

Perceptions of Interprofessional Collaboration among Taiwanese School Mental Health Trainers

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As Taiwan increasingly focuses on interprofessional collaboration (IC) in school mental health (SMH) services, understanding the perspectives of university trainers is vital. These trainers are instrumental in shaping the next generation of SMH professionals. To gain insight into their experiences, observations, beliefs, and visions regarding IC training and practice, a qualitative study was conducted, which involved virtual interviews with seven Taiwanese university trainers and employed directed qualitative content analysis to interpret the data. Four major, interconnected themes were examined and identified: (a) the current state of IC practices, (b) within-professional barriers, (c) systemic challenges, and (d) recommendations for fostering IC. The participants unanimously recognized the significance of IC in enabling SMH professionals to work effectively within integrated school-based teams. The study not only deepened our understanding of the hurdles and facilitators of IC in Taiwan, but also informed professional development initiatives to improve its implementation. Additionally, the findings led to the development of practical strategies and research directions for sustainable advancements in the psychological and practical facets of IC.

Keywords: interprofessional collaboration, interdisciplinary education, school mental health, school-based practices

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The complexity of symptoms and comorbidities in healthcare, along with their associated treatments, underscores the vital importance of effective teamwork (McLaughlin et al., 2020). This makes interprofessional collaboration (IC) an essential approach for optimal management and service delivery (Tataw, 2011). Bronstein (2003) articulates IC as “an effective interpersonal process that facilitates the achievement of goals unattainable by individual professionals working independently” (p. 299). Addressing each client’s unique needs demands seamless communication and collaboration among professional service providers (Mellin et al., 2011). Recognizing its significance, numerous countries, including the U.S., Japan, Germany, and Australia, have intensified their focus on IC in both professional training and practices over the last decade (Ansa et al., 2020; Bradley-Klug et al., 2013; Haruta et al., 2018; Mink et al., 2021; Sudeshika et al., 2023).

IC has been deeply embedded in Western school mental health (SMH) systems (Barrett et al., 2013; Mellin et al., 2011; Splett et al., 2017). Splett et al. (2017) detail the integral components of IC, emphasizing data-driven decision-making and the application of evidence-based practices. This conceptual framework for SMH prioritizes team building, functionality, and importantly, incorporates families and community service providers to address a variety of student mental health and behavioral concerns with better integrated services (Lazarus et al., 2022). It is also pivotal to routinely evaluate systemic IC implementations to ensure strategic planning and attainment of collective goals. Studies indicate that adept IC can foster a more comprehensive service delivery and yield favorable student outcomes (Bates et al., 2019; Splett et al., 2017). For example, Bates et al. (2019) conducted a mixed-methods analysis on four Title I elementary schools. Their findings revealed that efficient collaboration between SMH professionals and community-based mental health service providers resulted in enhanced academic, behavioral, and mental well-being among students.

Barriers to IC in Schools

While the effective implementation of IC can yield positive outcomes both individually and systemically (e.g., Bates et al., 2019), various practical and psychological obstacles can hinder successful teaming (Mellin et al., 2011; Mendenhall et al., 2013; Tataw, 2011). Fan and Trotter (2021) conducted a mixed methods study using guest lecture series during the COVID-19 pandemic and identified several barriers to IC among SMH professionals (i.e., a school counselor, a social worker, a special education teacher, and a physical and an occupational therapist). The identified barriers encompassed (a) time constraints, (b) gaps in knowledge, (c) divergent theoretical orientations, (d) role overlap and ambiguity, and (e) trust deficits. The results echoed earlier literature and data review findings in Tataw (2011) regarding team members’ territorial behavior, lack of IC training and leadership support, as well as role boundary conflicts for effective team practices.

Weist et al. (2012) highlight the systemic marginalization of SMH, often misconceived as merely an auxiliary service rather than integral to student academic achievement. This marginalization is compounded by a mismatch between the actual student-to-service provider ratios and those recommended by national professional organizations (e.g., school counseling, psychology, and social work). Such discrepancies limit the service roles that SMH professionals can effectively undertake. Moreover, key educational figures, like school principals and special education directors, may lack clarity about the specific expertise domains of SMH professionals (Weist et al., 2012). For instance, misconceptions persist, such as the beliefs that school psychologists solely handle special education evaluations and school counselors only provide academic advisement (Fan & Trotter, 2021).

Fazel et al. (2023) further underscore challenges in IC, noting the ambiguity of responsibilities, such as consent, confidentiality, and follow-up across the spectrum of services provided by school educators and SMH professionals, whether they operate within or outside schools. Such nebulousness in job roles could arise from overlapping professional training, as seen in professions like school counseling and school

psychology. This overlap may also inadvertently stoke fears concerning job security or spur unhealthy competition within school-based teams (Hsing et al., 2021; Weist et al., 2012). In conclusion, the barriers frequently encountered in SMH implementation (e.g., insufficient infrastructure, time constraints, turf wars) pose significant challenges to translating evidence-based research into practical application (Mendenhall et al., 2013). These obstacles must be proactively identified and addressed to ensure the best collaboration outcomes.

Development of IC in Taiwan

In recent years, the emphasis on communication and collaboration between SMH professionals in Taiwan has seen a significant surge (Chao & Chan, 2017; Chiang et al., 2020; Hsing et al., 2020; Juang & Wang, 2020; Yu et al., 2024). Roughly a decade ago, Taiwanese government introduced a three-tiered SMH service delivery framework within the Student Guidance and Counseling Act (SGCA, 2014). This mandate requires school administrators, teachers, counselors, and other mental health service providers to collectively shoulder the responsibility of offering preventive measures for all students, and specific interventions for those requiring additional support in their socio-emotional learning and resilience. Furthermore, schools have the provision to engage external SMH professionals, such as licensed clinical psychologists, counseling psychologists, or social workers, for student guidance and counseling services (Fan et al., 2021). Consequently, robust team collaboration is anticipated to enhance student mental well-being, resilience, and foster positive student-adult relationships.

However, recent Taiwanese literature indicates the emergence of several challenges. Hsing et al. (2020) identified three primary barriers thwarting effective IC in the Taiwanese education system. They are (a) apprehension over increased workload, (b) an inadequacy of pre-service training related to IC, and (c) navigational challenges within the system as to dealing with individuals or mechanisms. For many, incorporating IC to boost SMH is perceived as an additional burden, intensifying demands and stress for school educators. This often clashes with the traditional ethos of “letting things slide to avoid trouble” rooted in their beliefs system. Furthermore, when considering pre-service training for IC, Taiwanese university curricula often fall short in preparing SMH professionals for school-based consultation and systemic collaboration (Hsu & Hsing, 2019). As a result, many Taiwanese SMH professionals might find themselves in unfamiliar territory, resorting to a “trial-and-error” methodology within educational systems (Fan et al., 2021). Hsing et al. thus advocate for transparent interprofessional dialogue and consistent training to deepen the comprehension and subsequent adoption of the IC framework.

