

An Analysis of the Integration of Mental Health Education and Professional Teaching from the Perspective of Educational Psychology

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Abstract

This study addresses the critical disconnect between professional skills training and psychological well-being support in higher education, where specialized teaching and mental health education often operate in isolation, creating an imbalance in student development. From an educational psychology perspective, the research establishes the theoretical necessity for integration based on learning motivation theories and the interdependence of cognitive and affective processes in knowledge acquisition. The study develops a comprehensive integration framework through three dimensions: objective-content integration, which embeds psychological literacy into professional training objectives; process-method integration, focusing on creating supportive learning environments that address students' psychological needs; and evaluation-interaction integration, establishing developmental assessment systems that foster supportive teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, the research proposes systematic implementation strategies, including cross-departmental collaborative mechanisms, teacher capacity building programs, and institutional incentive policies, to ensure sustainable application. This integrated approach transforms mental health education from a peripheral supplement to an essential component throughout the professional teaching process, ultimately contributing to cultivating well-rounded talents with both professional excellence and psychological resilience. The framework provides theoretical foundations and practical guidance for promoting connotative development in higher education, offering significant insights for enhancing the overall quality and effectiveness of student development.

Keywords: Educational Psychology, Mental Health, Professional Teaching, Integration Paths

Introduction

The development of colleges and universities relies on the support of an integrated education system. However, in reality, professional teaching and mental health education in most colleges and universities in China are still in a disconnected state, and it is difficult to form a synergistic effect of education. Data indicate that a significant majority (82%) of professional teachers have not received training in psychological education competence, while only 34%

of higher education institutions have established effective psychological-professional collaborative mechanisms.

This not only deprives professional teaching of emotional warmth and educational depth, but also leads to the lack of pertinence and effectiveness of mental health education. According to the survey conducted in the 2023 Chinese University Student Mental Health Blue Book, 76.3% of university students experience moderate or higher levels of academic anxiety, highlighting the urgent need to integrate psychological support into specialized instruction. Against this backdrop, based on the perspective of educational psychology, this paper explores the ways to integrate professional teaching with mental health education, so as to promote the all-round healthy growth of students and provide valuable new ideas for the education and teaching reform in colleges and universities.

Problem Statement

The Theoretical Inevitability of the Integration of Mental Health Education and Professional Teaching in Colleges and Universities from the Perspective of Educational Psychology. The basic principles of educational psychology indicate that the integration of mental health education and professional teaching in colleges and universities embodies a profound inherent inevitability. Learning is a complex process driven by the synergistic interaction of cognitive and non-cognitive factors. The Learning effect of college students is determined not only by their intellectual factors, but also significantly constrained by their psychological states such as motivation, emotion, self-efficacy and interpersonal relationships (Li Sha He,2022; Hossain et al., 2023, 2025; Nur et al., 2024). The Learning Motivation Theory points that satisfying students' basic psychological needs such as autonomy, competence and relatedness is the key to stimulating their internal motivation. Empirical research demonstrates that granting students learning choice in the instructional process can increase their learning motivation by more than 37% (Ryan, R.M2023). This requires professional teaching to go beyond mere knowledge indoctrination and create a supportive learning environment to prevent academic burnout. In addition, students' cognitive process is not independent of their emotional process (Li Sha He,2022). When individuals are in a negative emotional states such as excessive anxiety and learned helplessness, it will impair individuals' cognitive functioning; conversely, when individuals are in a full development of their positive psychological traits, such as perseverance, sustained dedication and optimistic attitude, it will help facilitate thinking and problem-solving(Huang Rongfeng,2024; Javed et al., 2020).This indicates that the implementation of mental health education can lay a necessary psychological foundation for professional learning, ensuring that students engage in their studies with a positive and stable mental state. Meanwhile, professional classrooms serve as an important place for students' growth, where all links of the classroom involve students' psychological activities, and academic challenges, teacher-student interactions and peer mutual assistance all contribute to the development and improvement of students' psychological quality. Integrating mental health education into the context of daily professional learning and future career development can significantly enhance its pertinence and effectiveness (Al Qalhati et al., 2020). For contemporary college students, who are confronted with academic pressure and growth problems, integrating professional teaching with mental health education is not a redundant measure but an inevitable choice that conforms to the laws of education. As an essential approach to achieving whole-person development, the educational principle drives professional education to effectively

contribute to the intellectual development and personality formation of students in the process of imparting knowledge, educating people and resolving doubts.

