friendly interactions. Interdisciplinary collaboration between counseling and computer science professionals involved 15–20 testing iterations to ensure the AI chatbot stability and proficiency in these skills.

Biography

My name is Hsiao-Feng Cheng, an associate professor from the department of educational psychology and counseling, National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan. I am also an editorial board member of Journal of Guidance Quarterly and the external inspection team of Taipei prison, Agency of Corrections, Ministry of Justice in Taiwan. My research focuses on positive psychology, addiction therapy, school counseling, and art therapy for the elderly. My recent research explores the effectiveness of PERMA well-being course with a generative AI conversation system in relieving college students' smartphone addiction.

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