Chiang et al. (2020) investigated the links between professional role stress and job satisfaction among 485 school counselors in Taiwan, while also examining the mediating role of IC facilitated by the aforementioned external SMH professionals (Fan et al., 2021). The concept and implementation of IC were gauged based on three key components: (a) collaborative and emotional support provided by the SMH professionals, (b) professional assistance provided by the SMH professionals, and (c) effective engagement of SMH professionals in team efforts. The quantitative analysis results revealed that IC had a significantly positive impact on job satisfaction. Furthermore, the perceived role stress arising from overlapping responsibilities as a guidance teacher and an SMH professional, combined with an unmanageable workload, exerted a significantly negative influence on the school counselors’ participation in IC. Consequently, addressing the current role stress experienced by school counselors through efficient IC practices may lead to an enhancement in their job satisfaction.

Seeking to bolster interprofessional cognizance and communication, Juang and Wang (2020) conducted a case study that underscored the significance of IC. The study spotlighted the insights and reflections of two university trainers from distinct theoretical orientations (school counseling and special education). It stands as one of Taiwan’s pioneering studies delving into university trainers’ viewpoints on how genuine mutual comprehension of collaborative intentions can enhance SMH service delivery. Notably, the authors

debunk misconceptions about behavioral interventions in SMH, like the presumed undermining of an individual's intrinsic motivation. They emphasize that, regardless of theoretical stances, the overarching aim remains fostering lasting life transformations and wellness. In sum, it is hoped that the insights from these studies will pave a way for more vibrant IC dialogues and discussions in Taiwan.

IC Education

Western studies have indicated that interdisciplinary education can help surmount the challenges to effective collaboration for SMH services, particularly for professionals who may lack comprehension of school dynamics, educational systems, and related legislation (Fazel et al., 2023; Heatly et al., 2023; Splett et al., 2017; Weist et al., 2012). For example, Heatly et al. (2023) presented a school-centric learning model comprising monthly didactic instruction, peer support, and system enhancement strategies. This model not only augmented IC knowledge and skills but also its pragmatic application, receiving high ratings for perceived usefulness and acceptability by implementers. Yet, Heatly et al. highlight that the pre-service training for some school educators (e.g., administrators, teachers) might not sufficiently emphasize youth mental health. This gap in understanding can hinder their capability to extend timely and effective support in SMH processes, such as early identification and referrals, and managing students' behavioral and socio-emotional needs in the classroom. Consequently, furnishing SMH professionals with comprehensive interdisciplinary education during their initial training stages could better equip them to offer more streamlined and coordinated services.

In line with this perspective, gauging the attitudes and collaborative experiences of university trainers in SMH becomes a foundational move to foster IC adoption (Ansa et al., 2020). While the perceptions of IC have been substantially explored within medical disciplines (e.g., Campbell et al., 2021; Tolle et al., 2019; Vernon et al., 2018), this area remains relatively untapped in the realm of SMH, particularly in Taiwan. Therefore, the objective of this pilot study was to examine the views pertaining to IC among Taiwanese university trainers (e.g., current practices, perceived challenges and opportunities, potential solutions and resources), who play a pivotal role in shaping future SMH professionals. If these leading trainers exhibit limited buy-in, it casts doubt on whether the training curricula and pedagogical strategies (e.g., classroom discussions, field experiences) would adequately encompass IC competencies (Hsu & Hsing, 2019; Mendenhall et al., 2013). The insights garnered from this study aim to inform the design of professional development initiatives for fluid IC integration.

Method

Participants

The research proposal was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the second author's university in accordance with Taiwan's academic ethical standards. The purposeful sampling method (Patton, 2002) was utilized for participant recruitment because university trainers were expected to have direct knowledge and experiences regarding the studied phenomenon. Based on the professional connections and knowledge of SMH in Taiwan, eight university trainers of SMH were approached individually by the second author to discuss their participation, following by an invitation letter via email. Seven final participants (3 males and 4 females) were interviewed by the two primary researchers via Zoom. Each interview lasted for about one and a half hours and all interviews were completed within six weeks. Written consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. They were asked to provide basic demographic and employment information. The characteristics of the interviewed participants are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographics of the Interview Participants

Participants	C	B	Z	H	G	T	S
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female	Male
Profession	Educational Psychology	Counseling Psychology	Counseling Psychology	Counseling Psychology	Counseling Psychology	Counseling Psychology	Educational Psychology
Institution	University A	University B	University B	University C	University D	University D	University E
Rank	Professor	Associate Professor	Associate Professor	Associate Professor	Assistant Professor	Assistant Professor	Assistant Professor
Education	Ph.D.	Ph.D.	Ph.D.	Ph.D.	Ph.D.	Ph.D.	Ph.D.
Years of Service	14	8	7	9	3	6	2

Procedure and Data Analysis

This study adopted a practice-oriented approach to enhance the practicability of its findings. It focused on clearly defined research questions with substantial relevance, and investigating practical procedures and accessible resources for implementation (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015). Based on the literature review, a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions (see Appendix A) was developed to elicit the participants' observations and thoughts regarding their experiences of preparing SMH professionals for IC, challenging aspects and stories in their IC experiences, as well as suggestions for enhancing collaborative relationships within SMH teams. To ensure accuracy in representing participants' views and comments, we conducted member checking as an audit process, where participants were given their interview transcripts for review and correction (Hays & Singh, 2012). All participants actively reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of these materials with the research team.

Following the reception of the verified transcripts, we undertook a directed qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This analysis began with a literature review on IC to identify its key components and develop an initial coding scheme, complete with definitions for each main category. Initially, three categories were identified: (a) the current state of IC practices in Taiwan, (b) obstacles to effective IC, and (c) strategies to enhance IC (see Table 2). This framework was then used as guidelines for developing coding matrix for analyzing interview results.

