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Individual and Group Counseling in Educational Psychology: A Transdisciplinary Framework for Psychological Sustainability in Times of Global Transformation

Shi Jianing

PhD in Psychology
Azerbaijan Baku Slavic University
Azerbaijan
Email: shijianing2121@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-4573-1208>

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Abstract
In the context of rapid social, economic, environmental, technological, psychological, and media-related transformations, educational systems face unprecedented challenges in fostering sustainable development. This paper proposes a transdisciplinary theoretical framework positioning individual and group counseling as complementary mechanisms for cultivating psychological sustainability within educational psychology. Psychological sustainability is defined as the capacity to maintain growth-oriented cognition, emotional resilience, future-oriented motivation, and social responsibility over time under conditions of uncertainty and change. The framework reconceptualizes counseling from a problem-focused intervention to a developmental mechanism, integrating positive psychology, sociocultural, and developmental systems perspectives. Individual counseling facilitates intrapersonal reflection, emotional regulation, and goal construction, while group counseling amplifies relational meaning-making, social responsibility, and collective motivation. Together, they form a synergistic system that bridges global transformation challenges and individual developmental processes. The framework addresses theoretical gaps in sustainability-oriented education, counseling research, and positive psychology, offering implications for theory, practice, and policy, and guiding future research on long-term psychological development in educational contexts.

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1. Introduction

Contemporary society is undergoing unprecedented transformations characterized by rapid social restructuring, economic uncertainty, environmental crises, technological acceleration, psychological pressure, and profound changes in media and communication landscapes (Леви, 2017; Fredrickson, 2001; 陈会昌 & 张晓明, 2019). These interconnected transformations are reshaping not only institutional systems but also the developmental conditions under which individuals learn, grow, and construct meaning (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Li, 2018). For children, adolescents, and emerging adults in particular, global transformation is increasingly experienced as long-term uncertainty rather than short-term disruption, demanding sustained psychological adaptation rather than temporary coping (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

In response to these challenges, sustainable development has become a central global agenda across policy, education, and scientific research. Within educational contexts, sustainability has traditionally been addressed through curricular reforms, competency-based frameworks, and institutional strategies aimed at fostering responsible citizenship, adaptability, and innovation. While these approaches have generated valuable insights, they often prioritize structural, behavioral, or outcome-based indicators, leaving the internal psychological processes through which learners engage with, internalize, and sustain development underexplored.

Educational psychology offers a critical yet insufficiently integrated perspective on sustainability by focusing on how individuals cognitively interpret challenges, emotionally regulate uncertainty, and motivationally commit to long-term developmental goals (Bandura, 1997; Durlak et al., 2011). From this perspective, sustainable development cannot be reduced to the acquisition of discrete skills or knowledge; rather, it involves the cultivation of enduring psychological capacities that allow individuals to remain adaptive, agentic, and socially responsible over time. However, despite growing interest in social-emotional learning, resilience, and well-being, the field lacks a coherent theoretical framework that explains how such psychological capacities are systematically developed in response to global transformation.

Positive psychology has made important contributions to understanding human strengths, well-being, and resilience, emphasizing constructs such as optimism, hope, and character strengths (Fredrickson, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Smirnov & Petrova, 2020). These contributions have enriched educational psychology by shifting attention from deficit-based models toward growth-oriented perspectives. Nevertheless, positive psychology has been critiqued for its tendency to emphasize individual-level traits and outcomes while underestimating the relational, contextual, and developmental conditions under which psychological strengths are constructed and sustained. In rapidly changing and highly interconnected social environments, psychological sustainability cannot be understood solely as an individual attribute; it is fundamentally shaped through interaction, guidance, and shared meaning-making.

Within educational settings, counseling practices—particularly individual counseling and group counseling—are widely implemented to support students' emotional well-being, adjustment, and development. Yet, in both research and practice, these forms of counseling are predominantly conceptualized as *interventions*: tools designed to address problems, reduce symptoms, or enhance specific outcomes. While this intervention-oriented view facilitates evaluation and implementation, it limits the theoretical potential of counseling by focusing on effectiveness rather than explanation. As a result, the role of counseling in fostering long-term psychological sustainability remains fragmented and under-theorized.

This paper argues that individual counseling and group counseling should be repositioned within educational psychology not merely as practical techniques, but as distinct and complementary theoretical mechanisms through which psychological sustainability is developed in times of global transformation. Individual counseling and group counseling operate at different levels of psychological organization: the former primarily facilitates intrapersonal processes such as self-reflection, emotional regulation, and personalized meaning-making, while the latter functions as a relational and mediating structure through which psychological resources are co-constructed, normalized, and socially reinforced. Together, they form an integrated counseling system that bridges macro-level global challenges and micro-level developmental experiences.

