Building a Framework for AI in Counselor Training: A Delphi Study

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ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, has created new opportunities and challenges in counselor training. These technologies offer transformative potential in enhancing counselor education through personalized learning, simulation-based environments, and improved supervision practices. However, their integration raises ethical, practical, and pedagogical concerns, including issues of data privacy, algorithmic bias, and maintaining the humanistic principles central to the counseling profession. This study builds on a scoping review to examine AI's role in counselor training and employs a Delphi methodology to gather expert consensus on the applications, challenges, and ethical considerations of AI integration. Panelists include counselor educators and researchers with expertise in technology and counselor education. Through an iterative, consensus-driven process, the study aims to develop actionable guidelines and strategies for leveraging AI effectively and ethically in counselor training. The findings will provide a framework to align AI innovations with the relational and humanistic values of the counseling field, offering direction for future research and implementation.

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Abstract

The emergence of large language models (LLMs) and other artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has introduced significant innovations across various domains, including higher education and counselor training. Within counselor training programs, AI tools such as LLMs, machine learning algorithms, and chatbots offer dynamic, interactive platforms for counselors-in-training (CITs) to enhance skill development, receive personalized feedback, and engage in simulation-based learning environments. This scoping review applies the Arksey and O'Malley (2005) framework to systematically examine the benefits, challenges, and limitations of integrating AI into counselor education. Findings reveal transformative applications of AI, including advancements in personalized learning, simulation-based practice, and supervision. Despite these benefits, key challenges remain, such as the need for empirical validation, stakeholder resistance, concerns about data privacy, and algorithmic bias. The review highlights the importance of ethical frameworks, culturally responsive AI tools, and interdisciplinary collaboration to guide responsible integration. These insights provide a foundation for future research, including a Delphi study, to define priorities and best practices for effectively leveraging AI in counselor training, ultimately fostering a new generation of skilled, reflective, and technologically adept mental health professionals.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence; counselor training; counselor education; ChatGPT; counseling*

Exploring the Transformative Role of AI in Counselor Training: A Scoping Review

The past three years in Artificial Intelligence (AI) have witnessed the rise of large language models (LLMs) – advanced deep learning algorithms trained on vast datasets to process and generate human-like text – marking a transformative development across various sectors, including education and healthcare (Ray, 2023; Montenegro-Rueda et al., 2023). LLMs, such as ChatGPT, represent a significant technological breakthrough, demonstrating advanced natural language processing capabilities that enable tasks ranging from translation to complex conversations. Their ability to generate human-like text makes them particularly valuable for enhancing educational experiences and supporting professional training (Jeon & Lee, 2023).

In higher education, the integration of AI, particularly LLMs, has initiated a paradigm shift. These models have been recognized for their potential to personalize learning experiences, increase student engagement, and automate assessments, offering innovative approaches to traditional teaching methodologies (Alemdag, 2023; Montenegro-Rueda et al., 2023). However, while the broader field of education has embraced these technologies, counselor education—a domain deeply rooted in people, interpersonal skills, and emotional intelligence—has been slower to adopt AI. The integration of AI in counselor training offers unique opportunities to enhance skill development, create simulation-based learning environments, and improve supervision practices. Yet, it also raises critical concerns about ethical considerations, such as data privacy, algorithmic bias, and overreliance on technology (Timmons et al., 2023; Tlili et al., 2023).

Counselor training programs stand at a unique crossroads with the advent of AI. LLMs, like ChatGPT, possess the potential to revolutionize how counselors-in-training (CIT) develop their skills by providing dynamic, interactive environments that simulate real-world counseling

scenarios. These AI-driven tools can deliver tailored feedback, fostering comprehensive insights and enhancing the reflective practices critical to effective counseling (Maurya & DeDiego, 2023). Despite these possibilities, significant challenges persist, including ensuring the ethical and responsible use of AI, addressing usability concerns, and evaluating its impact on human-centric practices. Balancing these technological advancements with the relational and empathic core of counseling is essential to the responsible integration of AI in counselor education.

This scoping review aims to explore the integration of AI technologies in counselor training programs, systematically mapping the existing literature to identify key benefits, challenges, and limitations. By examining empirical studies, theoretical discussions, and case studies, this review highlights the transformative potential of AI in counselor education while addressing ethical and practical considerations. The findings aim to inform the development of cohesive frameworks for AI integration, fostering a new generation of skilled, reflective, and technologically adept mental health professionals. (Alemdag, 2023; Kaplan & Gladding, 2011).

Artificial Intelligence in Education: Definition, Applications, and Implications

Artificial Intelligence (AI), as defined by Ray (2023), encompasses technologies that mimic human intelligence through sophisticated algorithms, including machine learning (ML) and deep learning. More recently, a newer AI technology known as large language models (LLMs) has revolutionized the field by demonstrating unparalleled abilities in comprehending and producing human-like text (Ray, 2023). These models are trained on vast amounts of data, allowing them to exhibit a broad understanding of human language and to engage in conversations across a wide range of topics and languages. These technologies have profoundly impacted various sectors, particularly education, through applications like ChatGPT. These AI

tools are pivotal in enhancing capabilities such as speech and image recognition and have been integrated into educational settings to revolutionize traditional teaching methodologies.

The incorporation of AI, especially ChatGPT and other LLMs, into higher education has transformed how educational content is delivered. Researchers like Benvenuti et al. (2023), Munoz et al. (2023), and Kamalov (2022) highlight AI's potential to personalize learning experiences, enhance student engagement, and automate assessments. For example, LLMs have proven effective in medical training environments, providing real-time, personalized feedback in role-play scenarios crucial for training professionals such as emergency physicians (Webb, 2023). Additionally, AI-generated activities, as explored by Mollick and Mollick (2023), are creating more interactive and dynamic learning environments, demonstrating AI's ability to enrich educational experiences significantly.

Despite these advancements, the integration of AI in education is not without challenges. Significant concerns remain regarding data inaccuracies, sometimes referred to as 'hallucinations', which necessitate ongoing research to refine AI's functionality and reliability. Furthermore, issues related to bias, plagiarism, and the potential for overdependence on technology also pose substantial challenges (Crawford et al., 2023; Tlili, 2023). Additionally, AI applications like ChatGPT have demonstrated the ability to improve the educational experience but requires teachers to be trained for successful implementation (Montenegro-Rueda et al., 2023). These factors highlight the need for a balanced approach to AI integration, ensuring that while the benefits are harnessed, the pitfalls are carefully managed.

Current State of AI in Counselor Training

While AI has made significant strides in higher education, its adoption in counselor training programs has been comparatively gradual. Historically, counselor education has

emphasized interpersonal skills, theoretical knowledge, and practical experience (Maurya, 2023) domains considered challenging to replicate or enhance through technology. However, recent advancements in AI technologies, such as chatbots and machine learning, are beginning to transform this landscape by offering innovative tools for personalized learning, real-time feedback, and enhanced engagement.

AI applications in counseling have evolved significantly since their early development in the 1950s, finding increasing utility in areas such as therapeutic support and administrative efficiency (Carlbring et al., 2023; Piette et al., 2023; Sadeh-Sharvit et al., 2023). For instance, studies demonstrate that AI chatbots can simulate counseling responses that are indistinguishable from those of human counselors and, in some cases, surpass human responses in quality as evaluated by trained clinicians (Elyoseph et al., 2023; Kuhail et al., 2024). These findings suggest that AI holds immense potential not only for direct counseling services but also for revolutionizing counselor training through simulation-based learning environments and data-driven insights.

Despite these advancements, challenges remain. Concerns about over-reliance on AI, particularly the risk of diminishing the humanistic aspects central to counseling, are significant (Richards, 2025). Additionally, questions persist regarding the reliability and fairness of AI systems in providing accurate, unbiased responses (Eryilmaz & Basal, 2024). These challenges underscore the need for further research focused explicitly on developing culturally responsive, ethically sound AI tools that align with the unique demands of counselor education.

Future efforts should prioritize the integration of AI in ways that complement, rather than replace, traditional training methods (Carlbring et al., 2023). This requires addressing key issues such as ensuring the transferability of AI-driven training to real-world counseling contexts,

mitigating potential biases, and fostering trust among stakeholders. As the field continues to evolve, AI's role in counselor training must be guided by evidence-based practices, ethical frameworks, and a commitment to preserving the relational depth essential to the profession.

Opportunities and Challenges in AI Integration

The integration of AI in counselor training presents a transformative opportunity to revolutionize educational paradigms. By enhancing learning personalization, real-time feedback, and simulation-based practice, AI can address longstanding challenges such as scalability and diversity in training methods. Tools like ChatGPT create dynamic, adaptive learning environments, while AI-assisted supervision enhances adherence to evidence-based practices and supports the development of CITs' core competencies.

To fully harness these benefits, counselor education should adopt a strategic and ethically grounded approach. This involves fostering interdisciplinary collaboration among educators, developers, and policymakers to create robust validation frameworks and culturally responsive tools. Additionally, integrating AI must be accompanied by professional development initiatives to equip educators with the skills and confidence to effectively incorporate these technologies. By aligning AI innovations with the humanistic values of counseling, the profession can ensure that future practitioners are both technologically adept and deeply empathetic.

Purpose of this Study

Within this scoping review, we aim to explore the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into counselor training programs, focusing on its benefits, challenges, and limitations. Specifically, this review examines how AI technologies are being implemented, their impact on training outcomes, and their broader implications for counselor education.

By systematically mapping the existing literature, this review highlights key advancements in AI-driven personalized learning, simulation-based environments, and supervision practices. Additionally, it addresses critical challenges such as validation, ethical considerations, and stakeholder resistance. These insights aim to provide a foundation for effectively leveraging AI to enhance counselor education while maintaining the human-centered principles fundamental to the field.

Methodology

I conducted this scoping review using the Arksey and O'Malley (2005) framework, which includes five stages: identifying the research question, identifying relevant studies, study selection, charting the data, and collating, summarizing, and reporting the results. A scoping review is particularly suitable for examining the emerging field of AI in counselor training, as it facilitates a broad exploration of current applications, challenges, and ethical considerations (Arksey & O'Malley, 2025). This method helps map existing literature, identify knowledge gaps, and provide an overview of research trends. Given the complexity, rapid developments, and limited empirical research in this field, I selected a scoping review as the most appropriate approach.

Identifying the Research Question

The primary research question guiding this scoping review was: *What is the impact of AI technologies in counselor training programs?* I designed this question to explore the broad implications of AI within the context of counselor education. My focus on these aspects aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how AI technologies are currently utilized and the potential barriers to their effective integration.

Identifying Relevant Studies

I developed a comprehensive search strategy to identify relevant studies. I consulted a university librarian to compile a list of relevant databases and search terms. Based on this consultation, I selected the following electronic databases: PsycINFO, Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC. These databases were chosen for their extensive coverage of psychology, education, and interdisciplinary research, making them particularly relevant to the topic of AI in counselor training.

The search strategy employed Boolean operators and included the following terms: *("large language models" OR "natural language processing" OR "artificial intelligence" OR "ChatGPT") AND ("therapist training" OR "counselor education" OR "counselor training" OR "counselors in training" OR "counseling skills" OR "counseling" OR "therapist").*
This search yielded 318 results from PsycINFO, 1,600 from Scopus, 908 from Web of Science, and 60 from ERIC. To ensure comprehensive coverage, I conducted an additional search on Google Scholar using the terms *"ChatGPT" AND "counseling"* and *"artificial intelligence" AND "counseling"* with the "All in Title" filter, yielding 89 and 28 results, respectively. I also reviewed the *Journal of Technology in Counselor Education & Supervision*, which yielded an additional 61 articles. I applied predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the selected studies were relevant to the research question. Studies were included if they (a) focused on the application of AI technologies in counselor training or supervision, (b) were peer-reviewed journal articles or dissertations, (c) were published between December 2022 and December 2024 to reflect recent advancements in AI, particularly large language models like ChatGPT, and (d) were written in English. Studies were excluded if they (a) primarily focused on AI's impact on therapy rather than counselor training (b) focused on using AI to conduct therapy (chatbots)

rather than as a support (c) primarily examined AI technologies outside the context of education or training and (d) were editorials, opinion pieces, or lacked sufficient methodological detail.

Study Selection

The study selection process involved multiple steps to ensure that articles were relevant to AI applications in counselor training. First, I reviewed articles published before November 2022, prior to the release of ChatGPT, and determined that they lacked relevant context regarding recent AI developments in counselor training. Consequently, I applied a date filter for all databases to include only articles published between December 2022 and December 2024. This step reduced the results to 132 articles from PsycINFO, 933 from Scopus, 366 from Web of Science, and 20 from ERIC.

Because many of the Scopus results focused on unrelated medical topics, I applied an additional filter in Scopus requiring the Boolean terms ("therapist training" OR "counselor education" OR "counselor training" OR "counselors in training" OR "counseling skills" OR "counseling" OR "therapist") to be included in the article title. This further reduced Scopus's total to 159 articles. I did not apply this filter to the other databases, as the same issue was not as prevalent there. Following these refinements, I had a total of 677 records across the four databases.

I then screened these 677 articles by title and abstract against predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. I applied the same screening process to the 178 articles in Google Scholar and the Journal of Technology in Counselor Education. I excluded studies that did not focus on AI applications in counselor training (e.g., those examining AI's impact on therapy rather than training). Articles with ambiguous titles or abstracts were retained for full-text review to avoid discarding potentially relevant studies.

During the exclusion process, I identified 22 articles from PsycINFO, 16 from Scopus, 18 from Web of Science, 1 from ERIC, and 4 from Google Scholar that initially appeared to meet inclusion criteria. In an effort to be comprehensive, I also included 5 articles from the Journal of Technology in Counselor Education & Supervision. Overall, 66 articles were identified as potentially eligible before identifying and removing duplicates. Of the 66, 31 were identified as duplicates resulting in 35 articles that were selected for full-text review. Following an in-text review, 17 ultimately met all inclusion criteria.

Charting the Data

Following the Arksey & O'Malley (2005) framework, I organized and analyzed the data using thematic coding, applying both deductive and inductive approaches. Initially, I coded the data based on predefined themes, such as applications, benefits, and challenges of AI in counselor training. As the analysis progressed, I incorporated emergent themes and subthemes into the coding framework to capture novel insights. I reviewed each study carefully, applying multiple codes where necessary to ensure comprehensive thematic coverage. For unclear cases, I independently reviewed the inclusion and exclusion criteria and revisited ambiguous studies to ensure consistency. When necessary, I retained studies for full-text review to minimize the risk of excluding potentially relevant research.

During the final synthesis, I grouped studies by theme and identified patterns, trends, and gaps in the literature. This process enabled a detailed exploration of the benefits, challenges, and limitations of integrating AI technologies in counselor training programs. The findings offer a broad overview of the current research landscape and highlight areas requiring further investigation.