The first category, the current state of IC practices in Taiwan (CS), summarized Taiwanese literature regarding experiences, observations, or thoughts regarding interdisciplinary education and/or integration of IC into SMH services. The previous IC research participants in Taiwan were either SMH service providers or recipients, rather than university trainers. Fan et al. (2021) found that many Taiwanese SMH professionals often find themselves in unfamiliar territory, resorting to a "trial-and-error" methodology within educational systems. This indicates a lack of clear guidelines for practicing IC in Taiwan. Therefore, a key strength of this study is its focus on university trainers' perspectives, providing insight into the other side of the story to bridge the gap between training and field practices.

The initially proposed codes under the CS categories, for example, were (a) a gap between training and practice, (b) inability to switch professional perspectives, (c) a narrow and linear problem-solving approach, and (d) disintegrated teamwork. Then, two researchers repeatedly read the transcripts, highlighting data that contain the same ideas as the predetermined categories, and systematically organizing relevant data into each of them according to the initially developed codes. In other words, those predefined codes were assigned to highlighted chunks in the transcripts. As a result, reading summary forms, including associated context with codes for each read transcript, were created.

Additionally, the directed content analysis allowed researchers to edit or add codes during the analysis by iteratively assessing the coding scheme (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This flexibility was important for the

present study because the new population (i.e., university trainers) was being studied, and new ideas could emerge. Therefore, new codes could be assigned when any text did not fit within the original coding matrix. This approach allows existing theory or prior literature to be supported and even extended. In this study, two new sub-themes, “A lack of reflection” and “Prioritizing student best interests” were identified from the participating university trainers’ viewpoints.

To ensure trustworthiness, we employed a rigorous process of reading, re-reading, and cross-checking the coded information to avoid omission and maintain accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Any initial discrepancies in coding were resolved through thorough discussion until a consensus was reached. Finally, the results were amalgamated into a cohesive framework, emphasizing components related to IC.

Table 2
The Initial Coding Scheme Based on the Literature Review

Category	Operational Definition
(a) The current state of IC practices in Taiwan (CS)	Any experiences, observations, or thoughts regarding current interdisciplinary education and/or integration of IC into SMH services.
(b) Obstacles to effective IC (OB)	Any experiences, observations, or thoughts regarding obstacles to interdisciplinary education and/or effective IC practices.
(c) Strategies to enhance IC (ST)	Any thoughts or recommendations for promoting interdisciplinary education and/or IC practices.

Results

The current study involved seven university trainers who provided valuable insights into their diverse experiences, along with the obstacles and catalysts influencing collaborative endeavors. The directed content analysis resulted in four major themes: (a) the current state of IC practices, (b) within-professional barriers, (c) systemic challenges, and (d) recommendations for fostering IC. Figure 1 showcases an extended framework for IC within SMH practices in Taiwan, derived from our directed content analysis findings. These four overarching themes exhibit intricate connections, with various sub-themes elaborated upon in Table 3 for further clarity.

Additionally, Table 3 presents quantitative frequency and count results for each identified sub-theme. For instance, a “frequency” of 71.43 indicates that five out of seven participants mentioned a particular concept or idea. A “count” number represents the total number of times that concept or idea was mentioned across all participant transcripts. Furthermore, Appendix B contains a selection of direct quotes from the participants’ narratives. These quotes are presented in their original language, followed by their corresponding translations into English. It is aimed to provide a more authentic representation of the participants’ voices and ensure that their intended meanings are accurately conveyed.

Figure 1
The Extended Framework of IC in SMH Practices in Taiwan

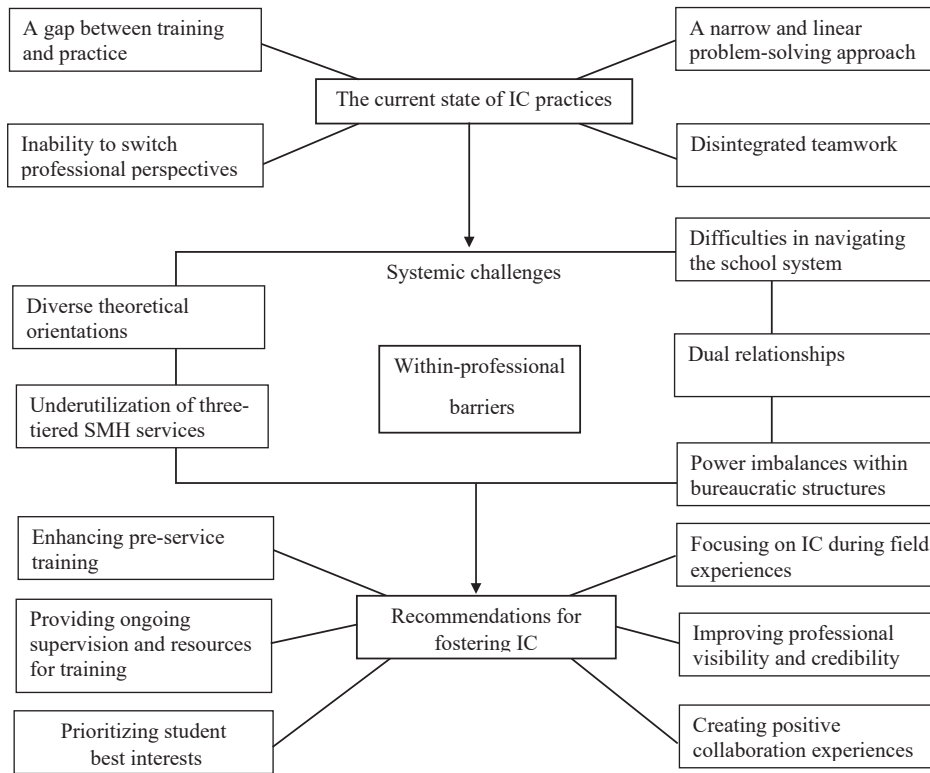


Table 3
Themes and Sub-themes Identified After the Directed Content Analysis with Quantitative Results

Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency	Count
(a) The current state of IC practices	• A gap between training and practice	100.00%	17
	• Inability to switch professional perspectives	42.86%	5
	• A narrow and linear problem-solving approach	57.14%	4
	• Disintegrated teamwork	85.71%	13
(b) Within-professional barriers	• Knowledge deficits in IC	42.86%	4
	• A lack of empirical training	57.14%	4
	• A territoriality mindset	42.86%	5
	• A lack of reflection	57.14%	6
	• Low motivation for professional development	28.57%	5
	• Ethical dilemma	14.29%	2
(c) Systemic challenges	• Diverse theoretical orientations	57.14%	8
	• Underutilization of three-tiered SMH services	85.71%	13
	• Difficulties in navigating the school system	85.71%	7
	• Dual relationships	14.29%	2
	• Power imbalances within bureaucratic structures	42.86%	6
(d) Recommendations for fostering IC	• Enhancing pre-service training	85.71%	13
	• Focusing on IC during field experiences	71.43%	11
	• Providing ongoing supervision and resources for training	71.43%	7
	• Improving professional visibility and credibility	57.14%	6
	• Prioritizing student best interests	57.14%	6
	• Creating positive collaboration experiences	57.14%	5

The Current State of IC Practices

It was evident that all the university trainers who participated in our study displayed a strong commitment to and acknowledged the utmost significance of IC in the context of delivering SMH services. They firmly believed that effective IC enables SMH professionals to function seamlessly within an integrated team. Within this cohesive environment, they valued mutual understanding and nurtured partnerships, all working together to achieve shared goals.