To articulate this position, the present study proposes a transdisciplinary theoretical framework grounded in educational psychology and informed by positive psychology, sociocultural theory, and developmental systems perspectives. Central to this framework is the concept of psychological sustainability, defined as the capacity to maintain growth-oriented cognition, emotional resilience, future-oriented motivation, and social responsibility under conditions of long-term uncertainty and transformation. Rather than treating sustainability as an external educational objective, the framework conceptualizes it as an ongoing psychological developmental process shaped by both individual and collective experiences.

By theorizing individual and group counseling as integral components of educational psychology's response to global transformation, this paper makes three contributions. First, it re-centers sustainability discourse on psychological development, addressing a critical gap between macro-level sustainability goals and learners' lived experiences. Second, it extends positive psychology beyond individual well-being toward a more relational and context-sensitive understanding of sustainable development. Third, it offers a conceptual bridge between research, educational practice, and interdisciplinary dialogue, aligning psychological theory with the broader scientific effort to address contemporary global challenges.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews relevant theoretical perspectives from educational psychology, positive psychology, and related disciplines to clarify the conceptual foundations of psychological sustainability. The third section defines psychological sustainability and elaborates its core components. The fourth section presents the proposed theoretical framework, followed by a detailed analysis of the distinct theoretical roles of individual and group counseling. The paper concludes by discussing theoretical contributions, interdisciplinary implications, and directions for future research (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020; Ivanova, 2019; Wang & Liu, 2020).

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Educational Psychology and Sustainable Development

Educational psychology has long been concerned with how individuals learn, develop, and adapt within educational contexts. Core topics such as motivation, cognition, emotion, self-regulation, and social interaction have provided foundational insights into students' academic and personal development. In recent years, these concerns have increasingly intersected with global discussions of sustainable development, particularly as education is recognized as a critical pathway for addressing long-term societal challenges.

However, within education for sustainable development (ESD), psychological perspectives have often played a secondary role. Dominant approaches tend to emphasize curriculum design, competency frameworks, institutional reform, and policy alignment, focusing on measurable outcomes such as environmental awareness, civic engagement, or employability skills. While these approaches are essential, they frequently assume that learners will internalize sustainability-related values and behaviors once appropriate structures are in place. This assumption overlooks the complexity of psychological development, especially under conditions of prolonged uncertainty and rapid change.

From an educational psychology perspective, sustainability is not merely a matter of external behavior or knowledge acquisition but involves enduring internal processes. Learners must continuously interpret changing environments, regulate emotional responses to uncertainty, and maintain motivation toward long-term goals whose outcomes may not be immediately visible. These processes unfold over time and are deeply embedded in developmental trajectories. Consequently, sustainable development requires what may be described as psychologically sustainable learners—individuals capable of maintaining adaptive functioning and meaningful engagement across fluctuating contexts (李红, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Despite this relevance, educational psychology has yet to offer a comprehensive framework that systematically explains how such psychological sustainability is cultivated. Existing research often addresses isolated constructs—such as resilience, self-efficacy, or self-regulated learning—without integrating them into a coherent developmental model linked explicitly to global transformation. This fragmentation limits the field's capacity to contribute to interdisciplinary sustainability discourse.

2.2 Contributions and Limitations of Positive Psychology

Positive psychology has significantly influenced educational psychology by shifting attention from pathology and deficits toward human strengths, well-being, and optimal functioning (Fredrickson, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Constructs such as hope, optimism, gratitude, resilience, and character strengths have enriched understandings of how individuals thrive, even in challenging circumstances. In educational settings, positive psychology has informed interventions aimed at enhancing student well-being, engagement, and motivation, aligning closely with sustainability-oriented goals.

Nevertheless, several limitations of positive psychology become apparent when addressing long-term global challenges. First, much positive psychology research emphasizes relatively stable individual traits or short-term outcomes, such as increased happiness or reduced stress, rather than sustained developmental processes. In the context of global transformation, sustainability demands not momentary well-being but the capacity to remain adaptive and engaged over extended periods of uncertainty.