Findings

Arksey & O'Malley (2025) data analysis process led me to identify three major themes, each with three subthemes, that capture the central dimensions of AI integration in counselor education. Themes and subthemes included: 1. Transformative applications of AI in counselor training (personalized learning and skill development, simulation-based learning, advancements in supervision) 2. Challenges in implementation (validation and reliability, usability and resistance) and 3. Ethical considerations and balancing human and AI contributions (data privacy and algorithmic bias, balancing human and AI contributions). I describe these in more detail below.

Transformative Applications of AI in Counselor Training

Findings suggest AI technologies are reshaping counselor education by addressing critical challenges, such as scalability, adaptability, and personalized training needs. By leveraging AI tools, counselor educators are enhancing skill development, creating realistic simulation environments, and improving supervision practices. This section begins to review the findings of this study beginning with the transformative potential of AI, with specific focus on personalized learning, simulation-based learning, and advancements in supervision.

Personalized Learning and Skill Development

AI tools have shown strong potential for creating personalized learning environments that adapt to the diverse needs of counselors-in-training (CITs). For example, Maurya (2023a) demonstrated ChatGPT's effectiveness in simulating realistic role-play scenarios, allowing trainees to practice empathy and reflective listening while receiving individualized feedback. Likewise, emotionally responsive AI clients such as ERIC enhanced CITs' confidence and reflection on their skills by offering realistic, interactive practice with feedback (Prescott et al.,

2023). Similarly, Kuo et al. (2023) demonstrated that natural language processing models could predict client distress scores based on prior session transcripts, highlighting the potential for AI-driven tools to support real-time outcome monitoring and therapist feedback without added burden on clients or clinicians. Cunningham et al. (2023) explored AI's ability to quantify abstract constructs like empathy and therapeutic alliance, also advocating for feedback systems tracking empathy to support counselor training. Fulmer et al. (2023) further illustrated AI's potential to personalize counselor training by helping students develop coping skills and navigate difficult emotions during the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing both educational and emotional support needs.

In the realm of multicultural counseling, Goldberg et al. (2024) demonstrated the use of machine learning models to objectively assess trainees' cultural competencies, fostering critical reflection and practice. Hsieh et al. (2024) further emphasized ChatGPT's role in scaffolding diagnostic reasoning and enhancing case conceptualization skills, bridging theoretical knowledge with practical application.

Simulation-Based Learning

Simulation-based environments powered by AI are revolutionizing counselor training by providing realistic, interactive scenarios to prepare CITs for real-world challenges. Maurya (2023b) highlighted the value of AI-driven role-play in allowing trainees to practice scenarios at their own pace, without the pressure of performing in front of classmates, the risk of breaching client confidentiality, or the fear of making mistakes with real or simulated clients such as fellow counseling students. Csaszar & Curry (2024) also discussed the value of AI in crafting case conceptualizations and supporting students in addressing cases.

Advancements in Supervision

AI technologies are enhancing supervision by improving feedback quality, streamlining evaluations, and supporting scalability in training programs. Sheperis and Sadeh-Sharvit (2023) found that AI-supported tools provided supervisors with detailed, objective insights into trainee performance, including thematic analysis and client progress. Peavy et al. (2024) highlighted similar benefits in opioid treatment programs, where AI-assisted supervision showed capacity to support adherence to evidence-based practices, enhance supervisor feedback and better structure supervision time. Generative AI applications like those explored by Brue and Brue (2024) further demonstrated scalability by providing personalized guidance to large cohorts in online education.

Challenges in Implementation

Despite its transformative potential, AI integration in counselor training faces numerous challenges. These include issues related to the validation and reliability of AI tools, stakeholder resistance, and usability concerns. Addressing these barriers is critical to ensuring the effective and ethical integration of AI in counselor education.

Validation and Reliability

The lack of robust validation frameworks remains a significant barrier to AI adoption in counselor training. Hsieh et al. (2024) underscored the importance of evaluating AI tools like ChatGPT to ensure reliability in supporting case conceptualization training. Similarly, Goldberg et al. (2024) identified variability in machine learning models' feedback on multicultural competencies, highlighting challenges in ensuring consistency and accuracy. Cunningham et al. (2023) raised concerns about AI's ability to reliably assess complex constructs like empathy, calling for further research to standardize these technologies.

Usability and Stakeholder Resistance

Stakeholder resistance also presents challenges to AI integration. Ajlouni et al. (2023) found that mixed perceptions of ChatGPT among counseling students were influenced by concerns about usability and trust. Kleine et al. (2023) reported similar hesitancy among prospective psychotherapists, citing cultural insensitivity and user-friendliness as barriers.

Ethical Considerations and Balancing Human and AI Contributions

The integration of AI into counselor training raises significant ethical questions about data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the relational depth central to counseling. This theme highlights these concerns and emphasizes the need to balance the advantages of AI with the human-centered principles of counselor education.

Data Privacy and Algorithmic Bias

Protecting sensitive trainee and client data is a key ethical priority. Gore and Dove (2024) stressed the importance of explicit consent protocols and robust data protection mechanisms to safeguard confidentiality. Additionally, Urom et al. (2024) highlighted the risks of cultural bias in AI tools, which, if unaddressed, could marginalize underrepresented populations. AI tools are developed using algorithms and data that often contain inherent biases, as well as by individuals who may also hold biases (Urom, 2024). Additionally, AI tools rely on the context they are given by the individual providing the prompt so without context being provided, responses can ignore the cultural aspects entirely (Maurya, 2023). As a result, these tools can produce inaccurate or even harmful responses, which CIT might inadvertently rely on.

Balancing Human and AI Contributions

While AI offers scalability and efficiency, it must complement, not replace, human-centered counseling practices. Maurya and DeDiego (2023) argued that empathy and interpersonal skills should remain central to training, with AI serving as a supplementary

resource. Similarly, Prescott et al. (2023) emphasized that while emotionally responsive AI clients enhance skill-building, they lack the relational depth critical to effective counseling.

Discussion

The findings in this review provide a comprehensive examination of the benefits, challenges, and ethical considerations associated with integrating AI technologies in counselor training. They highlight AI's transformative potential to enhance skill development, simulation-based learning, and supervision, while also revealing critical barriers to effective implementation, such as the need for validation, usability improvements, and ethical safeguards. These insights establish a foundation for understanding how AI can complement traditional counselor education while emphasizing the importance of thoughtful integration to maintain the humanistic values of the profession (Maurya & DeDiego, 2023; Prescott et al., 2023). These findings inform the subsequent discussion, which contextualizes the results and explores their broader implications.

This review highlights several novel applications of AI in counselor training that extend beyond existing literature. For instance, the use of AI tools to foster multicultural competence through automated assessments represents a significant advancement. Goldberg et al. (2024) demonstrated how these tools encourage CITs to reflect critically on cultural dynamics, addressing areas traditionally considered difficult to teach using technology. Similarly, AI-driven simulation environments provide CITs with opportunities to practice counseling in emotionally charged scenarios, such as crises or high-stakes interactions, offering experiences that are otherwise difficult to replicate in training (Cunningham et al., 2023; Maurya, 2023b).

The scalability of AI in supervision, particularly in online education programs, presents practical solutions for managing large student cohorts without sacrificing individualized

feedback (Brue & Brue, 2024). These tools, combined with AI-driven evaluations, help address challenges such as diversity in client interactions and supervisory bandwidth, making AI a valuable complement to human-centered training methods (Prescott et al., 2023).

This review emphasizes the importance of cohesive ethical integration frameworks for guiding the adoption of AI in counselor education. Data privacy and algorithmic bias represent two major areas of concern. Gore and Dove (2024) highlighted the risks of data breaches, stressing the importance of explicit consent protocols and robust safeguards to protect sensitive trainee and client information. Balancing AI's contributions with human-centered approaches is another critical issue. Maurya and DeDiego (2023) argue that AI should complement rather than replace traditional training methods, ensuring empathy and interpersonal skills remain at the core of counselor education. This aligns with findings from Prescott et al. (2023), who caution against over-reliance on AI at the expense of relational depth.

Ethical frameworks must address these concerns by providing clear guidelines for balancing innovation with the values of counseling. Collaborative efforts among educators, developers, and policymakers are essential for designing tools that preserve the humanistic foundations of the profession while leveraging AI's transformative potential.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this scoping review underscore the transformative potential of AI in counselor training while revealing significant challenges and ethical considerations. AI technologies address persistent challenges in counselor education by enhancing skill development, providing dynamic simulation-based learning environments, and improving supervision processes. Tools like ChatGPT and emotionally responsive AI clients, such as ERIC, provide tailored feedback and allow counselors-in-training (CITs) to practice handling complex

scenarios, which enhances reflective practice and fosters critical thinking (Prescott et al., 2023; Hsieh et al., 2024). These tools extend beyond traditional training methods by offering trainees low-risk environments to refine their skills, particularly in managing emotionally charged or complex interactions (Maurya, 2023b; Fulmer et al., 2023).

Simulation-based learning environments, highlighted in this review, offer a unique opportunity to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application. These environments align with previous research in medical training, demonstrating their effectiveness in preparing trainees for high-stakes scenarios (Webb, 2023). AI-driven advancements in supervision similarly align with existing findings in higher education but offer unique applications for addressing relational complexities in counselor education (Sheperis & Sadeh-Sharvit, 2023). By automating routine tasks and providing detailed, objective feedback, AI tools allow supervisors to focus on the relational and developmental aspects of training while scaling support for large cohorts (Brue & Brue, 2024).

Implications for Future Research

Despite these promising developments, this review identifies critical gaps that warrant further investigation. One major gap is the lack of robust empirical validation for AI tools in counselor training. Few studies have conducted longitudinal evaluations to assess the sustained impact of AI-driven training on counselor competencies and client outcomes (Hsieh et al., 2024). This lack of evidence limits educators' and program designers’ confidence in adopting these tools. Similarly, while simulation-based learning environments show potential, questions remain about the extent to which skills acquired in these settings transfer to real-world counseling contexts. Further research is needed to explore how these training experiences translate into effective practice (Maurya & DeDiego, 2023).

Concerns about cultural responsiveness and algorithmic bias also highlight the need for tools designed to meet the diverse needs of trainees and clients (Kleine et al., 2023; Urom et al., 2024). Without addressing these biases, AI tools risk perpetuating systemic inequities in training and practice. Research should focus on developing culturally responsive AI systems that align with the values of equity and inclusivity central to counselor education.

Future research should prioritize several critical areas in order to effectively advance the integration of AI into counselor training. First, longitudinal studies are necessary to assess the long-term impact of AI interventions on both trainee development and client outcomes (Hsieh et al., 2024). These studies would provide empirical evidence for the sustained efficacy and limitations of AI-driven tools in counselor education. Additionally, researchers should investigate the transferability of skills acquired in AI-driven training environments to live counseling sessions, identifying factors that enhance or hinder this process (Maurya, 2023b).

Another priority is the development of culturally responsive AI tools to ensure equity and inclusivity within training programs. These tools must address the diverse needs of trainees and clients, mitigating concerns about cultural biases in AI applications (Urom et al., 2024; Kleine et al., 2023). Equally important is the exploration of hybrid training models that integrate AI innovations with human-centered approaches. Such models could offer valuable insights into optimizing training outcomes while preserving the empathy and interpersonal skills that are central to counseling practice.

Future research should also focus on the creation of comprehensive ethical frameworks to address pressing concerns related to data privacy, equity, and over-reliance on technology. These frameworks are essential for guiding the responsible integration of AI while upholding the humanistic values of the counseling profession.

Finally, a holistic exploration of how the counseling profession plans to approach AI integration is critical. A structured approach, such as a Delphi study, could facilitate consensus among key stakeholders by identifying priorities, best practices, and ethical considerations. This method has been successful in the past, as seen in the 20/20 Vision for the Future of Counseling initiative led by Gladding and colleagues, which helped define a unified vision for the profession (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011). Similarly, a Delphi study could provide the counseling field with a roadmap for the responsible and effective adoption of AI technologies in counselor education and training.

Limitations

This scoping review provides a comprehensive exploration of the integration of AI in counselor training. However, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the coding and thematic analysis for this review were conducted independently. While we took efforts to maintain objectivity and rigor, the lack of a second coder could introduce bias in the interpretation of themes and data extraction. Independent coding by multiple researchers typically strengthens the reliability of the findings, and the absence of this step represents a limitation in the study's methodology.

Second, the rapidly evolving nature of AI presents a significant challenge in maintaining the relevancy of the findings. The field of AI, particularly the development and application of large language models (LLMs), is progressing at an unprecedented pace. As a result, some of the insights and conclusions drawn in this review may become outdated as new technologies emerge and existing ones are refined. This limitation underscores the importance of ongoing research and continuous updating of the literature to capture the latest advancements and their implications for counselor training.

Additionally, this review focused exclusively on peer-reviewed articles, excluding conference presentations, unpublished research, and works in progress. As a result, certain emerging themes and insights may have been overlooked. Future research could incorporate these sources to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the current state of research in this field.

Finally, the scope of this review was broad, encompassing a wide range of AI applications in counselor training. While this approach provided a comprehensive overview, it may have limited the depth of analysis on specific AI tools or applications. While this approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of the field, future research should focus on narrower aspects of AI integration to offer more detailed and actionable insights. For example, targeted studies could explore the efficacy of specific AI-driven interventions, such as simulation-based learning environments or culturally responsive AI tools, in greater depth.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this scoping review underscores the transformative potential of AI in counselor training while bringing to light critical challenges related to implementation and ethics. AI tools offer opportunities to enhance skill development, simulate realistic training scenarios, and streamline supervision processes, addressing key limitations in traditional counselor education. However, successfully integrating AI into counselor training requires a proactive approach to overcoming challenges such as validation, usability, and cultural responsiveness.

By prioritizing rigorous research, fostering collaboration among educators, developers, and policymakers, and establishing robust ethical frameworks, the counseling profession can harness AI's benefits without compromising its humanistic principles. These efforts will not only

advance the field but also ensure that future counselors are technologically adept, deeply empathetic, and culturally competent practitioners. The integration of AI represents a pathway to reimagining counselor education, provided its use is guided by intentionality, equity, and a commitment to the core values of the profession.