Furthermore, the participants provided insightful observations concerning the current state of interdisciplinary education and IC practices in Taiwan. Four distinct sub-themes were identified within this overarching theme: (a) a gap between training and practice, (b) inability to switch professional perspectives, (c) a narrow and linear problem-solving approach, and (d) disintegrated teamwork. For instance, all of the participants pointed out the absence of a dedicated course introducing the concept of IC and its practical application within the existing training curricula. One participant stated, "Systems collaboration seems to be scattered across different classes, without a unified course to provide a comprehensive explanation."

Additionally, 57.14% of the participants highlighted that many Taiwanese SMH professionals lacked a comprehensive understanding of the school system as well as its expectations, often limiting their involvement to working with individual students (e.g., individual counseling) rather than embracing a collaborative, systemic approach. For instance, one participant expressed, "I believe that the training model focuses on small system individual counseling, which is more linear, individual one-on-one, or small group direct service. This differs from the ecological model for collaboration." This is contrary to the aforementioned requirements of systemic mental health service outlined in the SGCA (2014).

Within-Professional Barriers

In terms of the second theme regarding barriers within individual service providers, six sub-themes were identified, highlighting various challenges in IC among Taiwanese SMH professionals: (a) knowledge deficits in IC, (b) a lack of empirical training, (c) a territoriality mindset, (d) a lack of reflection, (e) low motivation for professional development, and (f) ethical dilemma.

Expanding on the earlier discussion regarding the state of IC, it becomes evident that interdisciplinary education is either inadequately emphasized or entirely absent when it comes to preparing SMH professionals in Taiwan. One participant noted a prevailing focus on test-oriented training, wherein individuals who successfully complete all mandated courses and pass the national licensure exam may still find themselves ill-equipped to function effectively within school settings.

Another persistent obstacle is the tendency of some SMH professionals to expect the school system to adjust to their preferences, including aspects like scheduling or selection of interventions. One participant stated, "Especially with psychologists, they often consider themselves to be above others. Many courses mention systems collaboration, but when talking about systems collaboration, it's about how others should cooperate with counseling professionals, not how they should cooperate with others." When school personnel do not conform to these expectations, they risk being labeled as resistant or uncooperative. Such attitudes of professional centrism or overconfidence among SMH professionals can significantly impede the establishment of productive working relationships.

Another related concern revolves around the lack of reflection on acquired knowledge and the failure to bridge theoretical concepts with practical application. This sub-theme was never identified in the prior literature but in the current interviews with the university trainers. For instance, one participant expressed apprehension that SMH professionals are often exposed to a plethora of therapeutic theories and techniques without effectively integrating this information into their own belief systems. This disconnect can impede the formation of their professional identity and hinder the progression of effective practices.

Moreover, a significant number of SMH professionals were reportedly exhibiting a diminished interest

in ongoing professional training and development once they had established their careers in the system. One participant mentioned, "I have also served as a supervisor for specialized guidance teachers in New Taipei City, and I clearly observed that there are not many who are genuinely eager to learn." Nevertheless, the root causes of this trend, be it potential work-related stress, an overestimation of one's abilities, insufficient support from the administration, or the absence of prospects for career progression, remain unclear according to our data.

Furthermore, due to the requirement to maintain confidentiality, SMH professionals at times exhibit reluctance to share information with other school team members. An example mentioned was:

Taking school teachers as an example, they usually want to know the effectiveness of the counseling for the students they refer. However, many counselors respond by saying that due to confidentiality issues, they cannot share much information. This leaves the teachers feeling puzzled, thinking, "I referred the student to you for counseling, so at least let me know what you did." But many counseling professionals strictly adhere to the confidentiality boundary. I believe this creates a significant gap in systems collaboration, especially when it comes to cooperation within schools. (B-019)

Consequently, their professional contributions may go unnoticed or underappreciated. In more troubling scenarios, they risk being perceived as non-collaborative team players and may be excluded from vital information exchange and sharing networks within schools.

Systemic Challenges

The third theme focuses on challenges identified by the university trainers in the field of SMH. They highlighted several psychological and practical obstacles in systemic practices of IC, including (a) diverse theoretical orientations, (b) underutilization of three-tiered SMH services, (c) difficulties in navigating the school system, (d) dual relationships, and (e) power imbalances within bureaucratic structures.

One notable issue is the variance in training backgrounds and educational philosophies among SMH professionals, teachers, and administrators, leading to differing roles and functions. While teachers may primarily want to address disruptive student behaviors, counselors or psychologists often concentrate on internalizing symptoms, causing misalignments in service goals and priorities. For instance, one participant said, "Psychologists may focus on internal psychological dynamics, while school teachers may be more concerned with the external behaviors of students. This difference is also a part of the difficulties encountered in some collaborative efforts."

Another challenge is the misconception among teachers regarding their role in student mental health. They often see their duty as merely referring students in need, overlooking their potential for active involvement. This misunderstanding contributes to an overreliance on reactive services like crisis intervention, indicating a failure in broader preventive measures at the school or class level. Here is a shared example describing such dilemma:

If a school's counseling work is exceptionally well done, it indicates that the school's educational function is not fully realized. In Taiwan, if the effectiveness of counseling personnel is highlighted, it means that the school is often dealing with crises or has a higher number of severe cases. (Z-005)

Dual relationships in the school environment also present challenges. Teachers may view SMH professionals as mere colleagues, complicating the establishment of effective professional relationships. One participant expressed:

Actually, the specialized guidance teacher at that school is also a psychologist and quite professional. However, she cannot play the role of an outside expert and talk to the physical education teacher the way I can because they are colleagues. Therefore, I believe the core issue is the dual relationship, not that these specialized guidance teachers lack sufficient training. (T-036)

Similarly, parents might see school counselors as equivalent to teachers, underestimating their expertise in youth mental health compared to external mental health service providers like clinical psychologists or

psychiatrists.