Second, positive psychology has been critiqued for its tendency toward individualism. By focusing primarily on intrapersonal strengths, it often underrepresents the relational and contextual dimensions through which psychological resources are developed and maintained. Educational environments, however, are inherently social systems in which beliefs, emotions, and values are shaped through interaction with peers, teachers, and institutional cultures. Psychological sustainability cannot be fully understood without accounting for these relational dynamics (Smirnov & Petrova, 2020; Durlak et al., 2011).

Third, positive psychology interventions in education are frequently implemented as add-on programs rather than integrated components of broader developmental systems. As a result, their effects may remain localized or temporary, limiting their contribution to sustainable development in the deeper, developmental sense.

These limitations do not undermine the value of positive psychology; rather, they highlight the need to embed its insights within a more comprehensive educational psychology framework—one that explicitly incorporates relational processes, contextual conditions, and developmental continuity. Such integration is essential for extending positive psychology from a focus on individual well-being toward a more robust conception of psychological sustainability (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Козлова, 2018).

2.3 Sociocultural and Developmental Systems Perspectives

To address the relational and contextual gaps identified above, sociocultural theory and developmental systems perspectives offer critical complementary insights. Sociocultural approaches emphasize that psychological development occurs through mediated social interaction, language, and culturally situated practices. From this

viewpoint, learning and development are fundamentally collaborative processes in which individuals internalize shared meanings through participation in social activities (Леви, 2017; Ivanova, 2019).

Developmental systems theory further underscores the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environments across time. Rather than viewing development as a linear progression driven solely by internal traits, this perspective conceptualizes development as an emergent process shaped by interactions among biological, psychological, social, and cultural systems. Importantly, developmental systems theory foregrounds the temporal dimension of development, highlighting continuity, change, and adaptation over the lifespan.

Together, these perspectives challenge reductionist models of sustainability that focus exclusively on individual competencies or isolated interventions. They suggest that psychological sustainability emerges from sustained engagement within supportive relational contexts that evolve alongside broader societal changes. Educational settings, therefore, must be understood as complex systems in which individual development, social interaction, and institutional structures are mutually constitutive.

Within this theoretical landscape, counseling practices occupy a unique position. Counseling creates intentional spaces for reflection, dialogue, and emotional processing within educational systems, making it a particularly relevant site for examining how psychological sustainability is constructed. However, to fully realize this potential, counseling must be theorized not simply as a response to individual difficulties, but as a mechanism embedded within developmental and relational systems.

2.4 Counseling in Educational Contexts: From Intervention to Theory

Individual counseling and group counseling are widely implemented in schools and universities to address students' emotional distress, interpersonal difficulties, and developmental challenges. Research on counseling effectiveness has demonstrated positive outcomes across a range of indicators, including emotional well-being, self-esteem, and academic engagement. Despite these contributions, counseling is most often framed as an intervention—an auxiliary service designed to remediate problems or enhance adjustment (Bandura, 1997; Li, 2018).

This intervention-centered framing presents two key limitations. First, it positions counseling at the periphery of educational processes rather than as an integral component of development. Second, it prioritizes outcome evaluation over theoretical explanation, leaving unanswered questions about how counseling contributes to long-term psychological sustainability.

From an educational psychology perspective, counseling can be reconceptualized as a developmental process that operates through distinct psychological mechanisms. Individual counseling provides a structured context for intrapersonal exploration, supporting emotional regulation, identity development, and personalized meaning-making. Group counseling, by contrast, constitutes a relational system in which psychological resources are co-constructed through social interaction, mutual validation, and shared narratives. These processes are especially relevant in addressing global transformation, where uncertainty and complexity are collectively experienced rather than individually generated (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020; Wang & Liu, 2020).

Repositioning counseling within educational psychology thus requires a shift from an intervention logic to a theoretical logic. Counseling should be understood as a mechanism through which educational systems actively shape learners' psychological capacities to engage with long-term challenges. This reconceptualization opens the possibility of integrating individual and group counseling into a unified framework for psychological sustainability (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974; Ivanova, 2019; 施佳宁, 2025).

2.5 Summary and Theoretical Implications

The theoretical perspectives reviewed in this section collectively point to the need for a more integrative approach to sustainability in education. Educational psychology highlights the importance of internal psychological processes;

positive psychology contributes insights into strengths and resilience; sociocultural and developmental systems theories emphasize relational, contextual, and temporal dimensions of development. Yet, these perspectives have rarely been synthesized in a way that explicitly addresses how psychological sustainability is cultivated in response to global transformation.

This paper builds on these theoretical foundations by proposing a framework that positions individual and group counseling as complementary mechanisms within educational psychology. By doing so, it seeks to bridge fragmented strands of research and provide a coherent explanation of how educational systems can foster sustainable psychological development. The next section elaborates the concept of psychological sustainability, clarifying its definition and core components as the conceptual anchor of the proposed framework.