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Appendix

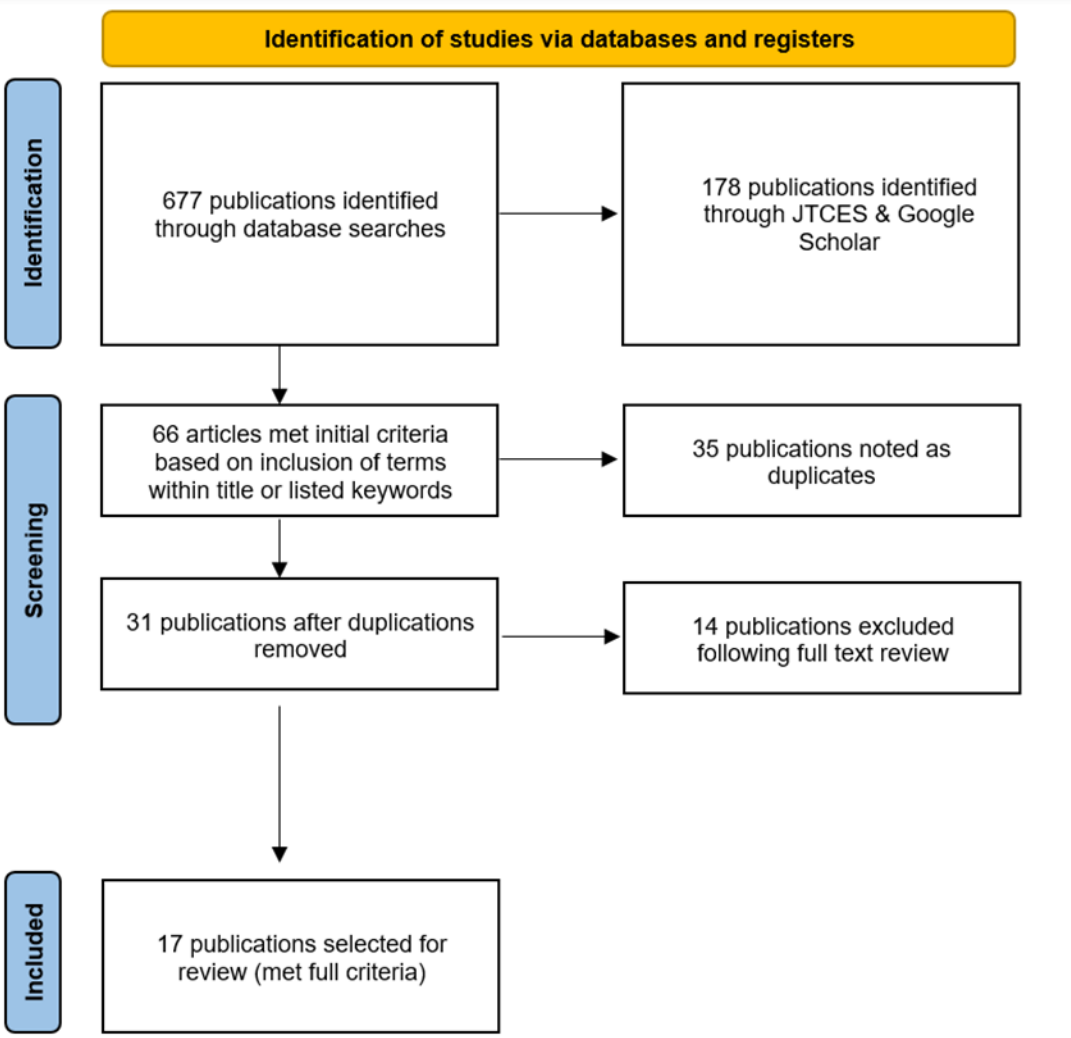

Figure 1
Scoping Review –Article Screening Process

Table 1

***S**ummary 17 Articles Analyzed for this Study*

Authors	Date	Method	Primary Aim
Ajlouni, A., Almahaireh, A. & Whaba, F.	2023	Quantitative (n=210)	The study aims to explore undergraduate students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of using ChatGPT in education to guide the effective integration of AI into counseling curricula and highlight areas for further research.
Brue, Jill and Brue, Jacob	2024	Conceptual	The study aims to explore the potential applications, benefits, and challenges of integrating generative AI tools into online counselor education, focusing on their role in enhancing critical thinking, supporting ethical use, and addressing key pedagogical challenges in counselor training.
Csaszar, I & Curry, J.	2024	Qualitative (n=3)	The study aims to evaluate the use of generative AI, specifically ChatGPT, in counselor education to promote critical thinking and ethical application among graduate students, while identifying its benefits, limitations, and implications for teaching and learning.
Cunningham, P. B., Gilmore, J., Naar, S., Preston, S. D., Eubanks, C. F., Hubig, N. C., McClendon, J., Ghosh, S., & Ryan-Pettes, S.	2023	Conceptual	The study aims to address gaps in evidence-based treatments for managing interpersonal process issues in therapy, particularly with adolescents and diverse populations, by leveraging AI to enhance understanding and therapist training.
Fulmer, R., Beeson, E., Sheperis, C., Rosello, D., & Edelman, R.	2023	Qualitative (n=22)	The study aims to evaluate the potential of AI chatbots in providing psychological support during crises, focusing on graduate counseling students as both recipients and future mental health providers.
Goldberg, S. B., Tanana, M., Stewart, S. H., Williams, C. Y., Soma, C. S., Atkins, D. C., Imel, Z. E., & Owen, J.	2024	Quantitative (n=100)	The study aims to explore the potential of AI, specifically machine learning and natural language processing, to efficiently and reliably assess multicultural competencies in psychotherapy, reducing reliance on labor-intensive human coding.
Gore, S., & Dove, E.	2024	Qualitative (n=47)	The study aims to explore counseling students' perspectives on the ethical considerations of integrating AI tools into their training, focusing on confidentiality, acceptable applications, and implications for educational and professional integrity.
Hsieh, L.H., Liao, W.C. & Liu, E.Y.	2024	Qualitative (n=7)	The study aims to evaluate the feasibility, accuracy, and effectiveness of using ChatGPT to train counseling trainees in case conceptualization, focusing on its potential to enhance training efficiency, improve conceptualization skills, and support the development of effective treatment strategies in psychotherapy.
Kleine, A.-K., Kokje, E., Lermer, E., & Gaube, S.	2023	Quantitative (n=206)	The study aims to examine the factors influencing early-career professionals' intention to use AI in mental health care, addressing individual, organizational, and systemic barriers to adoption.
Kuo, P. B., Tanana, M. J., Goldberg, S. B., Caperton, D. D., Narayanan, S., Atkins, D. C., & Imel, Z. E.	2024	Quantitative (n=56)	The study aims to use AI to predict client outcomes from session transcripts, enhancing psychotherapeutic care by providing real-time feedback and reducing the need for labor-intensive manual analysis.
Maurya, R. K.	2023	Qualitative (n=1)	The study aims to assess ChatGPT's effectiveness in simulating client interactions to enhance the practical skills of counselors-in-training, focusing on authenticity, emotional expression, cultural sensitivity, and overall utility in counselor education.
Maurya, R. K.	2023	Conceptual	The article aims to demonstrate how AI technologies like ChatGPT can enhance counselor education by using the CCS model to structure scalable and effective role-play scenarios for developing practical counseling skills.
Maurya, R. K., & DeDiego, A. C.	2023	Conceptual	The study aims to assess the current state of AI in counselor education, identify limitations, and propose a roadmap for integrating AI tools like chatbots into training and supervision.
Peavy, K. M., Klipsch, A., Soma, C. S., Pace, B., Imel, Z. E., Tanana, M. J., Soth, S., Ricardo-Bulis, E., & Atkins, D. C.	2024	Quantitative (n=27)	The study aims to leverage AI technology to enhance clinical supervision and training in OTPs, using machine learning to streamline review processes and improve the efficiency of evidence-based counseling practices.

Table 1 Continued

Prescott, J., Ogilvie, L., & Hanley, T.	2023	Quantitative (n=28)	The study aims to evaluate how student therapists interact with and benefit from ERIC, a chatbot designed to develop key counseling skills like empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard in person-centered therapy training.
Sheperis, D., & Sadeh-Sharvit, S.	2023	Conceptual	The study examines the role of AI in transforming clinical education and supervision in telemental health training clinics by enhancing diagnostic accuracy, personalizing treatment plans, and automating routine tasks to improve mental health care quality and accessibility.
Urom, Chidozie, Grey, B, Lindinger-Sternart, S., & Lucey, S.	2024	Conceptual	The study aims to examine the integration of artificial intelligence into counseling practices, focusing on addressing ethical challenges and enhancing multicultural competence to ensure equitable, effective, and human-centered care.

Chapter II: Building a Framework for AI in Counselor Training: A Delphi Study

Abstract

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, has introduced new possibilities and challenges for counselor education. While AI offers potential benefits in simulation-based learning, feedback, and instructional efficiency, its integration raises critical ethical, relational, and pedagogical concerns. This study employed a three-round Delphi methodology to explore expert consensus on the integration of AI in counselor training. A panel of six counselor educators and practitioners with expertise in AI and training participated across all rounds. Open-ended responses in Round 1 were analyzed using qualitative content and thematic analysis to generate 95 structured statements across five domains: key applications, risks and ethics, best practices, future research, and long-term strategies. These were rated in Rounds 2 and 3 using a 7-point Likert scale. Seventy statements reached consensus, reflecting strong support for simulation, ethical safeguards, and institutional capacity-building, alongside areas of uncertainty regarding AI in supervision and cultural competence development. The findings provide actionable insights for counselor educators, offering a framework for implementing AI in ways that preserve the profession's core humanistic values while embracing innovation.

Building a Framework for AI in Counselor Training: A Delphi Study

The rapid advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI) over the past three years have fundamentally reshaped numerous fields, including education, healthcare, and mental health. (Crawford et al., 2023). Among these advancements, Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT stand out for their ability to simulate human-like conversation, analyze text, and generate meaningful responses across diverse contexts (Ray, 2023). Built on sophisticated deep learning frameworks, these technologies have demonstrated significant potential in education, offering tools to personalize learning experiences, enhance student engagement, and streamline administrative tasks such as assessment and feedback (Jeon & Lee, 2023). However, while AI has gained traction in general education, its integration into counselor education remains limited and underexplored.

Counselor training programs have historically emphasized interpersonal skills, empathy, and emotional intelligence—core qualities that are often viewed as uniquely human and resistant to technological replication (Maurya, 2023). Despite this, emerging AI technologies, particularly LLMs, present opportunities to address persistent challenges in the field. For example, AI-driven tools can simulate complex client interactions for skill development, offering trainees consistent and scalable opportunities to practice counseling techniques. These tools can also provide immediate, objective feedback on critical skills like reflective listening or empathy, which traditional supervision methods often struggle to deliver due to time and resource limitations (Maurya, 2024). Additionally, AI technologies have the potential to streamline supervision practices by analyzing session transcripts or video recordings, identifying areas for improvement, and allowing supervisors to allocate their time more effectively.

These innovations hold the potential to complement traditional training methodologies by filling gaps in access and scalability, enhancing counselor preparation. However, the integration of AI into counselor education must be approached thoughtfully, as its use raises a range of ethical, practical, and pedagogical concerns that warrant careful consideration.

AI-generated outputs, while often insightful, can be inconsistent or inaccurate, potentially hindering the development of counselors-in-training (CITs) or reinforcing ineffective practices. Additionally, AI systems are trained on datasets that may reflect inherent biases, risking outputs that perpetuate stereotypes or lack of cultural sensitivity key competencies in effective counseling (Urom et al., 2024). Data privacy is another pressing issue, as the sensitive nature of trainee and client information requires robust protection, yet many AI tools lack clear safeguards against breaches or misuse (Gore & Dove, 2024).

Furthermore, overreliance on AI tools could inadvertently shift the focus away from cultivating the humanistic qualities central to counseling, such as empathy and emotional attunement, undermining the profession's core principles (Maurya & DeDiego, 2023). These concerns are compounded by the absence of comprehensive ethical guidelines for AI integration in counselor education, leaving educators and trainees without clear frameworks for its responsible use. Together, these challenges highlight the importance of a thoughtful approach to integrating AI, ensuring it complements traditional methods while maintaining the relational and ethical standards of the field.

This manuscript builds on a scoping review exploring the integration of AI in counselor training, focusing on its transformative potential, limitations, and ethical implications (Lange & Diambra, unpublished manuscript). It introduces a Delphi study designed to gather expert consensus on how AI technologies can be strategically leveraged to enhance counselor education

while preserving the relational and humanistic values that underpin the profession. By addressing key ethical and implementation challenges, this study aims to provide a framework for integrating AI into counselor training in ways that align with the field's core principles and future needs.

Transformative Potential of AI in Counselor Training

AI technologies, particularly LLMs like ChatGPT, have demonstrated significant potential in reshaping the educational landscape. In counselor training, AI-driven tools offer personalized learning opportunities, simulation-based environments, and advancements in supervision practices. Maurya (2023) and Goldberg et al. (2024) highlight how AI tools enable counselors-in-training (CITs) to practice reflective listening, empathy, and cultural competence through interactive and adaptive platforms. Csaszar & Curry (2024) demonstrated the value of ChatGPT in supporting the development of creativity in approaches to counseling research while Hsieh et al. (2024) demonstrated how case conceptualization skills can be enhanced through interactive case studies. Furthermore, simulation-based learning environments provide CITs with opportunities to engage in realistic counseling scenarios, preparing them for complex, real-world interactions (Maurya, 2023).

AI's role in supervision is equally transformative. Tools like ERIC (Prescott et al., 2023) and other AI-assisted platforms provide detailed, objective insights into trainee performance, enhancing the quality of feedback and enabling scalable support for large cohorts (Sheperis & Sadeh-Sharvit, 2023). These innovations address critical challenges in traditional clinical supervision, such as limited time and resources, while ensuring adherence to evidence-based practices.

Challenges in Implementation

Despite its potential, integrating AI into counselor training is not without challenges. Concerns about the accuracy and reliability of AI tools remain significant barriers to their widespread adoption. Hsieh et al. (2024) underscore the need for robust validation frameworks to ensure that AI-generated feedback is consistent, accurate, and aligned with best practices in counselor training. For instance, while AI tools can provide insightful feedback on reflective listening or empathy, inconsistencies in their responses (Goldberg et al, 2024) raise questions about their reliability as a learning tool. Furthermore, the lack of standardized evaluation criteria makes it difficult for educators to assess the effectiveness of these technologies, limiting their integration into formal training curricula.

Resistance from stakeholders, including educators, trainees, and policymakers, further complicates AI integration. Ajlouni et al. (2023) highlight concerns about usability and trust, noting that some trainees perceive AI tools as impersonal or culturally insensitive. Similarly, prospective psychotherapists have expressed skepticism about whether AI tools can adequately replicate the humanistic elements of counseling, such as empathy and emotional attunement (Kleine et al., 2023). These perceptions, coupled with usability challenges, create significant hurdles for AI adoption in counselor training programs.