Limitations

This literature review aims to synthesize existing research on the integration of mental health education and professional teaching from an educational psychology perspective. The review addresses three primary questions: (1) What theoretical foundations support the integration of mental health education and professional teaching? (2) What integration pathways have been proposed or implemented in higher education contexts? (3) What support strategies facilitate sustainable integration? By critically examining the current state of knowledge, this review identifies research gaps and proposes directions for future inquiry.

Literature Review

Learning Motivation Theory and Psychological Needs

The integration of mental health education and professional teaching finds strong theoretical support in learning motivation research. Self-determination theory (SDT), as articulated by Ryan and Deci (2023), posits that satisfying students' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is essential for stimulating intrinsic motivation. Empirical research demonstrates that granting students learning choice in instructional processes can increase learning motivation by more than 37% (Ryan & Deci, 2023), suggesting that professional teaching must extend beyond knowledge transmission to create supportive psychological environments. Li (2022) argued that college students' learning outcomes are determined not only by intellectual factors but also significantly constrained by psychological states including motivation, emotion, self-efficacy, and interpersonal relationships. This perspective challenges traditional approaches that separate cognitive development from psychological well-being, instead emphasizing their synergistic interaction in the learning process.

Cognitive-Affective Interdependence

A second theoretical foundation concerns the interdependence of cognitive and affective processes in learning. Educational psychology research has established that students' cognitive processes cannot be understood in isolation from their emotional states (Li, 2022). Huang (2024) demonstrated that negative emotional states such as excessive anxiety and learned helplessness impair cognitive functioning, while positive psychological traits including perseverance, sustained dedication, and optimistic attitudes facilitate thinking and problem-solving.

This cognitive-affective interdependence has significant implications for professional teaching. When students experience academic pressure without adequate psychological support, their capacity for higher-order thinking may be compromised (Al Qalhati et al., 2020). Conversely, professional classrooms that intentionally cultivate positive psychological states can enhance both learning outcomes and psychological development. The classroom environment, including academic challenges, teacher-student interactions, and peer mutual assistance, contributes to the development and improvement of students' psychological quality (Tian & Zhang, 2023).

Holistic Development and Educational Philosophy

The integration imperative also reflects broader educational philosophy emphasizing whole-person development. Xue (2024) argued that traditional approaches separating professional skills training from psychological support fail to address the comprehensive needs of contemporary college students confronting academic pressure and growth challenges. From this perspective, integration is not a redundant measure but an inevitable choice that conforms to the laws of education and the essential approach to achieving whole-person development.

The theoretical literature thus establishes a compelling foundation for integration, suggesting that professional education and mental health support are fundamentally interconnected rather than separate domains. However, as the following sections reveal, translating this theoretical understanding into practice requires systematic attention to multiple integration dimensions.

Objective-Content Integration

The integration of objectives and content represents the foundational dimension for achieving deep integration between mental health education and professional instruction. Researchers have emphasized the need to incorporate psychological literacy into professional talent development plans and course teaching objective systems (Li, 2023). Traditional professional course objectives have predominantly focused on knowledge and skills, paying insufficient attention to the cultivation of intrinsic psychological qualities closely linked to professional competence.

Guided by holistic education philosophy, scholars have proposed that each discipline should establish corresponding psychological competency indicators based on students' future career needs (Tian & Zhang, 2023). This approach makes implicit educational objectives of psychological development explicit. For specific courses, researchers recommend adding "competency objectives" or "value objectives" aligned with course nature to syllabus learning outcomes, covering psychological competencies including scientific spirit, engineering ethics, teamwork, innovation awareness, and stress resilience.