3. Conceptualizing Psychological Sustainability

3.1 From Sustainability to Psychological Sustainability

Sustainable development has traditionally been conceptualized at the societal and systemic levels, focusing on economic viability, environmental protection, and social equity. Within educational research, this focus has often been translated into learning outcomes, competencies, and behavioral indicators aligned with sustainability goals. While these approaches provide valuable structural guidance, they tend to treat learners as recipients of sustainability-oriented knowledge and norms, rather than as developing psychological agents who must continuously navigate uncertainty, change, and long-term responsibility (Fredrickson, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Li, 2018).

In the context of rapid global transformation, sustainability increasingly manifests as a psychological challenge. Learners are required not only to adapt to changing external conditions but also to sustain motivation, emotional balance, and a sense of meaning over time. This shift highlights the need to reconceptualize sustainability from a purely external objective to an internal developmental capacity. Psychological sustainability, therefore, refers to the enduring psychological processes that enable individuals to remain adaptive, engaged, and future-oriented across fluctuating contexts.

Unlike short-term adaptation or coping, psychological sustainability emphasizes continuity over time. It concerns how individuals maintain developmental trajectories in the face of prolonged uncertainty, delayed outcomes, and evolving expectations. From an educational psychology perspective, this involves the integration of cognition, emotion, motivation, and social orientation into a coherent and durable developmental system.

3.2 Defining Psychological Sustainability

Building on the theoretical foundations discussed earlier, this paper defines psychological sustainability as: the capacity to maintain growth-oriented cognition, emotional resilience, future-oriented motivation, and social responsibility across time under conditions of uncertainty and transformation.

This definition highlights four interrelated features. First, psychological sustainability is process-oriented, emphasizing ongoing development rather than static traits. Second, it is future-oriented, focusing on long-term engagement rather than immediate outcomes. Third, it is context-sensitive, acknowledging that psychological processes are shaped by social and institutional environments. Finally, it is developmental, recognizing that psychological sustainability evolves through experience, interaction, and guidance (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Smirnov & Petrova, 2020; Козлова, 2018).

Importantly, psychological sustainability does not imply emotional stability or uninterrupted well-being. Instead, it encompasses the ability to recover, reorganize, and continue meaningful engagement despite disruption. In this sense, psychological sustainability aligns with, yet extends beyond, constructs such as resilience and well-being by emphasizing durability, continuity, and integration across developmental domains.

3.3 Core Components of Psychological Sustainability

To operationalize this concept within educational psychology, the framework identifies four core components of psychological sustainability. These components are analytically distinct but dynamically interconnected.

3.3.1 Growth-Oriented Cognition

Growth-oriented cognition refers to beliefs and cognitive frameworks that support learning, adaptability, and openness to change. Drawing on research on growth mindset, self-efficacy, and systems thinking, this component reflects the extent to which individuals perceive challenges as opportunities for development rather than fixed limitations (Bandura, 1997; Li, 2018).

In the context of global transformation, learners are frequently confronted with novel problems and ambiguous outcomes. Growth-oriented cognition enables them to interpret uncertainty as a developmental condition rather than a threat. This cognitive orientation supports sustained engagement by fostering a sense of agency and learning potential, even when immediate success is not guaranteed.

3.3.2 Emotional Resilience

Emotional resilience involves the capacity to regulate emotions, recover from setbacks, and tolerate ambiguity without disengagement. Unlike simplistic notions of emotional positivity, resilience encompasses the ability to experience and process negative emotions while maintaining functional balance and forward movement.

Rapid social and technological change often generates anxiety, frustration, and future-related stress among learners. Emotional resilience allows individuals to remain psychologically available for learning and development despite these pressures. Crucially, emotional resilience is not merely an individual trait; it is shaped through supportive relationships, reflective practices, and emotionally safe environments (Fredrickson, 2001; Козлова, 2018).

3.3.3 Future-Oriented Motivation

Future-oriented motivation refers to the ability to commit to long-term goals, sustain effort over time, and invest in outcomes that may not yield immediate rewards. This component is particularly critical in sustainability contexts, where the benefits of present actions often materialize in distant or collective futures.