Ethical Concerns

Ethical concerns are paramount in integrating AI into counselor education. Issues such as data privacy and algorithmic bias pose substantial risks, particularly in a field that demands strict confidentiality and cultural competence. Gore and Dove (2024) emphasize the importance of safeguarding sensitive trainee and client data, advocating for explicit consent protocols and robust encryption mechanisms. Additionally, Urom et al. (2024) highlight the risk of

perpetuating systemic biases through AI tools trained on skewed datasets. Without careful validation and continuous refinement, these biases could undermine the inclusivity and fairness essential to counselor training.

A central challenge lies in balancing the use of AI technologies with the humanistic principles that define counseling. While AI can enhance efficiency and scalability, it must complement rather than replace traditional training methods. Maurya and DeDiego (2023) argue that relational skills, such as empathy and interpersonal attunement, should remain at the forefront of training, with AI serving as a supplementary tool. This requires intentional integration strategies that align technological advancements with the core values of the counseling profession.

Given the nascent stage of AI integration in counselor training, a structured and consensus-driven approach is essential to guide future efforts. A Delphi study provides a robust methodology for identifying expert perspectives on how AI should be leveraged in counselor education, addressing ethical and practical concerns, and establishing a roadmap for implementation. Drawing on the findings of a scoping review (Lange & Diambra, unpublished manuscript), this study will explore key questions related to the benefits, limitations, and ethical considerations of AI, aiming to align innovation with the core values of the counseling profession.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to build a consensus among experts regarding the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in counselor training. This includes finding consensus on the key applications, challenges, and ethical considerations of using AI, and developing strategies and guidelines for their effective and ethical implementation. By addressing these aspects, this study

aims to establish a foundational understanding of AI's role in counselor training and its alignment with the relational and humanistic values central to the counseling profession.

The guiding research question is, what are the key applications, challenges, and ethical considerations for integrating AI technologies into counselor training, and what guidelines or strategies need to be developed to support its effective and ethical implementation?

Methodology

Delphi methodology is a structured, iterative process for obtaining expert consensus on complex or emerging topics. Developed by Dalkey and Helmer (1962) for military forecasting, the methodology has since been widely applied in diverse fields, including education and counseling (Davidson, 2013). The core design of the Delphi process involves multiple rounds of data collection from a panel of experts who respond to questionnaires anonymously. After each round, feedback is aggregated and shared with participants, enabling them to reconsider their responses and consider group input. This process fosters a convergence of opinions and the development of consensus over time (Linstone & Turoff, 1975).

The method is particularly well-suited for exploratory research in fields where empirical evidence is limited or evolving rapidly. In such contexts, Delphi offers a systematic approach to synthesizing diverse expert knowledge, generating actionable strategies and guidance. As the counseling field begins to engage with the implications of artificial intelligence (AI) in training environments, a Delphi study provides a way to capture informed perspectives and guide ethical, pedagogical, and programmatic decisions.

Key features of the Delphi process include anonymity, iteration, and consensus-building. Anonymity enables participants to share honest and uninfluenced perspectives, minimizing social pressures and power dynamics (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). This anonymity also ensures

that diverse perspectives are represented equitably (Wester & Borders, 2014). Iteration across multiple rounds allows participants to refine their thinking and deepen their responses, while controlled feedback mechanisms promote transparency and thoughtful reconsideration. Finally, the emphasis on consensus-building helps surface points of agreement and divergence, offering nuanced insights into areas of professional complexity.

Rationale for Using Delphi Methodology

Delphi was selected for this study due to its alignment with the research goal of developing expert-informed guidance on the integration of AI in counselor training. As a rapidly evolving technological domain with few established best practices in the counseling profession, AI presents both opportunities and uncertainties. Traditional quantitative or experimental methods would be premature given the current state of the literature, and qualitative case studies alone may not capture the breadth of professional perspectives needed to inform national or institutional guidance.

Instead, Delphi provides a rigorous, flexible structure for gathering diverse viewpoints, exploring ethical and practical implications, and moving toward consensus on key issues. Its design supports the development of actionable recommendations through iterative refinement of expert input, making it an ideal fit for the present study.

Participant Selection & Recruitment

The researcher selected expert panelists using purposive and snowball sampling strategies to ensure informed, relevant, and diverse perspectives on the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in counselor training. Purposive sampling enabled the intentional selection of individuals with relevant expertise, while snowball sampling expanded the pool by leveraging participants' professional networks, especially important in niche or emerging areas (Okoli & Pawlowski,

2004). To qualify for participation, the researcher required individuals to have professional experience in counselor education and training, experience integrating or researching AI technologies within counselor training contexts, and a willingness and ability to participate in all three rounds of the Delphi process.

The researcher distributed an initial recruitment email via CESNET, a national listserv for counselor educators and supervisors. The invitation included a description of the study's purpose, inclusion criteria, procedures, time commitment, and compensation details. The researcher directed interested individuals to complete a brief screening form and informed consent document hosted in Qualtrics. This yielded two eligible participants. Purposive and snowball sampling supplemented this process, with targeted outreach to identified experts and early respondents encouraged to recommend additional qualified experts. The researcher identified an additional 14 individuals through this process, with eight of those participants completing the informed consent. Three of the eight were disqualified for not meeting inclusion criteria.

The researcher confirmed six panelists for participation (two recruited through CESNET and four via purposive/snowball sampling) . The researcher promoted a breadth of perspectives by including participants from varied institutional types (e.g., research-intensive universities, teaching-focused institutions), geographic regions, and professional roles (e.g., faculty members, program directors, researchers). Participants represented a range of professional settings, including university counselor education programs, clinical practice with training components, and research institutions. All of them held advanced degrees in counseling or counselor education and were actively engaged in the field at the time of the study. This diversity aligns with recommendations in Delphi research suggesting that panels may include both highly

experienced and emerging experts to enrich the breadth of responses when exploring rapidly evolving topics (Wester & Borders, 2014).

Among the six panelists, four were established experts with extensive experience in counselor education and AI integration, including multiple peer-reviewed publications on AI and significant involvement in designing or delivering counselor training curricula. The remaining two participants were early-career professionals with emerging expertise in counselor education who had applied experience using AI technologies in training or counseling practice. The researcher intentionally designed this composition to capture a comprehensive understanding of AI's role in counselor training, including both the depth of insights from senior scholars and practical, contemporary perspectives from newer professionals engaging with evolving AI tools. Panel sizes in Delphi research can vary, with acceptable ranges from as few as four participants to several hundred, depending on the goals and context of the study (Bloor et al., 2015; Niederberger & Spranger, 2020). Given the limited number of counselor education professionals with relevant AI expertise, six participants were deemed sufficient to achieve a high-quality, credible panel for consensus development.

To encourage full participation across all three rounds, the researcher offered monetary compensation: $5 for completion of Round 1, $10 for Round 2, and $68 for Round 3. Compensation amounts were adjusted after initial budgeting to enhance retention in the final round based on available funds. The researcher distributed personalized links and reminders through Qualtrics and email. I maintained participants' confidentiality through numerical identifiers, and no names were associated with analysis or reporting. All six participants completed each round, yielding a 100% retention rate and supporting the continuity and validity of the study's consensus findings.

Data Collection

This study employed a three-round Delphi process conducted electronically to achieve expert consensus on the integration of AI in counselor training. The iterative nature of the Delphi methodology allowed for progressive refinement of expert opinions, with each round building upon the findings and feedback of the previous one. The researcher facilitated data collection using Qualtrics, a secure survey platform that supported anonymized participation, automated tracking, and seamless data export for analysis. These features were critical to ensuring accessibility, engagement, and confidentiality throughout the process.

The researcher conducted three rounds of data collection over a 3-month period with Round 1 taking two months, Round 2 taking three weeks, and Round 3 taking one week. Personalized email invitations containing survey links were distributed to participants in each round, along with reminders to maximize completion rates. Throughout the study, the researcher maintained participant anonymity to reduce social pressure and power dynamics, ensuring the equitable representation of diverse perspectives.

Round 1: Open-Ended Exploration

In the first round, participants responded to five open-ended questions designed to explore a broad range of issues related to the integration of AI in counselor training. The questions were as follows: “What are the most promising applications of AI in counselor training (e.g., simulation, feedback, assessment), and how can they enhance counseling competencies while aligning with the profession’s humanistic and relational values?” “What are the major challenges, risks, or ethical concerns (e.g., bias, data privacy, over-reliance on AI) that may arise when integrating AI into counselor education? How might these be addressed?” What best practices should guide the ethical and effective use of AI in counselor training, and what training,

policies, or resources are needed to support its responsible implementation?" "What gaps exist in our understanding of AI's role in counselor training, and what future research is needed to support its ethical and effective use?" "How do you envision the role of AI evolving in counselor training over the next 5- 10 years, and what guidelines or strategies should be developed to ensure its responsible and sustainable implementation?" The open-ended format allowed for detailed, reflective responses grounded in each expert's unique experience and perspective. The researcher designed the survey to ensure clarity and minimize response fatigue, with clear instructions provided for each question. To maximize response rates, the researcher sent reminder emails to participants who had not yet completed the survey. I securely stored responses in Qualtrics and subsequently exported them to Excel for qualitative analysis.

Round 2: Rating Synthesized Statements

Based on the thematic analysis of Round 1 data, 95 statements were developed to represent the core ideas and recommendations expressed by participants. In Round 2, panelists rated their level of agreement with each statement using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). To enhance the refinement process, the researcher invited participants to provide open-text feedback on the clarity, completeness, and relevance of each statement.

This round allowed for both quantitative and qualitative input, facilitating a thorough validation of the initial themes. I then analyzed using descriptive statistics, including the median and interquartile range (IQR), to evaluate the level of agreement and variability among panelists. Consistent with best practices laid out by Wester & Borders (2014), statements with a median response of ≤ 6 and an IQR of ≤ 1.0 were identified as having reached consensus. I then reviewed participant comments to identify suggestions for revising or clarifying statements for Round 3.

Round 3

The third and final round focused on validating and finalizing the refined statements based on Round 2 results. The researcher asked participants to re-rate their level of agreement with the revised set of statements using the same 7-point Likert scale. This phase served as the final check for consensus and allowed participants to confirm or reconsider their prior ratings. The full retention of participants across all three rounds enhanced the continuity and integrity of the Delphi process. The structure of the rounds, combined with the anonymity and iterative design of the Delphi method, supported the development of a credible and actionable set of recommendations for the integration of AI in counselor training.

Data Analysis

This study employed a rigorous and systematic approach to data analysis, integrating Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis with Schreier's (2014) qualitative content analysis methodology. Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach provided a flexible framework for identifying and interpreting patterns in participant responses, while Schreier's (2014) methodology supported the development of a coding frame grounded in clarity, transparency, and consistency. Together, these methods allowed for both inductive theme development and deductive coding structure ensuring analytic rigor and transparency. Qualitative data from Round 1 served as the foundation for developing the structured statements presented in Rounds 2 and 3. Quantitative data collected in Rounds 2 and 3 were analyzed using descriptive statistics to evaluate levels of consensus and guide refinement across rounds. Together, these methods ensured the findings were credible, actionable, and aligned with the study's objective of identifying expert-informed guidance for the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in counselor training.

Round 1: Thematic Analysis & Statement Development

The analysis of Round 1 began with immersion in participant responses to the five open-ended questions. I exported responses from Qualtrics into Excel and organized by participant ID and question number. A familiarization phase followed, during which the researcher read and re-read the data to gain a holistic understanding of emerging ideas. I documented observational notes and key quotes in adjacent columns to begin identifying initial impressions and potential coding directions. Following Schreier's (2014) approach to qualitative content analysis, the researcher developed a preliminary coding frame using 10–15% of the data. This frame informed an initial coding of the data to be adjusted across the process. Codes were systematically applied using a color-coded Excel spreadsheet to enhance traceability.

After drafting the original coding frame, I identified meaning units—discrete segments of text conveying a single relevant idea—and coded across the full dataset. Coded data were then clustered into broader categories and subcategories, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, search for themes, reviewing themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the final report. I then developed thematic maps to visualize the relationship between themes and subthemes, guiding the organization of findings.

I then reviewed, refined, and named each theme to capture its core concept. Inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria as well as definitions were crafted for each sub theme to ensure meaning units were coded accurately. Redundant or overlapping themes were merged, and those lacking sufficient support were excluded. I continually revisited the raw data to verify that each theme was well-supported and representative of participant input. As a result of this analysis, 15 categories and 41 subcategories were identified across the 5 domains.

The finalized categories and subcategories served as the basis for developing 95 structured statements for Round 2. Each statement captured a distinct idea from the qualitative data, with care taken to preserve participants' language when possible. Each of the statements was coded back to at least two meaning units to ensure there was sufficient evidence and support for using the statement. Statements were crafted to be concise, clear, and suitable for Likert-scale rating. Some statements with similar ideas were retained to capture responses within each domain and confirm consensus between different domains. In cases where a single theme encompassed multiple facets, I created more than one statement to fully represent its complexity. I then reviewed each statement for content validity and alignment with the research objectives prior to inclusion in Round 2.

Saturation was determined during the final phases of coding when no new codes or themes emerged from the data. Documentation of recurring patterns provided confirmation that the analysis had reached saturation and adequately captured the range of expert perspectives.

Round 2: Initial Quantitative Analysis & Feedback Integration

The second round of the Delphi process served as the initial quantitative testing of the 95 statements developed from the Round 1 thematic analysis. Each statement represented a core idea synthesized from expert responses and was designed to be rated on the 7-point Likert scale mentioned earlier. The purpose of this round was to measure initial levels of consensus and to gather qualitative feedback that could inform potential revisions for the next round.

In addition to quantitative ratings, participants provided optional written comments on individual statements. This feedback proved valuable in identifying areas of confusion, redundancy, or overly broad phrasing. Based on these suggestions, select statements were reworded for clarity or broken into more specific components. All revisions were tracked and

documented in an audit log, with changes grounded in participant feedback and a return to the Round 1 themes when needed to ensure fidelity to the original data. The revised and narrowed set of statements was prepared for presentation in Round 3.

Round 3: Final Validation & Consensus

The third and final round of the Delphi process focused on validating and confirming consensus on the revised set of statements. This round served as a final check on expert agreement and allowed participants to reassess their responses in light of statement refinements and group-level feedback from Round 2. I classified statements that met a median score of ≥ 6.0 and an IQR ≤ 1.0 in Round 3 as having achieved final consensus and were retained as key findings of the study.

Qualitative comments in Round 3 were limited, with most participants affirming the clarity and relevance of the revised items. This round demonstrated stronger alignment across panelists, suggesting that the refinements made after Round 2 successfully addressed prior ambiguities and improved overall consensus. The final set of consensus statements represents a vetted, expert-informed collection of perspectives on the integration of AI in counselor training, including applications, ethical considerations, pedagogical strategies, and implementation challenges. These findings are presented in detail in the next chapter.