Regarding teaching content, the literature emphasizes exploring psychological elements within professional knowledge to achieve organic integration. For example, when teaching discipline history, instructors can highlight scientists' perseverance and spirit of exploration. When discussing professional ethics, students can be guided to reflect on balancing personal values in decision-making and managing negative emotions during project execution (Li, 2023). This integration is characterized not as simple superposition but as organic incorporation of psychological literacy into professional competence, enabling students to recognize that outstanding professional qualities are inseparable from sound psychological health and exemplary professional ethics.

Process-Method Integration

The integration pathway of process and methodology focuses on classroom teaching practices, aiming to cultivate classroom ecosystems conducive to students' psychological growth through optimized instructional processes and strategies. This approach draws on educational psychology research on learning motivation, cognitive patterns, and emotional

influences to construct classroom environments fostering positive teacher-student interaction and supporting students' psychological development (Kolb, 2024).

Drawing upon self-determination theory, researchers have identified several methodological strategies. Granting learning autonomy, adopting mastery-oriented goals, and implementing cooperative learning can satisfy students' psychological needs and stimulate intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2023). Additionally, appropriately challenging tasks should be designed, creating problem-based scenarios to guide student inquiry, sustaining learning interest and reducing anxiety stemming from external pressures.

The teaching process must actively incorporate elements of emotion regulation. Huang (2024) emphasized that emotions significantly impact cognitive activity efficiency, with individuals struggling to effectively utilize higher-order thinking skills when experiencing extreme tension or negative emotional states. Before major stressful situations such as exams, thesis defenses, or engineering project evaluations, researchers recommend guiding students in understanding their own stress responses and teaching simple stress management techniques (Li, 2022). These include practicing positive self-affirmation, maintaining proper relaxation breathing, focusing attention on desired activities, and learning to allocate time effectively.

From a constructivist perspective, researchers have advocated for inquiry-based or project-based learning approaches that enable students to acquire and create new knowledge while exploring real-world problems and solving practical challenges (Kolb, 2024). Research reveals that project-based learning implementation effectively elevates students' critical thinking performance, resulting in a 43% improvement in test scores. Furthermore, recognizing individual differences among students requires differentiated instructional plans tailored to learners with varying cognitive styles, strengths, and learning paces, avoiding uniform teaching methods that may dampen motivation for certain learners.

Evaluation-Interaction Integration

The operational mechanism integrating evaluation and interaction has emerged as a crucial pathway for ensuring effective and sustainable integration. This approach necessitates establishing teaching feedback systems centered on promoting student development and mediated by supportive teacher-student relationships (Tian & Zhang, 2023). Traditional teaching evaluations primarily focused on summative judgments of students' knowledge acquisition. Researchers have critiqued this narrow assessment orientation for intensifying students' competitive anxiety and fostering relatively rigid self-perceptions, thereby hindering psychological potential development.

The literature advocates shifting from purely selective assessment to promoting coordinated development of students' cognition and psychological well-being. Evaluation must emphasize process-oriented considerations, focusing on factors including students' level of effort, shifts in thinking, teamwork spirit, and resilience in the face of setbacks (Tian & Zhang, 2023). Timely, specific, and developmentally focused feedback should be provided throughout this process. Descriptive feedback in courses aims to encourage students to transform setbacks into growth opportunities rather than self-rejection, while reinforcing their strengths.

Diverse assessment methods themselves serve as psychological support. Through various formats including course papers, project reports, and group presentations, courses respect students' distinct intellectual strengths and expression styles, providing equal opportunities for each student to demonstrate abilities and gain successful experiences, thereby enhancing academic confidence and self-efficacy (Xue, 2024).