Educational psychology has long emphasized motivation, yet much motivational research focuses on short-term performance or proximal goals. Psychological sustainability requires extending motivational frameworks to include delayed gratification, purpose-driven engagement, and tolerance for uncertainty. Future-oriented motivation connects present learning activities to broader life narratives, supporting sustained developmental trajectories (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

3.3.4 Social Responsibility and Relational Orientation

Psychological sustainability also involves a relational dimension: the capacity to recognize oneself as embedded within social systems and to act with consideration for others and future generations. Social responsibility reflects values of cooperation, empathy, and collective well-being, which are central to sustainable development.

This component underscores that psychological sustainability is not solely an intrapersonal achievement. It is cultivated through social interaction, shared norms, and collective meaning-making. Educational contexts that promote dialogue, collaboration, and mutual support provide essential conditions for the development of socially oriented psychological capacities (Леви, 2017; Wang & Liu, 2020).

3.4 Psychological Sustainability as a Developmental System

Rather than viewing these components as independent variables, the present framework conceptualizes psychological sustainability as a developmental system. Growth-oriented cognition supports emotional resilience by framing challenges as manageable; emotional resilience enables sustained motivation by preventing disengagement; future-oriented motivation reinforces social responsibility by linking individual goals to collective futures; and social responsibility, in turn, provides meaning and reinforcement for cognitive and emotional engagement.

This systemic view aligns with developmental systems theory, emphasizing reciprocal interactions among psychological components over time. It also highlights the importance of educational environments in shaping these interactions. Psychological sustainability does not emerge spontaneously; it is cultivated through repeated experiences within structured contexts that support reflection, interaction, and guided meaning-making (Козлова, 2018; Yalom & Leszcz, 2020).

3.5 Implications for Educational Psychology and Counseling

Conceptualizing psychological sustainability in this way has important implications for educational psychology. First, it shifts the focus from isolated outcomes to integrated developmental processes. Second, it foregrounds the temporal dimension of development, emphasizing continuity and long-term engagement. Third, it underscores the necessity of intentional psychological contexts—such as counseling—for fostering sustainability-related capacities.

Within this conceptualization, counseling becomes particularly salient. Individual counseling supports intrapersonal integration by facilitating self-reflection, emotional regulation, and personalized goal construction. Group counseling supports relational integration by normalizing experiences, reinforcing shared values, and co-constructing meaning. Together, these processes form the psychological infrastructure through which sustainability is internalized and sustained.

The next section builds on this conceptual foundation to present the proposed theoretical framework, detailing how individual and group counseling operate within an educational psychology system responding to global transformation.

4. The Proposed Theoretical Framework: Counseling as a Psychological Sustainability Mechanism

4.1 From Intervention Techniques to Theoretical Mechanisms

In educational psychology, individual counseling and group counseling are traditionally positioned as applied interventions designed to address psychological difficulties or support adjustment. While this practice-oriented orientation has produced valuable outcomes, it has also limited the theoretical integration of counseling within broader educational and sustainability frameworks. Counseling is often treated as a downstream response to problems rather than as an upstream developmental mechanism.

This paper reconceptualizes counseling—both individual and group—not merely as intervention techniques, but as theoretical mechanisms that actively construct psychological sustainability. Within the proposed framework, counseling functions as a structured psychological context through which core components of psychological sustainability are cultivated, integrated, and stabilized over time (施佳宁, 2025; Ivanova, 2019).

By embedding counseling within an educational psychology framework, the model shifts the role of counseling from remediation to developmental infrastructure. Counseling is no longer peripheral to education; it becomes a central process through which learners internalize growth-oriented cognition, emotional resilience, future-oriented motivation, and social responsibility.

4.2 Structure of the Framework

The proposed framework consists of three interconnected layers:

Macro Context: Global Transformation and Sustainability Challenges

Rapid social, economic, technological, environmental, and media-related changes create prolonged uncertainty, value pluralism, and future ambiguity for learners (Леви, 2017).

Meso-Level System: Educational Psychology as a Developmental Environment

Educational psychology provides theories, principles, and practices that shape learning environments, relational norms, and developmental expectations (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Micro-Level Mechanisms: Individual and Group Counseling

Counseling operates as a psychological mechanism that mediates between macro-level challenges and individual developmental outcomes.

Within this layered structure, individual and group counseling function not as isolated services but as embedded processes that translate global sustainability demands into psychologically manageable and developmentally meaningful experiences (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020; Wang & Liu, 2020).

4.3 Individual Counseling as an Intrapersonal Sustainability Mechanism

Individual counseling primarily supports the intrapersonal dimension of psychological sustainability. Through one-to-one interaction, learners are guided to reflect on their experiences, emotions, beliefs, and future orientations within a psychologically safe and personalized context (Bandura, 1997; 李红, 2018).