Rigor & Trustworthiness

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of this Delphi study, I employed strategies grounded in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability throughout the research process. I tailored these strategies to both the qualitative and consensus-seeking nature of the Delphi method.

I enhanced credibility through the structured, iterative Delphi process itself, which allowed panelists to reflect on, revise, and refine their perspectives over three rounds. The inclusion of open-ended responses and participant-driven feedback helped ensure that consensus statements remained grounded in authentic expert insight. Participant selection, grounded in transparent inclusion criteria, further supported the validity of findings by ensuring all contributors had meaningful experience with both counselor education and AI.

I addressed dependability through methodological transparency and consistent application of procedures across all phases. An audit trail documented analytical decisions, statement revisions, and thematic coding. Although I used a single-coder model to maintain coherence in analysis, I also engaged in peer consultation during early coding phases to reduce interpretive bias.

Confirmability was supported through systematic data handling and decision-tracking. I de-identified participant responses to preserve anonymity and reduce bias during analysis. Then, I documented all coding decisions, theme development, and statement revisions in Excel. The use of participant quotes and retention of original language where possible helped ensure that findings remained grounded in the data rather than researcher bias.

Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the panel composition, the Delphi process, data collection procedures, and consensus thresholds. While not generalizable in the traditional sense, these findings offer insight into how counselor education programs might responsibly integrate AI, especially when navigating complex ethical and pedagogical considerations.

I upheld ethical standards throughout the study. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from the University of Tennessee. Informed consent was secured from all

participants prior to their involvement, and confidentiality was preserved through de-identification and secure data handling practices.

By integrating qualitative rigor with Delphi-specific strengths—such as iterative feedback, anonymous input, and clearly defined consensus thresholds—this study offers a trustworthy, credible contribution to the emerging literature on AI integration in counselor training.

Results

This chapter presents the findings of the three-round Delphi study, which sought to identify expert consensus on the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in counselor training. A total of six expert panelists participated in all three rounds of the study, providing both qualitative insights and quantitative ratings. Through content and thematic analysis and iterative consensus-building, a total of 70 statements (seen in **Table 1** below) met the predetermined threshold for inclusion, reflecting expert-informed guidance on emerging applications, challenges, ethical concerns, and strategies related to AI use in counselor education.

Round 1: Thematic Analysis

In the first round, participants responded to five open-ended questions designed to elicit their perspectives on the opportunities, challenges, and future of AI in counselor training. Content analysis of the responses yielded 95 distinct statements, which were synthesized from key ideas and coded meaning units. The five thematic domains used to organize the Round 1 data were directly informed by the structure of the open-ended survey questions. This approach reflects recommendations in qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2014), which supports the use of concept-driven categories derived from research questions or prompts. While the domains

Table 2: Consensus Statements

Domain	Theme/Subtheme & Associated Statements	Median	IQR
Key Applications for Counselor Training	***Simulation & Experiential Learning***		
	AI-Enhanced Simulation & Role Play		
	Counselor training programs should consider integrating AI-powered simulations, as they can provide low-risk environments for skill development.	6.5	1
	AI role-play agents can be used effectively in skill-based counseling courses to enhance clinical scenario practice and skill mastery.	6	0
	Real-Time Feedback & Supervision		
	AI tools can provide fast, formative, and personalized feedback that promotes self-awareness and skill development in counselor training.	6	0
	Ethics & Professional Safeguards		
	Cultural Responsiveness & Ethical Reflection		
	AI tools that present real-world ethical dilemmas can reinforce counselors' ethical responsibilities by encouraging reflective practice and enhancing ethics education.	6	0
	Ethical Safeguards & Human Oversight		
	Bias prevention requires diverse practitioner oversight of AI systems, ongoing audits, and transparency about system performance, including false-positive and false-negative rates.	7	1
	AI applications in counselor training must align with ACA ethics, professional values, and preserve client humanity.	6.5	1
	Data used in AI-assisted learning should be anonymized, stripped of client identifiers, and deleted after course completion unless otherwise consented to. Institutions should clearly communicate data handling policies to trainees to ensure transparency, confidentiality, and psychological safety.	6.5	1

Table 2 Continued

Key Applications Cont'd	AI systems in counselor training should not independently guide care or evaluation decisions without human review. Human supervisors must assess the value of AI-generated insights and determine how, when, or if they should be shared with trainees.	7	0.75
	AI Driven Assessment & Automation		
	Assessment & Diagnostic Support		
	AI tools that support diagnostic decision-making and assessment such as differential diagnosis suggestions hold promise for enhancing clinical judgment in counseling contexts.	6	0.75
	AI-powered transcription and speech-to-text tools can enhance counselor development by analyzing session behaviors (e.g., tone, talk time, open questions), and highlighting key themes.	6	0.75
	Predictive analytics may be used to help identify patterns that suggest early signs of counselor burnout and client risk, with the goal of offering supportive, system-level strategies that promote well-being and reduce harm for all stakeholders.	6.5	1
	Automated Content Generation		
	AI tools can support counselor education by generating instructional materials and academic resources such as clinical scenarios, case examples, test questions, and supporting academic writing support.	6	0.75
	AI can reduce administrative burden in counselor training programs by automating tasks such as transcription and note-taking, writing letters of recommendation, tenure narratives, or cover letters, enabling supervisors to focus more on relational and developmental processes and to recommend tailored learning resources for individual students.	6	0.75
Challenges, Risks, & Ethical Concerns	***Safeguarding Human-Centered Practice***		
	Preserving Humanistic Foundations		
	AI in counselor education should be designed to enhance rather than diminish the humanistic and relational core of the profession.	7	0.75
	AI as a Supportive Tool		

Table 2 Continued

Challenges, Risks, & Ethical Concerns Cont'd	AI should be integrated into counselor education as a supportive tool that enhances skill development and assessment, while reinforcing the importance of human supervision, experiential learning, and professional judgment.	6	1
	While AI diagnostic tools may be useful, human involvement remains essential for decision-making and relational work that supports meaningful client change.	7	0
	Critical AI Literacy and Moderate Use		
	AI in counselor education should be used with moderation and guided critical literacy to help students recognize its limitations and disengage when necessary.	6	0.75
	Counselor education programs should use debriefing sessions to help students process AI errors and turn technological limitations into opportunities for reflection and growth.	6.5	1
	Ensuring Equity & Inclusion		
	Bias, Fairness, & Cultural Responsiveness		
	AI systems in counselor education must be designed and monitored to prevent bias and ensure fairness for all users, especially those from marginalized communities.	7	0
	Bias in AI systems can stem from societal norms embedded in training data, including white-normative frameworks and medicalized models of counseling.	7	0.75
	Reducing bias in AI requires curating culturally and clinically diverse datasets and avoiding the use of narrow or homogeneous data sources.	7	0.75
	Equity, Access, & Infrastructure		
	The financial and technological demands of AI risk creating a digital divide, where well-funded programs benefit disproportionately compared to resource-limited institutions.	6	0.75
	Navigating Risks & Ethical Complexities		
	Data Privacy & Security		

Table 2 Continued

	AI systems used in counselor education must adhere to strict data privacy standards, including encryption of practicum recordings, de-identification of sensitive information, short data retention periods, and compliance with HIPAA and FERPA. Informed consent procedures must clearly explain what data are collected, for how long, and who has access.	7	0.75
	Ethical Oversight & Professional Judgment		
	Counselor educators and supervisors must retain final decision-making authority over AI-generated suggestions, ensuring that AI is used only as an advisory tool and not as a substitute for human judgment.	7	0
	Counselor autonomy and professional judgment must be protected during training, and institutions should clearly define accountability in cases where AI fails to detect clinical risks.	7	0
Best Practices for Ethical & Effective Implementation	***Centering Human Judgment & Values***		
	Human Oversight & Accountability		
	AI in counselor education should be used for tasks like pattern recognition and rapid feedback, while ultimate decision-making must remain with faculty and supervisors. AI tools should always include an accessible human override• function.	7	0
	Ethical integration of AI requires human oversight to ensure accurate interpretation of AI outputs and equitable trainee evaluation. AI-generated insights must be verified through human context and judgment.	7	0
	AI developers should include practicing counselors in tool development, and all decisions about AI implementation in counselor education should be grounded in the principle that technology must serve rather than steer training and supervision.	7	0
	Human-Centered Practice		

Table 2 Continued			
Best Practices for Ethical & Effective Implementation Cont'd	AI should serve as a supportive tool that complements rather than replaces human relationships, professional judgment, and supervision in counselor education, while preserving empathy, cultural responsiveness, and human connection.	7	0
	Upholding Ethical & Equitable Standards		
	Data Security & Confidentiality		
	Confidentiality and data privacy must be prioritized from the outset when using AI in counselor training. Platforms should be vetted for privacy compliance, incorporate encryption for recordings and transcripts, and include built-in protections for handling sensitive data.	7	0.75
	Institutions should implement secure data handling protocols, including immediate removal of personal identifiers, restricted access, short retention windows, and clear user guidance on whether tools meet privacy standards.	6.5	1
	Bias Mitigation & Equity		
	To promote fairness and minimize harm, AI systems used in counselor education should be trained on diverse datasets, regularly audited for bias, and carefully vetted for cultural sensitivity in both their design and output.	7	0.75
	Ethical Risk Management		
	AI practices in counselor education should be guided by core counseling values such as nonmaleficence and autonomy, with safeguards in place at the level of AI development to prevent potential harm from unregulated or unethical systems.	6.5	1
	Building Institutional Capacity & Competence		
	Training & Literacy for AI Use		
	Developing AI literacy among counselor educators and trainees is essential for fostering critical reflection, ethical reasoning, and appropriate use of AI in practice. All trainees should understand how AI functions, what data it collects, and how it is applied in assessments.	6.5	1

Table 2 Continued

	Training should cover the capabilities and limitations of AI tools, differences in technologies (e.g., LLMs, NLP), and how to explain AI applications to clients and students. Workshops on AI literacy should be available to both faculty and students.	7	0
Best Practices for Ethical & Effective Implementation Cont'd	Counselor education programs must adopt clear policies, invest in faculty development, and provide continuing-education credit opportunities to support the responsible and sustainable integration of AI.	7	0.75
	Institutional & Professional Guidelines		
	The integration of AI in counselor education must comply with ethical and legal frameworks such as the ACA Code of Ethics, FERPA, and HIPAA. These standards must be updated to address new risks posed by AI and clearly state that AI outputs are advisory, not determinative.	6.5	1
	Institutions must develop and enforce clear policies on AI use, including data privacy, quality assurance, and human oversight. Institutions remain responsible for ensuring client and student welfare, regardless of AI involvement.	7	0.75
	Best practices for AI use in counseling should be shaped by interdisciplinary panels and professional organizations, treated as living documents that evolve alongside technology, and updated regularly to reflect emerging challenges.	6	1
Future Research Needs in AI & Counselor Training	**Iterative Evaluation & Piloting**		
	New AI systems in counselor education should be implemented through small-scale pilot studies that include feedback loops, system refinement, and phased expansion. Continuous evaluation and research are essential to improve performance and ensure responsible use.	6	0.75
	Empirical Gaps in Efficacy & Impact **Longitudinal & Outcome Research Needs**		
	Longitudinal research is needed to evaluate how AI in counselor education affects the development of counseling skills, professional competence, client outcomes, and ethical behavior both during training and after graduation.	7	0.75

Table 2 Continued

Future research should examine the effectiveness of AI tools as learning aids in classroom and practicum settings, and explore how their use may influence the counselor client dynamic.	7	0
AI's Role in Clinical Applications Future research should examine the role of AI in supporting clinical tasks such as differential diagnosis and co-therapist functions and its effectiveness in real-world counseling and care settings.	6.5	1
Both qualitative and factorial research designs are needed to assess how students experience different AI applications and to compare the effects of varied schedules, formats, and intensities of AI use in training.	6	0
Evolving Competencies & Pedagogical Uncertainty **Impact on Counselor Learning & Competency** Research is needed to determine whether AI tools effectively support the development of core counseling competencies, including clinical skill acquisition and student learning outcomes.	7	0
Curriculum Innovation & Pedagogical Shifts Clearer definitions, frameworks, and research are needed to determine the appropriate use of AI in counselor training such as when, how much, and in which contexts it is most beneficial. These models should be tested in real-world classroom settings to assess their impact on learning.	6	0
Ethical, Equitable, & Humanistic Integration **Humanistic Integration in Counselor Training** AI should be implemented in counselor education in ways that preserve the relational, ethical, and humanistic foundations of the profession, and future research should examine whether trainees who use AI maintain these core counseling values.	7	0.75
Infrastructure & Resource Barriers Future research should examine the cost-effectiveness of AI integration in counselor education, comparing it to traditional teaching methods while accounting for licensing, infrastructure, security, and faculty labor. These findings can support programs operating under budget constraints.	6	0.75

Table 2 Continued

	Educator & Learner Readiness		
	Further research is needed on the types of training and support that can help counselor educators and supervisors effectively integrate AI feedback while preserving empathy, human connection, and professional judgment.	6	0
	Future studies should investigate whether AI-supported learning improves client outcomes, enhances clinical skill development, or simply accelerates procedural learning without deeper professional impact.	6	0
	Descriptive research is needed to better understand counselor educators' current attitudes, knowledge, and practices related to AI, as many appear underprepared or tech-averse despite growing AI use by students in academic settings.	6.5	1
Long Term Strategies & the Future of AI in Counseling	**Ethical Considerations & Evolving Norms**		
	AI integration in counselor education should be guided by evidence-based policies that protect ethical standards and maintain appropriate human oversight.	6.5	1
	Ongoing ethics research is essential, and existing ethical frameworks must evolve quickly to remain responsive to innovations in AI technologies.	6.5	1
	Evolving Applications of AI		
	AI Capability		
	AI-powered simulations and virtual clients are expected to become increasingly sophisticated, offering culturally responsive, adaptive feedback and consistent interaction for trainees across learning stages.	7	0.75
	AI tools may support counselor supervision by identifying patterns in trainee performance, leading to more efficient and targeted interventions.	6	0.75
	Research should examine the implications of AI in counseling, including comparisons to traditional methods, effects on insurance or employment structures, and the quality of current user experiences.	6	0
	Future Projections		