Lastly, as mentioned in both Western and Taiwanese literature (Chao & Chan, 2017; Weist et al., 2012), school administrators, who hold decision-making power on resources and training, may lack adequate competencies in SMH. This gap necessitates extra effort from SMH professionals to communicate their needs effectively and secure administrative buy-in and support. This was specifically noted by one participant:

The administrative power in education lies in the hands of the directors and group leaders, while the professional expertise is with the specialized guidance or special education teachers. However, administrative decision-making power overrides the counseling professionals, creating an inequality in power hierarchy. This affects resource control and distribution. Therefore, our suggestions and how they can be taken into account involve understanding their psychological state. Many subtle factors come into play in the interaction and collaboration within the system. (Z-015)

Recommendations for Fostering IC

The fourth theme centers around strategies for enhancing IC in SMH, as suggested by the participating university trainers. These strategies are categorized into six sub-themes: (a) enhancing pre-service training, (b) focusing on IC during field experiences, (c) providing ongoing supervision and resources for training, (d) improving professional visibility and credibility, (e) prioritizing student best interests, and (f) creating positive collaboration experiences.

Almost all of the participating university trainers (i.e., 85.71%) highlighted the importance of incorporating practical elements in pre-service training, like solution-focused problem-solving skills, using case scenario discussions to acquaint trainees with real-world practices. Also, increasing awareness and understanding of the various professional roles in SMH is considered crucial for fostering IC by 71.43% of the participants. This includes recruiting experienced instructors to impart key IC competencies, such as consultation theories and practices, and mandating active participation in school-based teams during field training, such as practicum and internship.

Besides, 71.43% of the participants mentioned that continuous professional supervision for all SMH professionals is deemed necessary, at least on a monthly basis, and can be organized at the school or district level. One participant indicated:

Guidance teachers should receive professional supervision every month, to understand the school's needs from a practical systemic perspective. They can consider attending workshops and further training based on the most common types of cases. Gradually, this will help build their professional expertise in practical work. (Z-034)

Additionally, clear communication about professional roles, expectations, and limitations is also vital for building mutual understanding and facilitating consensus in team decisions with shared responsibilities. An example expressed by one participant was that "Systems collaboration means that the effectiveness of our guidance work is visible to other teachers, which makes them believe in the functionality of the counseling department. This increases their willingness to collaborate."

Given the diverse training backgrounds of SMH service providers, a focus on the student's best interests is paramount. This includes applying strength-based practices and striving for long-term outcomes, such as nurturing lifelong learners. One participant argued, "In systems collaboration, it is essential to view cases from a strengths-based perspective, identifying the strengths and abilities of the individual. Then, find ways for the school system to help leverage and enhance these personal strengths." (Z-042) This concept was never indicated in the current IC literature and is new to this study.

Finally, more than half of the participants (i.e., 57.14%) emphasized the importance of fostering positive collaborative experiences in school-based teams. It is widely recognized that the principal plays a crucial role in enhancing cohesion across various working sections and should actively facilitate increased

opportunities for teamwork to ensure success. For illustration, one participant stated:

I believe that in order to fully utilize the functions of these departments, several connections are needed. I have found that the leadership of the principal is a crucial bridge. Whether the principal has knowledge of mental health and understands the concept of collaboration is very important. If we have such leadership, it is usually easy to succeed because they understand the strengths and expertise of each department. Therefore, I believe leadership becomes very important. (B-010)

Discussion

There are growing efforts to incorporate IC into SMH services in Taiwan. However, research there on the perceptions of its university trainers regarding interdisciplinary education and IC practices is scant. Considering the potential advantages of integrating IC into SMH service provision (Bates et al., 2019; Splett et al., 2017), our study delved into the experiences and perspectives of seven Taiwanese university trainers through virtual interviews. These trainers are integral in shaping future SMH professionals. Similar to prior research results (e.g., Ansa et al., 2020; Chao & Chan, 2017), the participants in this study voiced supportive views on IC and provided insightful feedback, illuminating various elements that either impede or facilitate its present incorporation in SMH practices in Taiwan. Furthermore, the findings from the seven interviews were compared with the initial coding matrix based on the IC literature. During this process, codes were revised and additional codes were added as necessary. For instance, the originally proposed “obstacles to effective IC” category was further refined into two distinct but interrelated themes: Within-professional barriers and systemic challenges to better organize and present the interview results. A few new sub-themes that emerged beyond the existing body of literature are discussed below.

The Current State of IC Practices

Our interview findings align closely with the recent literature on the current state of interdisciplinary education and IC practices in Taiwan. A key limitation identified is the tendency for SMH professionals to adhere to their own perspectives and service plans when working with the same student clients, often without significant collaboration. This siloed approach can lead to a waste of resources, potential miscommunication, and a lack of integration among involved parties. Chiang et al. (2020) describe this as a parallel operating mode, likely stemming from insufficient interdisciplinary education during both pre-service and in-service stages. The limited training in collaborative practices and lack of school-based team experiences make it challenging for Taiwanese SMH professionals to adopt different professional viewpoints. Consequently, their ability to effectively engage in the ecological service model for collaboration as proposed in the SGCA (2014) is compromised. This systemic approach to case conceptualization is crucial for enhancing team efficacy and preventing professional burnout (Chao & Chan, 2017). We explore further discussions and potential solutions in the subsequent sections.

Within-Professional Barriers

The current study has identified several key barriers to effective IC among SMH professionals. First, our findings revealed that the concept of IC is insufficiently emphasized in the training curricula for SMH professionals in Taiwan. This finding aligns with the existing literature (Fan et al., 2021; Hsu & Hsing, 2019) which notes a lack of comprehensive competency skills, including consultation and collaboration, to support the use of IC. The training curricula do not explicitly teach the importance of IC in content or field experience courses. Nevertheless, the concept of IC is actually incorporated into Taiwanese legislation, specifically the SGCA (2014). This act does not support applying an expert model where SMH professionals work towards isolated goals without significant integration or collaboration. Rather, it recommends a three-

tiered framework based on an ecological approach for SMH service delivery that benefits all students through effective IC practices.