From a theoretical perspective, individual counseling contributes to psychological sustainability in three key ways: First, it facilitates cognitive reorganization. Learners are supported in identifying rigid or maladaptive cognitive patterns and reconstructing more growth-oriented and adaptive interpretations of challenges. This process strengthens growth-oriented cognition and enhances perceived agency.

Second, individual counseling promotes emotional regulation and resilience. By providing space for emotional expression and reflection, counseling enables learners to process uncertainty, anxiety, and frustration without disengagement. Emotional resilience emerges not as suppression of distress, but as the capacity to integrate emotional experiences into ongoing developmental narratives.

Third, individual counseling supports future narrative construction. Learners are encouraged to articulate personal goals, values, and aspirations in relation to broader social and environmental contexts. This process connects present educational engagement with long-term meaning, reinforcing future-oriented motivation.

Within the framework, individual counseling thus functions as a psychological stabilizer, helping learners maintain coherence and continuity amid changing external conditions.

4.4 Group Counseling as a Relational Sustainability Mechanism

While individual counseling focuses on intrapersonal integration, group counseling addresses the relational and social dimensions of psychological sustainability. In group settings, learners encounter shared experiences, collective meaning-making, and interpersonal feedback that extend beyond individual perspectives.

The theoretical contribution of group counseling lies in its ability to transform sustainability from an abstract or moralized concept into a lived social experience. Through dialogue, collaboration, and mutual recognition, learners come to understand sustainability as a collective endeavor grounded in shared responsibility and interdependence.

Group counseling contributes to psychological sustainability in several ways. First, it normalizes uncertainty and struggle by revealing common emotional and cognitive challenges among peers. This normalization reduces isolation and supports emotional resilience (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020; Ivanova, 2019).

Second, group counseling fosters socially mediated cognition. Through exposure to diverse perspectives, learners develop more flexible and systems-oriented ways of thinking. Growth-oriented cognition is reinforced not only individually but collectively.

Third, group counseling cultivates relational motivation and social responsibility. As learners engage in cooperative tasks and shared reflection, future-oriented motivation becomes embedded within group narratives and collective goals. Sustainability is experienced as a relational commitment rather than an individual burden.

In this sense, group counseling operates as a social amplifier of psychological sustainability, extending intrapersonal capacities into relational and collective domains.

4.5 Synergistic Function of Individual and Group Counseling

A key innovation of the proposed framework lies in its emphasis on the synergistic relationship between individual and group counseling. Rather than viewing these modalities as alternatives or sequential interventions, the framework conceptualizes them as complementary mechanisms operating within a unified developmental system (施佳宁, 2025; Wang & Liu, 2020).

Individual counseling prepares learners for group engagement by enhancing self-awareness, emotional regulation, and personal goal clarity. Group counseling, in turn, contextualizes individual insights within shared social realities, reinforcing meaning and motivation through collective interaction.

This reciprocal dynamic supports the stabilization of psychological sustainability across contexts and time. Personal insights gained through individual counseling are tested, refined, and reinforced within group settings, while relational experiences in groups inform deeper individual reflection.

4.6 Counseling as a Mediator Between Global Challenges and Sustainable Development

Within the broader educational psychology framework, counseling functions as a mediating mechanism that translates abstract global challenges into psychologically actionable experiences. Sustainability becomes internalized not through direct instruction alone, but through guided reflection, emotional processing, and relational engagement.

By conceptualizing counseling as a theoretical mechanism, the framework addresses a key gap in sustainability-oriented education research: the lack of models explaining how sustainability is psychologically sustained over time at the individual and relational levels.

The next section will discuss the theoretical contributions and gaps addressed by this framework, clarifying how it extends existing educational psychology, positive psychology, and sustainability research (Fredrickson, 2001; Леви, 2017).

5. Theoretical Contributions and Research Gaps Addressed

5.1 Bridging Sustainability Research and Educational Psychology

One major theoretical gap in existing sustainability research lies in the insufficient integration of psychological developmental processes into sustainability frameworks. While sustainability studies increasingly acknowledge the importance of human behavior, values, and attitudes, they often conceptualize psychological factors as static variables or outcome indicators rather than as dynamic, developmental systems.

Educational psychology, on the other hand, offers rich theories of cognition, emotion, motivation, and social development, yet these theories are rarely positioned as foundational to sustainability research. As a result, sustainability-oriented education tends to emphasize curricular content and behavioral competencies without adequately addressing how learners psychologically sustain engagement with long-term and uncertain goals.