Table 2 Continued

AI systems used in counselor training are expected to become significantly more intelligent and immersive, potentially incorporating tone recognition, facial recognition, and holographic telepresence as part of increasingly realistic simulations.	7	0
AI is likely to become embedded in learning management systems and clinical skills labs across counselor education, supporting both practice and pedagogy in increasingly seamless and automated ways.	7	0.75
Instructional Innovation & Institutional Readiness		
Training Enhancements		
AI-powered tools that offer real-time feedback may enable more individualized and scalable training while reducing the administrative burden on human supervisors.	6	0
AI-supported interventions and tools such as organized transcripts should preserve the reflective and relational aspects of human supervision, which are essential for maintaining professional judgment and counselor development.	6	0.75
AI Literacy & Faculty Development		
AI literacy should be developed among both counselor educators and trainees, with training focused on interpreting AI-generated feedback, understanding AI limitations, and fostering critical reflection.	7	0.75
Faculty should have access to modular, ongoing workshops that offer continuing education credit and help them stay current on new AI features, ethical concerns, and instructional strategies.	6.5	1
AI integration in counselor education should be supported by evolving guidelines and best-practice documents that teach how to use AI tools in applied practice and promote the augmentation not replacement of human judgment.	7	0.75
Implementation & Infrastructure		

Table 2 Continued

Institutions should establish clear, transparent policies and governance structures for AI implementation that include continuous monitoring, ethical compliance, communication of assessment criteria, and responsiveness to emerging risks.	6.5	1
Programs with limited budgets should be supported through regional consortia that provide access to open-source models and pooled storage, narrowing the digital divide and ensuring broader access to AI infrastructure.	6.5	1
Accreditation bodies such as CACREP should consider updating core competencies to explicitly address AI literacy and ethics for both students and supervisors in counselor education programs.	6	0
Ethical & Legal Considerations		
Responsible AI implementation in counselor training must adhere to established legal and ethical standards, including the ACA Code of Ethics, FERPA, and HIPAA. Guidelines should include strict protocols for handling sensitive trainee and client data.	6.5	1
Guidelines for AI use in counselor training must emphasize maintaining human oversight and include transparent communication about data use, the limits of AI feedback, and the role of AI as a supportive not substitutive tool.	6.5	1
Skepticism & Professional Identity		
AI should be used to complement and not replace the relational and humanistic foundations of counseling. Educators and practitioners must continue to advocate for the unique role counselors play in mental health care, even as AI becomes more widely accepted.	7	0
Institutions should ensure that educators are meaningfully included in AI-related decision-making processes and that policies reflect ethical, pedagogical, and relational priorities.	6.5	1

themselves were deductively structured, the coding and theme development within each domain followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis, allowing for inductive emergence of key themes and subthemes. Responses were first organized into deductively derived domains, then segmented into meaning units for inductive thematic coding. The meaning units were coded into themes and sub themes. The themes and sub themes then informed the development of the statements. This combination of structure and flexibility enabled the study to maintain transparency and methodological rigor while capturing the richness and complexity of expert perspectives.

Domain 1: Key Applications in Counselor Training

The first domain, Key Applications in Counselor Training, captured expert perspectives on the most promising and relevant uses of artificial intelligence in counselor education. Analysis of the open-ended responses within this domain resulted in three central themes: Simulation & Experiential Learning, Ethics & Professional Safeguards, and AI-Driven Assessment & Automation. These themes reflect a growing interest in AI as both a pedagogical tool and a supplement to supervision, feedback, and instructional design.

Theme 1: Simulation & Experiential Learning. Experts widely agree that AI-powered tools offer substantial potential for simulating clinical scenarios, enhancing role-play exercises, and providing adaptive learning environments. The subcategories within this theme included AI-enhanced simulation and role-play and real-time feedback and supervision. These applications were viewed as especially valuable for developing core counseling skills, allowing students to engage in repeated practice and receive automated feedback prior to engaging with real clients. "AI-powered simulations may offer trainees the opportunity to practice counseling skills with virtual clients" (Participant 1)

While experts acknowledged the limits of these tools in capturing the full nuance of human interaction, they emphasized their role as complementary tools that could enhance, rather than replace, traditional experiential learning methods.

Theme 2: Ethics & Professional Safeguards. Another prominent theme was the integration of ethical and cultural reflection into AI-supported learning environments. Subcategories included cultural responsiveness and ethical reflection as well as ethical safeguards and human oversight. Experts cautioned that AI should not be adopted without safeguards that maintain humanistic values at the core of counselor education. Several panelists stressed that ethical implications should be embedded into training content, not treated as an afterthought.

"First and foremost, applications must be grounded in ethics." (Participant 2)

The use of AI in supervision and feedback, for instance, was seen as requiring clear ethical guardrails to avoid misuse or over-reliance on automated judgments.

Theme 3: AI-Driven Assessment & Automation. The final theme centered on the use of AI for assessment, diagnostics, and content generation, with subcategories including assessment and diagnostic support and automated content generation. Participants noted the potential for AI to assist faculty in tracking student progress, analyzing language in role-plays, and generating tailored learning content based on student needs. Participants also noted the support AI could provide in supporting students in identifying differential diagnoses.

"It can help with differential diagnoses and give a list of diagnoses to consider and rule out." (Participant 6)

Nonetheless, experts emphasized that these systems must remain under human oversight and should be designed with flexibility and transparency.

Statement Development for Domain 1. The insights within this domain were translated into 16 structured statements for Round 2 of the Delphi process. These statements reflected both enthusiasm and caution, emphasizing the complementary role of AI tools, the need for ethical safeguards, and the importance of retaining a human-centered approach in AI-enhanced assessment and supervision. The statements developed from this domain served to gauge expert consensus on how AI could best be applied in counselor education settings.

Domain 2: Challenges, Risks, & Ethical Concerns

The second domain, Challenges, Risks, and Ethical Concerns reflected participant apprehensions regarding the unintended consequences, ethical dilemmas, and broader systemic implications of integrating AI into counselor training. Analysis of responses within this domain revealed three central themes: Safeguarding Human-Centered Practice, Ensuring Equity and Inclusion, and Navigating Risks & Ethical Complexities. Together, these themes reflect an ardent desire among experts to preserve counseling's foundational values while navigating the uncertain terrain of technological innovation.

Theme 1: Safeguarding Human-Centered Practice. One of the most prominent concerns among participants was the potential erosion of humanistic and relational foundations in counselor education. Subcategories contributing to this theme included preserving humanistic foundations, ethical oversight and professional judgment, threats to student learning and development, and the idea of AI as a supportive tool rather than a central force. Participants expressed concern that AI, if not carefully implemented, could unintentionally de-emphasize the core interpersonal and relational dimensions that define the counseling profession.

"AI tools, while effective for skill development and assessment, cannot replicate the depth of human empathy, intuition, and the therapeutic relationship." (Participant 1)

Experts emphasized the need for ongoing human oversight, thoughtful supervision practices, and clear pedagogical guidelines to ensure AI remains aligned with counselor identity and values.

Theme 2: Ensuring Equity and Inclusion. Concerns about equity, access, and cultural responsiveness were also prominent. Subcategories here included bias, fairness, and cultural responsiveness, equity, access, and infrastructure, and digital fatigue and mental health concerns. Experts warned that AI tools could inadvertently reinforce systemic inequities particularly if trained on biased data or implemented without consideration of student diversity and institutional resource gaps.

"AI models are trained on data that may reflect societal biases, leading to inaccurate assessments or inequitable feedback, particularly for trainees or clients from marginalized backgrounds." (Participant 1)

Participants also highlighted the risks of digital fatigue, particularly among students already navigating complex technological demands, and called for more inclusive design processes.

Theme 3: Navigating Risks & Ethical Complexities. The final theme in this domain addressed broader ethical risks and sociopolitical concerns associated with AI in counselor training. Subcategories included data privacy and security and sociopolitical and labor implications. Experts expressed concern over how sensitive trainee and client data might be stored, processed, or repurposed in AI-driven platforms, particularly those developed by third-party vendors.

"Audio, video, and text from practicum sessions are highly sensitive. We must store them on encrypted servers, strip identifiers at upload, and set short retention windows." (Participant 6)

Panelists also noted larger societal implications, such as the potential for AI to reshape the labor landscape in mental health care or concentrate power among commercial stakeholders.

Statement Development for Domain 2. The rich and multifaceted insights from this domain were translated into 22 structured statements for Round 2 of the Delphi process. These statements focused on preserving relational integrity in training, digital divide concerns, mitigating systemic bias, and ensuring transparent data governance. Experts' nuanced views within this domain reflect a shared commitment to integrating AI in a manner that is not only innovative but also ethically grounded, equitable, and sustainable.

Domain 3: Best Practices for Ethical & Effective Implementation

The third domain, Best Practices for Ethical and Effective Implementation, captured expert perspectives on the standards, strategies, and institutional capacities required to integrate AI responsibly into counselor education. Analysis of responses within this domain resulted in three central themes: Centering Human Judgment & Values, Upholding Ethical & Equitable Standards, and Building Institutional Capacity & Competence. These themes emphasize that effective AI integration is not just about technology adoption, but about ensuring that implementation aligns with counseling's ethical, relational, and pedagogical foundations.

Theme 1: Centering Human Judgment & Values. Participants consistently stressed that AI tools must augment—not replace—human decision-making in counselor training. This theme is drawn from subcategories human oversight and accountability and human-centered practice, with respondents underscoring the importance of maintaining the counselor educator's vital role in supervision, evaluation, and ethical reflection.

"The key here is thinking of AI programs as tools. The humans have a responsibility of ensuring ethical teaching and research practices with any tools they use." (Participant 4)

This theme reflected a strong consensus that human values, critical thinking, and contextual judgment should remain at the heart of AI-enhanced training environments.

Theme 2: Upholding Ethical & Equitable Standards. This theme focused on maintaining ethical rigor and protecting the rights and dignity of students and clients. Subcategories contributing to this theme included data security and confidentiality, informed consent and ethical transparency, bias mitigation and equity, and ethical risk management. Participants emphasized the need for counselor education programs to adopt formal protocols for transparency around AI use, including how data is collected, stored, and analyzed.

"Transparency is essential, with clear policies ensuring trainees are informed about how AI is used, including data collection and its role in assessments, and obtaining informed consent before implementation. Protecting confidentiality is critical, requiring adherence to ethical and legal standards such as the ACA Code of Ethics, FERPA, and HIPAA, along with secure data handling and limited access to sensitive information." (Participant 1)

Experts also discussed the importance of regularly evaluating AI tools for bias and unintended consequences and advocated for routine ethical audits and clear risk mitigation plans.

Theme 3: Building Institutional Capacity & Competence. Participants highlighted the structural and systemic support needed for successful AI integration. Subcategories within this theme included training and literacy for AI use, institutional and professional guidelines, and iterative evaluation and piloting. Respondents noted that faculty, staff, and students often lack the training needed to use AI effectively and ethically, and that institutional readiness varies significantly across programs.

"Programs will need support. First, it is beneficial to host workshops on AI literacy for faculty and students, plus continuing-education credits for supervisors. Further, infrastructure

should be established by providing secure cloud storage, vetted open-source libraries, and funds for pilot studies and security audits." (Participant 6)

This theme also emphasized the importance of scaling AI responsibly, through phased implementation, pilot testing, and the creation of shared professional standards.

Statement Development for Domain 3. Findings from this domain were translated into 18 structured statements for Round 2 of the Delphi process. These statements addressed the importance of preserving human decision-making, formalizing ethical safeguards, and building institutional systems to support effective implementation. Together, they reflect a vision for AI integration that is intentional, ethical, and collaborative, grounded in the core values of the counseling profession and sensitive to the realities of training environments.

Domain 4: Future Research Needs in AI & Counselor Training

The fourth domain, Future Research Needs in AI and Counselor Training, captured expert perspectives on the empirical, pedagogical, and implementation-related gaps that must be addressed to responsibly integrate AI into counselor education. Analysis of participant responses in this domain resulted in three central themes: Empirical Gaps in Efficacy and Impact, Evolving Competencies and Pedagogical Uncertainty, and Ethical, Equitable, and Humanistic Integration. These themes reflect both an urgency to develop an evidence base for AI use and a call for research that aligns with counseling's relational and ethical foundations.

Theme 1: Empirical Gaps in Efficacy and Impact. Participants emphasized the lack of robust, empirical research on the use and outcomes of AI in counselor training. Subcategories within this theme included longitudinal and outcome research needs, evidence base and best practices, and AI's role in clinical applications. Experts expressed concern that much of the

current discourse on AI is speculative, with limited rigorous, counselor-education-specific studies to back it.

“Right now, there's a bunch of anecdotal discussions. Very little research simply describes what is happening right now. [There are] Research questions about efficacy of AI use in the classroom. AI is being applies, but does it work?” (Participant 2)

They called for longitudinal, mixed-methods research to better understand how AI influences student learning, skill acquisition, and long-term counselor effectiveness.

Theme 2: Evolving Competencies and Pedagogical Uncertainty. This theme addressed the need for deeper exploration of how AI is reshaping the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for future counselors—and how training programs should adapt. Subcategories included impact on counselor learning and competency, curriculum innovation and pedagogical shifts, and educator and learner readiness. Panelists noted that many training programs are unsure how to integrate AI meaningfully into their curricula without compromising existing standards or overburdening faculty.

“I have not seen too many counselor educators who are fully up to speed with AI and technology in general. Many counselor educators even seem somewhat tech-averse. I don't know of many counselor educators who really understand that AI is already here; I think there is going to be real catch-up needed.” (Participant 5)

This theme reflected a need for clarity in how AI intersects with CACREP standards, ethical competencies, and multicultural training frameworks.

Theme 3: Ethical, Equitable, and Humanistic Integration. Experts also called for research that investigates not just technical outcomes, but also the ethical, equitable, and relational dimensions of AI in training. This theme was shaped by subcategories including

humanistic integration in counselor training, infrastructure and resource barriers, and ethical considerations and evolving norms. Participants encouraged research into how AI can be integrated in ways that promote rather than undermine counselor identity, and how disparities in access to technology might affect student outcomes across institutions.

"We need to learn what training, workload adjustments, and decision aids help them integrate AI feedback without losing the human touch. (Participant 6)

There was a shared desire for research that blends technical evaluation with ethical inquiry, particularly in diverse and underserved educational contexts.

Statement Development for Domain 4. Insights from this domain were synthesized into 17 structured statements for Round 2 of the Delphi process. These statements addressed the need for longitudinal research, curricular innovation, faculty readiness, and ethical integration. Experts' responses emphasized that AI's future in counselor education depends not only on innovation, but on a parallel investment in thoughtful, evidence-informed inquiry that safeguards the integrity of the profession.

Domain 5: Long-Term Strategies and the Future of AI in Counseling

The fifth domain, Long-Term Strategies and the Future of AI in Counseling, reflected expert insights into the strategic planning, faculty development, and professional identity concerns associated with AI integration over the next decade. Analysis of responses in this domain produced three central themes: Evolving Applications of AI, Instructional Innovation and Institutional Readiness, and Safeguarding Ethical Standards and Professional Identity in AI Integration. These themes capture both the forward-looking optimism and the professional skepticism shared by participants as they considered the future landscape of counselor education.