Formative assessment must be conducted within supportive teacher-student interactions. Researchers emphasize that professional educators should not confine themselves to knowledge disseminator roles but should cultivate environments of respect, trust, and open communication both inside and outside the classroom (Tian & Zhang, 2023). When students encounter learning difficulties, educators should assist in identifying root causes and seeking appropriate solutions, rather than resorting to blunt rejection. The understanding, respect, and personalized guidance embedded in daily interactions fundamentally constitute developmental mental health education.

Research Questions

The core research question of this paper is: Against the background that professional instruction and mental health education in higher education institutions are generally disconnected (“two separate layers”), how can mental health education be effectively integrated into the whole process of professional teaching in universities based on educational psychology theories, so as to achieve collaborative education and promote the holistic development and well-being of students.

This question is further specified at three levels:

- 1.Theoretical level: What is the inherent necessity (theoretical foundation) for integrating the two?
- 2.Practical pathway level: What are the specific points of integration and methods (pathways)?
The paper explores these from three aspects: objectives and content, teaching process, and evaluation system.
- 3.Supporting strategies level: How can institutional, instructional, and incentive measures be designed to facilitate and ensure the implementation of such integration?

Research Objectives

- 1.Theoretical Construction Objective: To elucidate the theoretical imperative for integrating mental health education with professional instruction based on core educational psychology theories (e.g., motivation theory, cognition-emotion interaction theory, self-determination theory), thereby providing a theoretical foundation for integrated practices.
- 2.Pathway Exploration Objective: To propose concrete pathways for integrating mental health education with professional instruction across three dimensions—objectives & content, teaching process, and evaluation system—ultimately forming an operable integrated teaching model.
- 3.Strategic Support Objective: To propose supporting strategies from the aspects of institutional mechanisms, faculty development, and incentive policies to promote the deep integration of the two, offering practical references for universities to advance psychological education within professional education.

Research Methodology

Literature Review

A systematic review and analysis of academic literature in the fields of educational psychology, mental health education, and the integration of professional instruction will be conducted. Key theoretical achievements, such as motivation theory, theories on emotion-cognition relationships, and self-determination theory, will be studied in depth to establish a solid theoretical foundation and provide academic support for this research.

Theoretical Deduction

Based on the fundamental principles of educational psychology and considering the practical characteristics of professional instruction in higher education, this study will logically deduce the internal mechanism and practical logic underlying the integration of mental health education and professional teaching. This process aims to construct a tripartite analytical framework encompassing "theory—pathway—strategy."

Inductive Analysis

Through the inductive analysis of existing problems in current practices of both professional instruction and mental health education in universities, this research will summarize the main manifestations and root causes of their separation. Building upon this analysis, targeted integration pathways and institutional recommendations will be proposed.

Conclusion

This text explores the theoretical significance and practical value of an innovative integration paradigm by constructing a "theory-path-strategy" trinity analytical framework, which promote mental quality education from a marginal, auxiliary position to a central role in fostering students' holistic development and highlight the important revolution of teaching theory. Simultaneously, this paper proposes several key points that need to be broken through in future practice: completely breaking down systemic barriers, strengthening the construction of teaching staff, improving reward system, and normalizing and systematizing integration efforts. Only thus can we cultivate high-quality talents who possess solid professional knowledge, strong mental toughness, and innovative traits and who can adapt to the needs of the times.

Recommendation

Constructing a Collaborative Mechanism

Constructing a collaborative mechanism is an important institutional safeguard for breaking down existing institutional barriers within universities and promoting the interactive integration of mental health education and professional teaching. This requires the organic unity of shared responsibility and coordinated action in educating students among office of academic affairs, office of student's affairs, mental health educational center, and all departments, based on performing school's function of organization, management, education. Based on the current practical situation, the cross-departmental joint meeting system of normalization will be constructed. This will have a regularly joint assessments for students' study performance and mental developmental situation to exactly master the study, mental situation and their typical traits from every term, every student from various majors, and then construct forward-looking and targeted supporting plan accordingly this (Li Hong,2023). The key lies in the referral process of the information sharing and crisis