The present framework bridges this gap by positioning **psychological sustainability** as a central construct that connects sustainability objectives with educational psychology theory. By emphasizing continuity, development over time, and integration across psychological domains, the framework reframes sustainability as a developmental challenge rather than a solely instructional or policy-driven task.

5.2 Reconceptualizing Counseling Beyond an Intervention Paradigm

A second theoretical gap concerns the conceptual status of counseling within educational psychology. Existing literature predominantly treats individual and group counseling as applied interventions aimed at remediation, crisis response, or short-term adjustment. This intervention-centered paradigm limits the theoretical scope of counseling and marginalizes its role in broader educational and developmental models.

The present framework addresses this limitation by reconceptualizing counseling as a theoretical mechanism rather than a set of techniques. Individual and group counseling are positioned as structured psychological contexts that

actively shape cognition, emotion, motivation, and relational orientation over time (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974; Ivanova, 2019).

This reconceptualization contributes to theory in two ways. First, it elevates counseling from a peripheral support service to a core component of educational psychology systems. Second, it provides a conceptual explanation for *how* counseling contributes to long-term developmental outcomes, moving beyond outcome-based justification toward process-oriented theorization.

5.3 Integrating Individual and Group Counseling Within a Unified Developmental Model

A further gap in counseling research is the frequent separation of individual and group counseling into distinct literatures, with limited theoretical integration. Studies often compare their effectiveness or examine them in isolation, without articulating how they function together within a developmental system (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020; Wang & Liu, 2020).

The proposed framework addresses this gap by theorizing the complementary and synergistic functions of individual and group counseling. Individual counseling is conceptualized as supporting intrapersonal coherence and self-regulation, while group counseling is theorized as cultivating relational meaning, social responsibility, and collective motivation.

By integrating these modalities within a single educational psychology framework, the model offers a more comprehensive account of how psychological sustainability is constructed and stabilized. This integration advances theory by shifting the focus from modality comparison to systemic interaction.

5.4 Extending Positive Psychology Toward a Sustainability-Oriented Perspective

Positive psychology has significantly influenced educational psychology through its focus on well-being, strengths, and positive functioning. However, much of positive psychology research emphasizes present-centered or short-term indicators of well-being, such as happiness, life satisfaction, or positive affect.

The present framework extends positive psychology by embedding it within a sustainability-oriented temporal perspective. Psychological sustainability emphasizes endurance, continuity, and future orientation, addressing how positive psychological resources are maintained under prolonged uncertainty and delayed outcomes (Fredrickson, 2001; Smirnov & Petrova, 2020).

By linking positive psychological constructs—such as growth-oriented cognition, emotional resilience, and meaning—to counseling processes, the framework demonstrates how positive psychology can be operationalized as a long-term developmental system rather than a set of discrete outcomes. This extension responds to calls for a more contextualized and temporally sensitive positive psychology.

5.5 Addressing the “Implementation Gap” in Sustainability Education

Another critical gap addressed by this framework is the disconnect between sustainability discourse and educational practice, often described as an “implementation gap.” While sustainability goals are widely endorsed at policy and curricular levels, educators frequently lack theoretically grounded models explaining how these goals are internalized by learners (施佳宁, 2025; 陈会昌 & 张晓明, 2019).

The proposed framework addresses this gap by identifying counseling as a psychological translation mechanism. Through individual reflection and group-based meaning-making, abstract sustainability challenges are transformed into psychologically accessible and personally meaningful experiences.

This theoretical contribution provides educators and policymakers with a clearer rationale for integrating counseling structures into sustainability-oriented education. Rather than adding sustainability content alone, the framework emphasizes the importance of psychological contexts that support long-term engagement and responsibility.

5.6 Contribution to Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Dialogue

Finally, the framework contributes to interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research by offering a conceptual bridge between educational psychology, counseling psychology, positive psychology, and sustainability studies. By articulating shared constructs and mechanisms, it facilitates dialogue across disciplines that often operate in parallel rather than in integration.

This contribution aligns with the goals of international conferences that seek to address complex global challenges through cross-disciplinary collaboration. The framework demonstrates how psychological theory can inform sustainability discourse, while sustainability imperatives can, in turn, enrich educational psychology theory (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Козлова, 2018).