Theme 1: Evolving Applications for AI. Participants discussed the potential for AI to reshape multiple dimensions of counselor education and practice. Subcategories contributing to this theme included AI capability and future projections. Experts envisioned a future where AI could support more complex training functions—such as nuanced feedback, supervision augmentation, or even elements of clinical judgment—while acknowledging that many of these projections remain speculative.

"Honestly, AI technology could look very different in five years, given its rapid growth. Perhaps, AI will sit quietly in the background of nearly every skills lab. Virtual clients will greet first-semester students, give consistent responses, and log each reflective statement for later review. Speech-to-text tools will break a practice session into talk-time ratios and question types, then suggest targeted drills." (Participant 6)

While some experts were enthusiastic about long-term possibilities, others emphasized the importance of maintaining a realistic, measured outlook, grounded in research and professional standards.

Theme 2: Instructional Innovation and Institutional Readiness. This theme focused on preparing educational systems, faculty, and infrastructure to support AI adoption over time. Subcategories included training enhancements, AI literacy and faculty development, and implementation and infrastructure. Experts called for investments in faculty training, updates to program curricula, and long-term infrastructure planning to ensure that institutions are equipped to engage with AI in sustainable and scalable ways.

"Future guidelines should also support AI literacy for both counselor educators and trainees. This includes providing ongoing training on interpreting AI-generated feedback, recognizing AI's limitations, and fostering critical reflection to maintain professional judgment." (Participant 1)

There was broad agreement that long-term planning—including pilot programs, resource allocation, and strategic partnerships—would be essential for effective integration.

Theme 3: Safeguarding Ethical Standards & Professional Identity in AI Integration. A final, recurring concern related to how AI might reshape counselor identity and the values that define the profession. Subcategories here included ethical and legal considerations and skepticism and professional identity. While experts acknowledged AI's potential to enhance aspects of training, they expressed concern about how technology might shift perceptions of what it means to be a counselor or how the profession communicates its core values to trainees. "I suspect we will see outcomes research comparing counselors versus medication benefits versus AI. If or when AI shows comparable outcomes, then the implications could be significant for insurance reimbursement and even employment opportunities. We should develop a living document of best practices to ensure their proper implementation. We should continue to advocate for the importance and special role of counselors for mental health care." (Participant 2)

This theme emphasized the need to proactively define ethical boundaries and professional norms as AI capabilities evolve, so that the counselor's role remains grounded in empathy, reflection, and human connection.

Statement Development for Domain 5. Participant insights from this domain were synthesized into 22 structured statements for Round 2 of the Delphi process. These statements addressed long-term visioning, the role of faculty development and infrastructure investment, and the preservation of counselor identity in an AI-integrated future. Collectively, they reflect a call for initiative-taking, cultural alignment, and ethical foresight in shaping the long-term direction of AI in counselor education.

Round 2: Statement Ratings

All six participants completed the second-round survey. In this round, participants rated 95 statements derived from the content analysis of open-ended responses in Round 1. These statements were assessed using the 7-point Likert scale, and consensus was defined as a priori as a median score of 6 or higher with an interquartile range (IQR) of 1.0 or less. Of the 95 statements rated in Round 2, 63 met the defined consensus criteria and were retained for the final set of endorsed statements. Because consensus had been achieved, these items were not included in the third-round survey. The remaining 32 statements did not meet consensus and were subject to further review. Of these, four were removed from the study entirely due to consensus around disagreement—indicated by a median below the threshold and an IQR of 1.0—suggesting shared skepticism or rejection of the item's premise among panelists.

The remaining 28 statements were carried forward to Round 3. These items were divided into two categories based on participant feedback. Fourteen statements were revised based on participant comments that indicated how the item could be improved for clarity, relevance, or conceptual alignment. For each of these, the Round 3 survey presented the original statement, a summary of Round 2 ratings (including the median and IQR), a brief rationale for the revision grounded in participant feedback, and the revised version for panelist review and re-rating. The remaining 13 statements were re-sent without modification; while these items had not yet met consensus, the participant feedback did not suggest specific changes, and the intention was to allow for reflection and potential convergence in Round 3 by providing summary statistics alone.

Round 3: Final Consensus

All six participants completed the third and final round questionnaire of the Delphi study. This round focused on 28 remaining statements that either did not meet consensus in Round 2 or

were revised based on participant feedback. At the conclusion of Round 3, seven additional statements met the predetermined consensus criteria (median ≥ 6 and interquartile range ≤ 1.0). Interestingly, four of these seven statements were associated with the first domain, Key Applications in Counselor Training. This brought the total number of consensus statements across all three rounds to 70. These final consensus items reinforced and refined themes identified in earlier rounds, providing further clarity on expert perspectives related to the benefits, challenges, ethical considerations, and implementation strategies for AI integration in counselor training.

Discussion

The purpose of this Delphi study was to explore expert consensus on the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in counselor training, focusing on its potential applications, ethical considerations, implementation strategies, and long-term implications. A three-round Delphi process involving six expert panelists yielded 70 consensus statements. These findings provide a nuanced understanding of both the opportunities and limitations associated with AI integration in counselor education and offer strategic recommendations for future development.

Interpretation of Key Findings

Across all domains, the panelists acknowledged the potential benefits of AI, particularly in areas like experiential learning through simulations and personalized learning and support. However, for each potential benefit, there were concerns and challenges related to oversight, potential biases, and potential consequences to counselor educators, counselors in training, or clients. The general sense was that fear and excitement were both present for each of the panelists as they considered the transformative power of AI. The panelists advocated for wielding the power of AI in counselor training with moderation and balance.

The most pervasive theme across all five domains was concern for preserving the humanistic core of the counselor identity. Panelists consistently expressed fears of AI impacting the therapeutic relationship, supervision relationships, impacting the classroom experience, and student development all in part due to a shift away from the humanistic approach. The findings suggest any meaningful AI integration must align with the values and identity of the profession at the organizational, program, counselor educator, and counselor trainee level. A takeaway from this is counselor educators will be charged with serving as the gatekeepers of the counseling professional identity.

Experts repeatedly emphasized that successful integration of AI is contingent on institutional readiness and systemic support. Without adequate infrastructure, training, and policy development, AI adoption risks becoming fragmented, inequitable, or even unethical. The findings point to a need for faculty development programs, investment in secure and accessible tools, and ongoing ethical audits. Panelists also described the necessity of shared standards for transparency, informed consent, and data privacy, particularly as external vendors play a growing role in educational technology. Counselor education programs cannot approach AI integration as an isolated curriculum change; rather, it requires whole-system alignment.

Participants emphasized the paucity of empirical research on AI in counselor training. Most current discourse is theoretical, speculative, or anecdotal. The panel called for studies that examine learning outcomes, faculty and student experiences, and long-term impacts on counselor development. In particular, there was a strong desire for mixed-methods and longitudinal research that could offer practical, generalizable insights. This mirrors the evidence-based orientation of the counseling profession more broadly and reflects a discomfort with adopting

tools in the absence of robust outcome data. If AI is to gain legitimacy in counselor education, it must be accompanied by a parallel investment in empirical research.

Finally, concerns around access, bias, and systemic inequity permeated each domain. Experts highlighted the risks of reinforcing existing disparities through biased algorithms, uneven access to technology, or insufficient attention to digital fatigue. The emphasis on cultural responsiveness and inclusion reflects a broader movement within counselor education toward justice-oriented training. Importantly, this framing was not restricted to ethical critiques but extended into best practice recommendations: inclusive design, equitable infrastructure, and transparency in decision-making. These findings suggest that equity is not a separate concern from AI integration but a foundational element of its ethical implementation.

Comparison to Existing Literature

This study builds on prior research exploring AI in general education and healthcare settings but fills a critical gap in counselor education literature. While earlier studies have focused on the pedagogical benefits of AI (Ray, 2023; Crawford et al., 2023), few have examined its alignment—or misalignment—with counseling's core values. This study's emphasis on human-centered design, equitable implementation, and ethical safeguards echoes the caution expressed by Maurya (2023) and Maurya and DeDiego (2023), while also offering actionable guidance for implementation.

Additionally, this study confirms prior calls for clearer professional guidelines, as few existing counselor education frameworks address AI (Jeon & Lee, 2023). Expert participants advocated for professional organizations such as CACREP and ACA to develop position statements, ethical codes, and training resources specific to AI use in counselor training. This

expands upon existing scholarship by identifying not only the what and why of AI integration, but also the how.

Surprising & Divergent Results

In much the same way what is not talked about in therapy can be revealing, what was absent from consensus in this study proved equally significant as what was affirmed. One unexpected finding was the lack of consensus regarding the use of AI in supervision. Although panelists expressed comfort with classroom and experiential applications of AI, they hesitated to endorse its use in supervisory contexts. This reluctance may stem from concerns about overreliance on technology or fears that AI could diminish the human connection essential to supervision. However, this area appears ripe for thoughtful innovation, as AI has the potential to offer trainees real-time feedback, enhance reflection, and support supervisor workload without replacing the relational core of supervision. Another area of divergence was the use of AI to support cultural humility and competence.

Given the complexities of addressing multicultural dynamics in training, one might expect enthusiasm for tools that could offer consistency, objectivity, and broader exposure to diverse perspectives. Yet panelists did not reach consensus on this topic, perhaps due to skepticism about whether AI—often trained on biased datasets—can appropriately model or reinforce culturally responsive practices. Still, there may be untapped potential for AI to serve as a nonjudgmental platform for students to receive feedback and engage with sensitive topics in ways that reduce fear of interpersonal evaluation or missteps.

Notably, participants did not comment on AI generated clinical notes when responding to the questionnaires. Some clinical software platforms (e.g., SimplePractice) offer this as a clinical helpmate. The omission of this AI application may simply be an oversite or it may reflect a lack

of knowledge of this AI tool in current practice. If participants were unaware of this AI helpmate, this may suggest the importance for counselor educators to maintain their state counseling license and concurrently counsel clients and/or supervise license seeking counselors to stay abreast with AI technologies being used in the field.

A final surprise was the limited discussion about generational divides in AI adoption. Differences in digital fluency and attitudes toward technology between faculty and students—and even among faculty themselves—are likely to create tension in program implementation. Some educators may resist integrating AI altogether, while others may embrace it fully, potentially leading to inconsistencies in student learning experiences and institutional expectations. This gap may be further compounded by incoming students who arrive with strong AI literacy and expectations for its integration. If counselor education programs do not proactively develop training that aligns with evolving technological trends, graduates may enter the workforce either underprepared or misusing AI tools, with implications for ethical practice and client outcomes.

Implications for Counselor Education

These findings suggest that artificial intelligence, if approached with intentionality, thoughtfulness, and care, has the potential to revolutionize counselor education. Across all three Delphi rounds, there was strong consensus that AI tools can be most impactful when used to enhance experiential learning and provide personalized feedback. For example, AI-powered simulations and role-play agents offer opportunities for students to develop core clinical skills early in their training and to engage with increasingly complex client scenarios before encountering them in practice, thereby supporting student growth and client safety. Although skills-based courses present the most immediate use cases, participants also noted that other

traditionally less experiential courses, such as assessment and multicultural counseling, can benefit from AI applications. These tools enable low-risk, high-feedback learning environments and can help address persistent gaps in course design by simulating diverse scenarios, perspectives, and diagnostic challenges. Counselor education programs should view AI not as a tool for a select few courses, but as a resource with the potential to enrich the curriculum more broadly through scalable, personalized learning experiences.

Nevertheless, the risks associated with AI integration demand equal attention. Participants expressed clear concerns about the potential erosion of humanistic and relational foundations, the risk of overreliance on automated systems, and challenges related to privacy, bias, and accountability. These concerns must be addressed directly within program curricula, including through course syllabi, structured debriefing, and transparent communication about AI's limitations and proper use. Programs should not only integrate AI with care but also explicitly teach students how to critically evaluate and appropriately disengage from AI outputs when necessary. Counselor education programs must ensure that all AI use aligns with ethical standards such as the ACA Code of Ethics, FERPA, and HIPAA, and that students are trained to critically engage with AI-generated feedback. Transparent communication around data privacy, system limitations, and appropriate use is essential to protect both student learning and client welfare.

Programs must also invest in AI literacy across all levels of training. This includes offering faculty development opportunities, workshops for students, and curricular content that demystifies AI tools, explains their limitations, and fosters critical reflection. Without adequate training, there is a risk of overreliance, misuse, or inequitable implementation, particularly if only some faculty or programs have the capacity to meaningfully engage with these tools.

Finally, institutions must develop clear policies and oversight structures to guide AI implementation. These policies should define appropriate use cases, safeguard against bias, ensure data privacy, and establish clear lines of responsibility when AI systems are used in training or supervision. Participants also highlighted equity concerns, noting that well-resourced programs may be better positioned to adopt and benefit from AI, potentially widening existing disparities. As such, counselor education programs, accrediting bodies, and professional associations must prioritize accessibility and fairness when developing AI-related competencies, guidelines, and infrastructure support.

Limitations

While this study offers timely insights into the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in counselor training, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the Delphi method, while well-suited for exploring expert consensus in emerging fields, relies on the subjective judgments of a small, purposefully selected panel. The six experts who participated in this study were selected for their relevant experience and scholarship, but their perspectives may not represent the full diversity of thought within counselor education, particularly from underrepresented institutional types or international contexts. As such, the findings should be interpreted as a reflection of expert consensus among a specific, well-informed group, rather than generalizable to all counselor educators. Second, the sample size, while consistent with Delphi methodology standards, limits the breadth of perspectives included. A larger panel might have produced additional variation in viewpoints or surfaced competing priorities that this study did not capture.

Third, the rapid evolution of AI tools and practices presents a challenge for maintaining the relevance of the findings over time. Given the pace of technological advancement, some applications discussed by participants may become outdated, while new innovations may raise

ethical and pedagogical questions not considered in this study. Additionally, while efforts were made to minimize researcher bias through an audit trail and peer debriefing, a single researcher conducted the qualitative coding and theme development. Although a structured and transparent process was used, alternate interpretations of participant responses are possible. Future studies may benefit from multi-coder triangulation or external validation to strengthen analytic rigor.

Finally, although the study explored implications for practice, pedagogy, ethics, and research, the Delphi process is inherently limited in its ability to assess or measure real-world effectiveness. The statements generated through this process are intended to inform reflection, policy development, and future research, rather than prescribe definitive practices. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study contributes meaningfully to a growing body of literature exploring AI in counselor education and offers a foundation for further empirical and applied inquiry.