Secondly, the interview findings highlighted turf issues and associated negative attitudes as significant barriers to IC. Splett et al. (2017) suggest that interprofessional conflicts are not uncommon in the early stages of IC. A common concern among school-employed service providers is the involvement of outside experts, such as clinical psychologists. They worry that these external collaborators may not fully understand or appreciate their roles, functions, or the existing service system (Chao & Chan, 2017). Our research supports this, revealing that professional centrism or even arrogance perceived by school-based teams often hinders student referrals to external mental health service providers. Another prominent issue found in this study is the lack of school-based training among these outside service providers as pointed out by Fan et al. (2021). This deficiency often leads to challenges in adapting to and functioning within the school system. The apparent lack of contextual fit can make school-based teams hesitant about collaboration (Chao & Chan, 2017). The underlying issue could actually be a lack of trust (Fan & Trotter, 2021). When school-based teams harbor concerns or skepticism, it weakens trust and consequently, the likelihood of successful IC diminishes. Thus, cultivating this trust is crucial for overcoming barriers and fostering effective collaboration.

Thirdly, our interview findings uncovered a significant gap in reflective practice related to the integration of knowledge within interdisciplinary education processes. This discovery presents a novel insight that extends beyond the existing body of literature on IC practices. Typically, digesting new information and connecting theories to real-world practice take time. To bolster IC competencies, university trainers should focus on expanding research, development, and delivery of courses that teach evidence-based practices, along with other specialized training tailored to Taiwan's cultural context (Fan et al., 2021). Also, it is strongly advised that graduate programs enhance field training requirements, such as practicum and internship, for SMH professionals by incorporating more school-based training elements (Hsing & Hsu, 2014; Tataw, 2011). It is only through real-world interactions and field experiences that SMH professionals can develop a more grounded identity and realistic expectations. This process not only enhances their professional growth but also enables them to integrate their work environment into their case conceptualization system, enriching their awareness and knowledge of IC. Additionally, on-site consultation and professional supervision are recommended to foster deeper reflection, either individually or as part of a school-based team. For more information about consultation and supervision, please refer to the "Practical Strategies for Implementation" section below.

Lastly, the current findings indicated that some SMH professionals in Taiwan would rigidly stick to the principle of confidentiality but therefore sacrifice team collaboration as described by Chao and Chan (2017). In addressing the concern of confidentiality in relation to collaboration, SMH professionals in the United States are governed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (1974). This act allows family members and relevant school personnel to access student records. In Taiwan, it is essential for teachers involved to receive pertinent information about the SMH services being provided to students, including information about what services are offered, when they are available, and where they are conducted. Additionally, SMH professionals should regularly engage teachers and students' families by sharing written updates on the content and progress of the services, particularly when further collaborative efforts are suggested for classroom or home environments. Most importantly, all participating professionals and educators should refrain from sharing any unnecessary information to uphold confidentiality in service provision (Weist et al., 2012).

Systemic Challenges

Several systemic challenges have been identified in the school system concerning the provision of SMH services. First, there exists a fundamental disparity in job roles and training among school team members, including teachers, SMH professionals, and administrators. This diversity often leads to the perception of speaking different “languages” (i.e., terminologies) with varying priorities, hindering effective interprofessional communication (Heatly et al., 2023). Students requiring additional assistance in Taiwan are often referred to various professionals for distinct services, yet there is a lack of a comprehensive overview of the student’s overall needs (Chao & Chan, 2017). This fragmentation can impede the development of a unified understanding and shared objectives in addressing a variety of student’s needs. To address this issue of professional centrism, Mellin et al. (2011) suggest adopting a shared leadership model for IC, in which more than a single professional discipline share the responsibilities in the teaming process, such as evaluating obtained information, generating possible solutions, making action decisions, and developing service capacity. By adopting this approach, external service providers can gain a more comprehensive perspective, enhancing their understanding of student behaviors in a typical classroom environment as opposed to the limited view within their therapy settings. This broader insight lays a solid groundwork for improved communication and fosters more effective collaboration within school-based teams (Yu et al., 2024).

Secondly, while positive student-teacher interactions and relationships are pivotal for fostering emotional competency and prosocial skills (Cook et al., 2018), a major obstacle in SMH collaboration is the challenge of encouraging and supporting school educators to embrace broader roles in promoting students’ mental health development (Fazel et al., 2023; Mendenhall et al., 2013). Our interview findings align with recent research findings, indicating that Taiwanese teachers often do not perceive it as their responsibility to cultivate and manage students’ social-emotional and behavioral aspects in the classroom (Fan et al., 2024). The adoption of culturally responsive interventions is therefore suggested (Lazarus et al., 2022), such as Fan et al. (2021) utilizing psychological principles to enhance the understanding of and promote actual implementation of IC in a collectivist society in Taiwan.

Thirdly, the findings from our interviews indicated that SMH professionals often face inadequate administrative support in the IC process. This shortfall could be due to the administrators’ limited competencies in SMH (Weist et al., 2012). Such a knowledge gap necessitates additional efforts from SMH professionals to persuade their administrative supervisors to undertake essential actions, such as making referrals to appropriate mental health service providers. Another related challenge is the impatience of these administrators, who frequently expect immediate change or positive outcomes from SMH services. In the absence of such results, issues of trust or a lack of appreciation for the efforts of SMH professionals may arise. Thus, targeted professional development is advised to address the unique needs of different groups of team members (Mendenhall et al., 2013; Tataw, 2011). For instance, Chao and Chan (2017) recommend SMH professionals to cultivate perspective-taking skills, which involves understanding the desires and limitations of administrators. It is also recommended that SMH professionals proactively initiate efforts to establish a mutually beneficial collaboration for win-win results (Chiang et al., 2020).

Lastly, our findings revealed that the challenge of dual relationships, stemming from assuming multiple roles, can impact the professional identities of mental health service providers and constrain their practices within the school system. This means they cannot exclusively focus on a clinical or therapeutic relationship with student clients, as their work inevitably intersects with the broader school system. In response to this challenge, Fan et al. (2021) strongly advise SMH professionals to diversify their roles by expanding their “service menu” to encompass a broader range of functionalities. In a similar vein, Hsing et al. (2020) propose a redefinition of their roles, advocating for the normalization of the “wearing different hats” situation. This approach would include not only the role of a counselor but also that of a consultant or a collaborator, a moderator between parents and school personnel, and even a system-change facilitator

focusing on problem-solving and the implementation of evidence-based practices, echoing the Western SMH service framework (Barrett et al., 2013; Splett et al., 2017).