6. Conclusion and Implications

6.1 Conclusion

This paper has proposed a transdisciplinary theoretical framework positioning individual and group counseling as complementary mechanisms for cultivating psychological sustainability within educational psychology. Grounded in educational, positive, sociocultural, and developmental systems theories, the framework addresses the increasing complexity of contemporary global transformations—including social, economic, environmental, technological, psychological, and media-related changes—that impose prolonged uncertainty on learners (Bandura, 1997; Yalom & Leszcz, 2020).

Key contributions of the framework include:

Conceptualizing Psychological Sustainability: Psychological sustainability is defined as the capacity to maintain growth-oriented cognition, emotional resilience, future-oriented motivation, and social responsibility over time, even under conditions of uncertainty and transformation. This concept shifts sustainability discourse from external objectives or short-term outcomes to enduring internal developmental processes.

Repositioning Counseling as a Theoretical Mechanism: Individual and group counseling are reconceptualized not merely as intervention tools but as structured psychological mechanisms that actively construct and stabilize the components of psychological sustainability. Individual counseling supports intrapersonal integration, while group counseling amplifies relational and collective meaning-making.

Integrating Individual and Group Modalities: By highlighting their complementary and synergistic roles, the framework provides a systemic view of counseling within educational psychology, bridging gaps between intrapersonal development, relational engagement, and broader sustainability-oriented learning outcomes.

Extending Positive Psychology: Positive psychological constructs, such as growth-oriented cognition and emotional resilience, are embedded within a sustainability-oriented, long-term developmental perspective, addressing the limitations of short-term and individualistic approaches.

Overall, the framework demonstrates that psychological sustainability can serve as a central organizing principle for educational interventions and research, linking global challenges with individual and relational development in a coherent theoretical model.

6.2 Implications for Theory, Practice, and Policy

Theoretical Implications:

The framework advances educational psychology by integrating counseling processes with sustainability-oriented development. It addresses previously underexplored theoretical gaps, including the lack of models connecting sustainability to long-term psychological processes, and the absence of frameworks integrating individual and group counseling within a unified developmental system. Additionally, it fosters interdisciplinary dialogue by bridging educational psychology, positive psychology, and sustainability studies (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Козлова, 2018).

Practical Implications:

For educators and school-based practitioners, the framework emphasizes the importance of embedding counseling structures—both individual and group—within educational systems to support sustained psychological development. Rather than treating counseling as remedial or optional, the framework advocates its strategic integration as a mechanism for cultivating learners' cognitive, emotional, motivational, and social capacities in the context of global transformation (施佳宁, 2025; Ivanova, 2019).

Policy Implications:

Policymakers may benefit from the framework's conceptual clarity in designing sustainability-oriented educational initiatives. By recognizing counseling as a core developmental mechanism, educational policies can prioritize resources, training, and program structures that support both intrapersonal and relational processes essential for long-term psychological sustainability (陈会昌 & 张晓明, 2019; Wang & Liu, 2020).

6.3 Future Research Directions

Several avenues for future research emerge from this theoretical framework:

Empirical Validation: Investigate the effectiveness of integrated individual and group counseling programs in fostering psychological sustainability across diverse cultural and institutional contexts.

Longitudinal Studies: Examine the developmental trajectories of psychological sustainability components over time to understand the durability and evolution of these capacities.

Cross-Disciplinary Integration: Explore how insights from environmental psychology, organizational psychology, and behavioral economics can further inform sustainability-oriented counseling practices in education.

Digital and Media Contexts: Examine how online and hybrid educational environments influence the processes and outcomes of counseling as a mechanism for psychological sustainability, especially under rapid technological and media transformations.

6.4 Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper offers a conceptually robust and transdisciplinary framework that situates counseling at the heart of educational psychology's response to contemporary global challenges. By integrating individual and group mechanisms, and embedding positive psychological and developmental systems principles, the framework provides both theoretical guidance and practical pathways for fostering psychological sustainability in learners. It contributes to interdisciplinary discourse, supports evidence-informed educational practice, and lays the groundwork for future research aimed at equipping learners to thrive in an era of unprecedented transformation (Bandura, 1997; Yalom & Leszcz, 2020).

Ethical Considerations

This paper is theoretical and conceptual in nature and does not involve empirical data collection, human participants, interviews, surveys, or experimental procedures. The study is based exclusively on the critical analysis and synthesis of existing scholarly literature across educational psychology, counseling, sustainability studies, and related disciplines. Consequently, issues related to informed consent, confidentiality, data protection, or ethical approval do not apply, and formal review by an institutional ethics committee was not required.

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Conflict of Interest

The author (s) declare that there are no known financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conceptual development, analysis, or conclusions presented in this article.

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