Future Research Directions

This study highlights several areas that warrant future research. First, empirical studies are needed to assess the actual efficacy of AI tools in counselor training, particularly their impact on student learning, supervision outcomes, and long-term professional development. Longitudinal, mixed-methods research could provide valuable insight into how AI tools shape counselor identity and competency over time. Second, future research should explore the role of AI in multicultural and equity-centered training. There is a need for critical inquiry into how AI tools can be designed, implemented, and evaluated in ways that address systemic bias and promote cultural responsiveness. Third, implementation research is needed to evaluate how counselor education programs adopt AI on a scale, including analysis of institutional readiness, faculty buy-in, and student experiences. Comparative case studies could yield best practices for

integrating AI tools across diverse institutional contexts. Comparing AI, student, and faculty performance across tasks will help reveal the technology's strengths, limitations, blindspots, and where humans still excel. Finally, further Delphi studies could help identify emerging competencies required for future counselors in an AI-integrated world. As the profession evolves, these competencies will inform curriculum development, accreditation standards, and professional development pathways.

Conclusion

This Delphi study offers timely insight into how artificial intelligence (AI) can be thoughtfully and ethically integrated into counselor education. Through a rigorous three-round consensus process involving expert voices in counselor training and AI, the findings highlight both the promise and complexity of this evolving technological landscape. Panelists identified key opportunities for AI to enhance experiential learning, real-time feedback, and administrative efficiency, while also underscoring critical concerns around ethics, data privacy, cultural responsiveness, and the preservation of humanistic counseling values.

The study's consensus-driven results affirm that AI can be a powerful tool in counselor education—if used intentionally, with appropriate oversight, and guided by clearly defined ethical standards. Importantly, participants emphasized that AI must serve as a supportive aid, not a substitute, for human judgment, relationship-building, and clinical skill development. These findings provide a roadmap for counselor educators, academic programs, and professional organizations seeking to adapt to emerging technologies without compromising the core values of the profession.

By surfacing areas of consensus across application, risk, implementation, research, and long-term strategy, this study contributes a foundational framework for navigating AI's role in

counselor training. As the field moves forward, continued research, iterative program development, and collaborative policy-making will be essential to ensure that AI is leveraged in ways that advance both counselor competence and client well-being.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Informed Consent

Title of the Study: Building a Framework for AI in Counselor Training: A Delphi Study

Principal Investigator: Joel Diambra
University of Tennessee
Email: jdiambra@utk.edu
Phone: 865-414-3356

Co-PI: Robert Lange, Ph.D. Candidate
University of Tennessee
Email: rlange2@vols.utk.edu
Phone: 410-858-0274

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

We are asking you to be in this research study because you meet expert panel criteria for a Delphi study investigating AI in counselor training.

What is this research study about?

The purpose of this research study is to build consensus among experts on the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in counselor training. This research study aims to identify the potential applications, challenges, and ethical considerations of AI in the field, as well as to develop actionable guidelines and strategies for its effective and ethical implementation. This research study uses Delphi methodology, which involves multiple rounds of surveys to gather and refine expert opinions.

Who is conducting this research study?

This research study is being conducted by Joel Diambra (Principal Investigator) and Robert Lange (Co-PI), researchers from the University of Tennessee.

How long will I be in the research study?

If you agree to be in the study, your participation will last approximately 2 months and will involve completing a demographic questionnaire and three online surveys. Each survey will take approximately 20-40 minutes to complete.

What will happen if I say "Yes, I want to be in this research study"?

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to complete three rounds of an online questionnaire. The questionnaire will be sent to an email address you provide, and you will have up to two weeks to complete the requested information. All participant information and responses will be kept in a password protected online folder to which only the primary researcher has access.

What happens if I say "No, I do not want to be in this research study"?

Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study later. Either way, your decision won't affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Tennessee.

What if I say "Yes" but change my mind later?

Even if you decide to be in the research study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time.
If you decide to stop before the research study is completed, you can contact the research investigators, and they will remove your data from all analyses.

Are there any possible risks to me?

It is unlikely that participating in this research study will pose any risks to you. It is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but we believe this risk is small because of the procedures we use to protect your information. These procedures are described later in this form.

Are there any benefits to being in this research study?

Your participation may help us to learn more about the best way to integrate AI in counselor training which may in turn benefit you. We hope the knowledge gained from this research study will also benefit others in the future.

Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?

Informed consent and all other documentation collected during this research study will be kept in a password protected online folder to which only the primary researcher has access. The key code that identifies participants will be kept separate from the other research collected. Only the primary researcher will have access to this material during and after the research study.

We will protect the confidentiality of your information by assigning your survey responses to a unique research identification code. The identification code will be kept separate from the other research collected. Only the primary researcher will have access to this material during and after the study.

If information from this research study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information we collect about you. These include:

- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly.
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research.
- If a law or court requires us to share the information, we would have to follow that law or final court ruling.
- Business offices at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville may be given your name, address, Social Security Number, payment amount and related information to issue your payment and report tax information.

What will happen to my information after this research study is over?
We will not keep your information to use for future research or other purposes. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be kept secure and stored separately from your research data collected as part of the research study. After three years, all research materials will be destroyed. We will not share your research data with other researchers.
Will I be paid for being in this research study?
All participants who participate in this research study will receive up to a $33 electronic Amazon gift card. Participants will receive a $5 Amazon gift card for completing round one and $10 for completing round two of the research study. If they complete all three rounds, they will receive an additional $18 Amazon gift card for a maximum total of $33. Gift cards will be issued via email after the data collection process has been completed. Participants will be required to provide information including name and email address, so that the gift card may be purchased and delivered.
What else do I need to know?
About 5-15 people will take part in this research study. Because of the small number of participants in this research study, it is possible that someone could identify you based on the information we collected from you. The procedures described above will help reduce this risk.
Who can answer my questions about this research study?
If you have questions or concerns about this research study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the primary researcher, Bobby Lange rlange2@vols.utk.edu, 410-858-0274, or faculty advisor, Joel F. Diambra, jdiambra@utk.edu, 865-414-3356. For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the research study, please contact: Institutional Review Board The University of Tennessee, Knoxville 1534 White Avenue Blount Hall, Room 408 Knoxville, TN 37996-1529 Phone: 865-974-7697 Email: utkirb@utk.edu
STATEMENT OF CONSENT
I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have more questions, I

have been told who to contact. By signing this document, I am agreeing to be in this research study. I will receive a copy of this document after I sign it.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Adult Participant	Signature of Adult Participant	Date

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Recruitment Letter

Subject Line: Invitation to Participate in a Research Study on AI in Counselor Training

Dear [Recipient's Name],

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Robert Lange, and I am a Ph.D. candidate in Counselor Education at the University of Tennessee and Joel F. Diambra is serving as my dissertation chair. I am conducting a Delphi study to explore the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in counselor training. This study aims to identify potential applications, challenges, and ethical considerations of AI, and to develop actionable strategies and guidelines for its effective implementation.

Your expertise in [counselor education/AI development/policymaking] uniquely positions you to contribute valuable insights to this important topic. The study will involve three rounds of surveys conducted online over a two-month period. Each survey will take approximately 20–30 minutes to complete, and your responses will remain confidential and anonymized. All participants who participate in this research study will receive up to a $33 electronic Amazon gift card. Participants will receive a $5 Amazon gift card for completing round one and $10 for completing round two of the research study. If they complete all three rounds, they will receive an additional $18 Amazon gift card for a maximum total of $33. Gift cards will be issued via email after the data collection process has been completed.

Eligibility Criteria:

To participate, you must meet the following criteria:

- Demonstrated expertise through publications, conference presentations, or leadership roles.
- Availability to complete three rounds of surveys over the next two months.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. By participating, you will help advance understanding in this emerging area of research and contribute to the development of guidelines that align with the relational and humanistic values of counselor training.

If you are interested in participating, please click on the following link to this brief eligibility survey & informed consent document or reply to this email by [insert deadline], and I will provide additional details, including the informed consent form, eligibility survey and instructions for the first survey.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to contribute to this important work. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at rlange2@vols.utk.edu.

Sincerely,

Robert Lange

Ph.D. Candidate, Counselor Education

University of Tennessee

Appendix C: Round 1 Questionnaire

Round 1 Questions

1. Key Applications of AI in Counselor Training

- What are the most promising applications of AI in counselor training (e.g., simulation, feedback, assessment), and how can they enhance counseling competencies while aligning with the profession's humanistic and relational values?

2. Challenges, Risks, and Ethical Concerns

- What are the major challenges, risks, or ethical concerns (e.g., bias, data privacy, over-reliance on AI) that may arise when integrating AI into counselor education? How might these be addressed?

3. Best Practices for Ethical and Effective Implementation

- What best practices should guide the ethical and effective use of AI in counselor training, and what training, policies, or resources are needed to support its responsible implementation?

4. Future Research Needs in AI & Counselor Training

- What gaps exist in our understanding of AI's role in counselor training, and what future research is needed to support its ethical and effective use?

5. Long-Term Strategies and the Future of AI in Counseling

- How do you envision the role of AI evolving in counselor training over the next 5-10 years, and what guidelines or strategies should be developed to ensure its responsible and sustainable implementation?

Appendix D: Second Round Questionnaire

Second Round Questions Based on Themes

Round 2 Survey

Instructions:

Welcome to Round 2 of the Delphi Study on AI in Counselor Training

Thank you for continuing your participation in this Delphi study, which explores the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in counselor education and training. Based on your input and the input of other experts in Round 1, we have developed a series of statements that reflect key themes and ideas from the first round.

In this round, you will be asked to:
1. Rate your level of agreement with each statement using a 7-point scale (from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) with 7 indicating strongly agree and 1 indicating strongly disagree.
2. Optionally provide feedback or suggested edits to clarify, revise, or expand each statement.

The statements are grouped into five sections, each aligned with one of the guiding research questions. There are around 20 items per section.

The survey should take approximately 25–30 minutes to complete.

Your responses will help identify consensus and refine priorities for future training, policy, and research.

Please answer each item independently, even if some statements may appear similar across sections. If you have any questions or need to pause and return later, you may do so at any time.

Thank you again for your time and contributions.

Section 1: Applications of AI in Counselor Training

AI-driven simulation tools can effectively enhance skill-building in counselor training.

[ ] Strongly Disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Somewhat Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Somewhat Agree [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree

Comments:

Personalized feedback from AI systems can complement traditional supervision methods.

[ ] Strongly Disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Somewhat Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Somewhat Agree [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree

Comments:

Section 2: Challenges and Barriers

3. Stakeholder resistance to AI integration is a significant barrier in counselor training programs.

[ ] Strongly Disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Somewhat Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Somewhat Agree [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree

Comments:

Ensuring data privacy in AI systems is critical for ethical implementation in counselor training.

[ ] Strongly Disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Somewhat Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Somewhat Agree [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree

Comments:

Section 3: Ethical Considerations and Strategies

5. AI systems must be designed to avoid algorithmic bias to ensure cultural competence in counselor training.

[ ] Strongly Disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Somewhat Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Somewhat Agree [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree

Comments:

Guidelines for AI use in counselor training should emphasize its role as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, traditional methods.

[ ] Strongly Disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Somewhat Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Somewhat Agree [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree

Comments:

Appendix E: Third Round Questionnaire

Round 3 Survey

Instructions:

Introduction to Round 3 of the Delphi Study

Thank you again for your thoughtful contributions to this Delphi study on the integration of AI in counselor education. Your insights have been instrumental in shaping a more nuanced understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and ethical considerations in this emerging area.

This is the final round of the study. In Round 2, participants rated a series of statements developed from Round 1 themes. Based on those responses, we identified which items showed strong agreement and which items lacked clear consensus.

In this final round, you will see two types of statements:

-Revised statements, which were updated based on your feedback from Round 2.

-Unchanged statements, which are being presented again to see if additional reflection leads to more clarity or convergence.

Each item includes summary statistics, and the revised statements also include a brief rationale explaining why changes were made based on feedback from the previous round to support your reflection. You'll be asked to rate your agreement with each statement and may also leave optional feedback if you have additional thoughts or wish to explain your response.

Please note: The goal of this process is not to force consensus. Your disagreements are just as valuable as your agreements when considering the next steps with the integration of AI in counselor education. Thank you again for sharing your time and expertise.

Section 1: Applications of AI in Counselor Training

AI-driven simulation tools can effectively enhance skill-building in counselor training.

[ ] Strongly Disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Somewhat Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Somewhat Agree [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree

Section 2: Challenges and Barriers

2. Stakeholder resistance to AI integration is a significant barrier in counselor training programs.

[ ] Strongly Disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Somewhat Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Somewhat Agree [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree

Section 3: Ethical Considerations and Strategies

3. AI systems must be designed to avoid algorithmic bias to ensure cultural competence in counselor training.

[ ] Strongly Disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Somewhat Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Somewhat Agree [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree

Additional Comments:

Please use the space below to provide any final comments or suggestions regarding the statements or overall themes of this study.

Appendix F: CESNET Message

Call for Participants: Help Shape the Future of AI in Counselor Training

Are you an **expert in counselor education, AI development, or policymaking**? Your insights are needed for a research study on the integration of **Artificial Intelligence (AI) in counselor training**.

I'm **Robert Lange**, a Ph.D. candidate at the **University of Tennessee**, conducting a **Delphi study** to explore AI applications, challenges, and ethical considerations in counselor education. The goal is to develop guidelines that align with the relational and humanistic values of the counseling profession.

Who We're Looking For:

- Professionals with expertise in demonstrated through publications, conference presentations, or leadership roles
- Availability to complete **three short online surveys** over the next two months (**20–30 minutes per round**)

Why Participate?

- Contribute to research on AI in counselor education
- Help shape ethical and effective AI integration in training programs
- Receive up to a **$33 Amazon gift card** for completing all survey rounds

How to Join:

If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please follow this link to a brief eligibility survey & the informed consent document, comment below, send a message, or email **rlange2@vols.utk.edu**.

#CounselorEducation #AIinCounseling #ResearchStudy #ArtificialIntelligence #MentalHealthTech #CounselingEthics #EdTech

Vita

Bobby Lange currently serves as the Associate Director of Career Coaching for Full Time MBA students at the Rady School of Management at the University of California, San Diego. His journey has taken him across the East Coast, beginning with a bachelor's degree in psychology from James Madison University in Virginia, followed by professional roles at the UNC School of the Arts and graduate study in counseling at Wake Forest University. He then pursued a Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision at the University of Tennessee. Throughout his academic and professional experiences, Bobby has found deep fulfillment in helping others grow, discover their paths, and navigate meaningful transitions. In his current role in sunny San Diego, he supports high-performing MBA students as they prepare to make a positive impact on the world. He looks forward to continuing his own growth and contributing as a leader in the field of education.