Practical Strategies for Implementation

The final theme addresses strategies for enhancing IC in the provision of SMH services to promote student well-being and minimize obstacles to student learning. The findings of this study suggest potential improvements in interdisciplinary education. These improvements span both psychological aspects such as deepening the understanding of IC and fostering commitment, and practical aspects like honing communication skills and collaborative working methods. Collectively, these enhancements contribute to building a robust foundation for valuing teamwork and recognizing the distinct contributions of each profession (Ansa et al., 2020). For instance, equipping professionals with interpersonal and self-advocacy skills to facilitate collaboration can enhance familiarity among school-employed service providers and outside experts and reduce role-based stereotypes as well as misconceptions (Mellin et al., 2011; Tataw, 2011).

In addition, because of the differences in training backgrounds and theoretical orientations, it is critical to focus on scientifically evidence-based practices to help facilitate professional communication (Splett et al., 2017). Moreover, developing a clear map of roles and responsibilities, either within the school premises or on its website, can effectively inform students and their families about the available resources (Weist et al., 2012). Incorporating community mental health resources and programs into this service framework can further strengthen family-school-community partnerships (Bates et al., 2019; Heatly et al., 2023).

During the pre-service training phase, it would be beneficial for university trainers to incorporate collaborative teaching methods, such as co-teaching or inviting guest lecturers from related fields, such as special education, social work, and pediatric psychology (Fan & Trotter, 2021; Heatly et al., 2023). This approach may significantly enrich the training content and help in cultivating IC competencies for each profession (Tataw, 2011). Regarding in-service training, school leaders in Taiwan could implement effective assessment tools, such as the Chinese version of the Beliefs about Behavior Scale (BABS; Fan et al., 2024), which can help in identifying specific weaknesses of philosophical readiness in school-wide positive behavior support practices among school staff. Such assessments can guide the planning of additional professional development programs and monitor the progress of these training initiatives. Besides, involving experts from both the school level and the community in conducting training sessions and providing diverse exposure opportunities is crucial (Bates et al., 2019). This strategy could actively engage school educators and enhance their capacity in SMH practices (Weist et al., 2012).

Secondly, it is recommended that school-based teams consistently collect both quantitative and qualitative data about IC implementation. This continuous data gathering is crucial for reflective evaluation of the collaborative process, especially with the backing and guidance of school administrators (Mellin et al., 2011). For example, Mellin et al. (2011) propose dedicating the final five minutes of each routine meeting to reflect on both successes and areas needing improvement. This approach may enhance learning among SMH professionals and lead to more effective collaboration. Moreover, providing professional on-site consultation during the collaboration process is vital for emotional support, feedback, team reflection, and planning for ongoing professional development (Heatly et al., 2023; Mendenhall et al., 2013). In a consultative working relationship, it is essential that school-based teams feel heard and valued. Only when perceiving a genuine sense of acknowledgment and respect can they become receptive to adopting suggestions from the external mental health service providers. Additionally, our interview findings emphasize the significance of professional supervision in SMH practices. Such supervision plays a key role in continually advancing professional knowledge and skills in IC. Effective supervision also aids in preventing a superficial approach to in-service training and the misallocation of professional resources (Chao & Chan, 2017).

Thirdly, to improve IC in SMH practices, our findings emphasize the need to transition from a deficit-based to a strength-based approach, which is a relatively new concept to Taiwanese mental health service providers. This shift focuses significantly on enhancing psychological wellbeing through preventive and promotive strategies, in contrast to the traditional emphasis on psychopathology assessment and special education placements (Lazarus et al., 2022). Following this vein, the core objective of IC extends beyond merely minimizing undesirable symptoms; it should aim to maximize positive student outcomes and foster long-lasting, life-enhancing transformations for positive natural reinforcement (Juang & Wang, 2020).

Finally, the leadership at the organizational level needs to show good understanding and adequate buy-in of IC implementation (Mendenhall et al., 2013). For example, our findings argue that school principals are pivotal in fostering IC within SMH services. The administrative authority and comprehensive perspective on the school organization uniquely position administrators to understand both stakeholder needs and the resources available both within and outside the school (Chao & Chan, 2017). Moreover, they can orchestrate regular meetings, either bi-weekly or monthly, where educators, SMH professionals, and administrators can exchange ideas and information. These meetings provide a platform for sharing visions, plans, concerns, progress, and resources, which are essential for effective teamwork. Such collaborative efforts are key to improving both the school climate and student outcomes (Weist et al., 2012).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this study effectively explored the roles and perspectives of Taiwanese university trainers, the conclusions drawn must be considered within the context of its limitations. Firstly, the employment of purposeful sampling and the geographic constraint to northern Taiwan may limit the generalizability of the findings. To enhance external validity, future research could broaden the sample size and diversity, potentially using methods like focus groups or surveys.

Secondly, subsequent research should explore the practical application of IC in real-world settings, such as its utilization and practicability among school teams. For example, Fan et al. (2024) suggest the importance of SMH training for Taiwanese school educators, aiming to improve their ability to implement proactive strategies. It would be beneficial to gather feedback on the actual use of the training materials and assess if further support is needed for fostering interprofessional communication and competencies.

Thirdly, the study acknowledges the extensive documentation of IC's potential benefits in the literature. However, the practical implementation of various collaboration modes, such as the circuit operating mode, the full-time in-school mode, and the secondment operating mode (Hsing et al., 2020), has not been extensively explored within the dynamics of Taiwan's school system. Further implementation research is needed to compare the effects of each of these service modes in addressing a variety of school service needs (e.g., high rate of truancy or special education populations), as well as understanding changes in professional identity among service providers in each model (Hsing & Yeh, 2024).

Fourthly, one new challenge identified in this study is the diminished motivation for professional development and in-service training among SMH professionals. Our findings underscore an urgent need for enhancing interdisciplinary education in Taiwan to bolster teamwork efficiency. Consequently, further research is warranted to explore the root causes of this motivation deficit issue, which may range from having limited time for training to deeper issues of professional identity or confusion. Understanding the underlying reasons is crucial for designing targeted interventions to boost participation in professional development and enhance training outcomes, rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all approach for change.

Finally, from a program evaluation perspective, it is crucial to investigate whether the adoption of IC actually leads to improved student prevention and intervention outcomes within the three-tiered SMH service framework recommended by the SGCA (2014). The findings from such research can inform ongoing advancements in policies, procedures, and practices in Taiwan, benefiting legislators, trainers, and field school-based collaborators.

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Appendix A Interview outline

1. Can you briefly tell us about your background training (e.g., credentials), professional experiences, and current job (e.g., employment, position, job responsibilities)?
2. How do you perceive your work in training and preparing school mental health (SMH) professionals?
3. What are your experiences collaborating with other SMH professionals? (If possible, please provide 1 to 2 examples)
4. In your observation and/or experiences, what are difficult or challenging aspects in your profession when collaborating with other SMH professionals?
5. Do you have any suggestions in training for enhancing partnership relationships between your profession and others?

Appendix B*Original Participant Narrative and English Translation Sample*

Original Participant Narrative	English Translation
「系統合作似乎散佈在不同課程當中，並沒有一個統整的課程去把它做一個完整的講解。」	“Systems collaboration seems to be scattered across different classes, without a unified course to provide a comprehensive explanation.”
「我覺得在訓練模式就是走小系統的個別諮商，比較是線性的、個別一對一的、或是做小團體這樣一個直接服務模式，跟生態系統合作模式有差異性。」	“I believe that the training model focuses on small system individual counseling, which is more linear, individual one-on-one, or small group direct service. This differs from the ecological model for collaboration.”
「特別是心理師們，他們都覺得自己高高在上，很多的課程都會提到系統合作，但他們在講系統合作的時候是其他人要怎麼配合諮商專業，而不是我們怎麼配合其他人。」	“Especially with psychologists, they often consider themselves to be above others. Many courses mention systems collaboration, but when talking about systems collaboration, it’s about how others should cooperate with counseling professionals, not how they should cooperate with others.”
「我也曾經擔任過新北市的專輔老師的督導，我其實清楚的看到，真的認真想學習的並不多。」	“I have also served as a supervisor for specialized guidance teachers in New Taipei City, and I clearly observed that there are not many who are genuinely eager to learn.”
「以學校老師為例，他們其實會想要知道他們送出來接受輔導的學生的成效，然後蠻多輔導老師都回覆說，因為有保密問題，所以他不能夠告訴老師太多，所以老師就會覺得很納悶啊，我把學生送給你做輔導，你至少讓我知道你做了什麼嘛，可是滿多輔導專業人員非常恪守那一個嚴格保密的界線，所以我覺得這個是導致在系統合作上，尤其是在學校內合作時很大的一個鴻溝。」	“Taking school teachers as an example, they usually want to know the effectiveness of the counseling for the students they refer. However, many counselors respond by saying that due to confidentiality issues, they cannot share much information. This leaves the teachers feeling puzzled, thinking, ‘I referred the student to you for counseling, so at least let me know what you did.’ But many counseling professionals strictly adhere to the confidentiality boundary. I believe this creates a significant gap in systems collaboration, especially when it comes to cooperation within schools.”
「心理師可能關注什麼內在的心理動力，那學校老師可能就關注的是學生的一些外在行為表現，這也是我覺得現在在一些合作上面會有困難的部分。」	“Psychologists may focus on internal psychological dynamics, while school teachers may be more concerned with the external behaviors of students. This difference is also a part of the difficulties encountered in some collaborative efforts.”
「如果說某個學校的輔導工作做得非常的好，那表示這個學校的教育功能是比較沒有發揮的，就是說在臺灣如果輔導人員的功效被突顯出來，表示這個學校經常是在做危機處理，或者是嚴重個案比較多的。」	“If a school’s counseling work is exceptionally well done, it indicates that the school’s educational function is not fully realized. In Taiwan, if the effectiveness of counseling personnel is highlighted, it means that the school is often dealing with crises or has a higher number of severe cases.”

(Continued)

Appendix B*Original Participant Narrative and English Translation Sample (Continued)*

「教育的行政權在主任、組長手上，但是專業是在專輔或者是特教老師身上，但是行政裁決權是凌駕在輔導專業之上，這樣是存在權力位階的不平等，就會涉及到資源掌握和分配，所以我們的建議他們怎麼樣能夠聽進去就會涉及到對他們心理狀態的一個理解，所以很多微妙的東西在系統的互動與合作裡面。」

“The administrative power in education lies in the hands of the directors and group leaders, while the professional expertise is with the specialized guidance or special education teachers. However, administrative decision-making power overrides the counseling professionals, creating an inequality in power hierarchy. This affects resource control and distribution. Therefore, our suggestions and how they can be taken into account involve understanding their psychological state. Many subtle factors come into play in the interaction and collaboration within the system.”

「輔導老師應該每個月接受專業督導，從系統實務工作裡面去看學校的需要，哪些類型的個案比較多就可以考慮去參加這方面的研習跟進修，然後慢慢把實務性工作上的一個個專業建立起來。」

“Guidance teachers should receive professional supervision every month, to understand the school’s needs from a practical systemic perspective. They can consider attending workshops and further training based on the most common types of cases. Gradually, this will help build their professional expertise in practical work.”

「我覺得要把讓這些處室的功能發揮，真的是要有幾個橋樑，我發現很重要的橋樑是校長的領導……我發現校長有沒有輔導知能跟合作的概念很重要，所以我覺得如果遇到這樣的領導，其實很容易就會成功……就會知道說這兩個處室有他們各自的優勢跟專長在哪裡，所以我覺得領導變得很重要。」

“I believe that in order to fully utilize the functions of these departments, several connections are needed. I have found that the leadership of the principal is a crucial bridge. Whether the principal has knowledge of mental health and understands the concept of collaboration is very important. If we have such leadership, it is usually easy to succeed because they understand the strengths and expertise of each department. Therefore, I believe leadership becomes very important.”

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臺灣心理諮商系所大學教師對跨專業合作的觀點研究

范中豪¹、刑志彬²、楊乃錦³

隨著臺灣越來越注重校園心理健康服務中的跨專業合作，了解在大學裡教授相關學校心理健康課程的教師對跨專業合作的看法就顯得至關重要，因為他們在塑造下一代校園心理健康專業人員方面發揮著極為重要的作用。為了深入了解他們的經驗、觀察、信念及對跨專業合作訓練和實踐的看法，我們進行了一項質性研究，通過線上面試了七位在臺灣心理諮商系所任教的大學教師，並使用 directed 取向的內容分析法來解釋數據。本研究檢查並確認了四個主要且相互關聯的主題：(a) 跨專業合作實踐的現狀；(b) 心理健康專員本身的障礙；(c) 工作系統中的挑戰；以及 (d) 對促進跨專業合作的建議。本研究所有受訪的大學教師一致認為跨專業合作能使心理健康專業人員有效地整合在校園輔導團隊中工作。此研究不僅加深了我們對臺灣跨專業合作中障礙和促進因子的了解，也為改善其實施提供了專業發展的倡議。此外，研究結果還促成了在心理和實踐層面持續進步的實用策略和研究方向的發展。

關鍵詞：跨專業合作、跨學科教育、校園心理健康、學校本位的實踐

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