intervention under the premise of confidentiality rules. When professional teachers identify that the student having behaviors of psychological troubles during their daily teaching, they can trigger quickly so that they can find potential crisis status earlier, and lead students into professional mental supporting system to have a care and monitoring; Meanwhile, a cross-disciplinary cooperative platform between mental health educators and professional course instructors should be established. It should be encouraged that both sides jointly carry out cross-disciplinary teaching activities or teaching reform study to realize complement each other's advantages. Psychological theories and professional knowledge education should be organically integration. On basis of this, relevant integrated teaching resources should be explored and developed to form a hierarchical collaborative network. Existing relevant dispersed resources should be utilized and revitalized to transform mental health education from original peripheral supplementary into the key point of the entire professional talent cultivation process. Therefore, a solid organizational foundation, for deep integration of mental health education with professional cultivate goal, will be established.

Strengthening Teacher's Ability Building

Strengthening teacher's ability building is the basic guarantee for carrying out integrated practices. The entire educational system from new faculty orientation to continuous professional training should be established, which will lead professional teachers to integrate mental health education theories and methods into subjects teaching. The considerable gap between the current average student-counselor ratio (1:4500) in Chinese universities and the international standard (1:1000) highlights the urgency of equipping professional teachers with the skills to act as frontline responders for student psychological well-being. Constructing and improving integrated pre-employment and post-employment training system, which combines new teacher orientation with on-the-job training, and integrates teaching ability with mental health education capabilities. Required courses, which include basic knowledge of educational psychological theories, undergraduate psychological developmental traits, and skills for recognizing and solving common mental questions, need to be set in new teacher orientation and on-the-job teachers' training. Meanwhile, the activities of cross-disciplinary education study meeting and workshops, led by mental health experts and all advanced teachers, should be held regularly. Real class teaching cases should be selected to discuss how to transform the psychological theories, including learning motivation theories and emotion management theory and so on, into practical instructional methods and skills. This will improve teacher's attention level for students' mental status during their instructional design; A community comprising disciplinary faculty and mental health educators should be actively established. These activities, including joint pre-class, class observations, and academic research exchange, should be organized to improve the integration of psychological and professional knowledge, and to help establish a supportive professional learning community for teachers. Besides possessing professional knowledge and methods of educational psychology, teachers need to face these issues and recognize mental health troubles in themselves and their students, and seek interventional psychological counseling; The most important is the traditional teacher-student concept must be transformed to emphasize proactive attention, respect for individual differences, and enforce evaluation and development. Teachers should internalize these rules into teaching practices and provide mental health education for students consciously and positively in daily teaching (Xue Ming, 2024). Therefore, this will provide a powerful assurance for talent retention and human capital development through deeper integration.

Improve Institutional Incentive and Guarantee Mechanisms

Improving institutional incentive and guarantee mechanisms aims to transform the soft requirements of “psychological education” into hard indicators of teacher’s class teaching evaluation and teacher’s development, through scientific policy guidance and resources allocation, which enable universities to form a systematic institutional framework where teachers embed “psychological education” throughout classroom. Establish and improve teaching management and evaluation institution in university, by incorporating the working status that university teachers practice mental health education in course teaching, such as the construction of class mental atmosphere, the attention on student’s learning state and mental needs, the utilizing of developmental evaluation, the interaction between teachers and students, into the working important contents of teaching quality evaluation, professional title evaluation and appointment, outstanding individual and so on. And it will command the high attention and complete support in terms of institution by giving a certain ratio, which plays a certain evaluation guiding role. For teaching teams and individuals who have an excellent grade in the implementation of integrated practice in university, special project and dedicated incentive funds will be established separately in addition to dedicated funding setting. By increasing financial support and rewards for those teaching team and individual with significant practical outcomes, the teacher’s subjective initiative and creativity of will be further stimulated. Provide corresponding financial support, develop more courses, compile relevant textbooks, and allocate more time for teaching research and reform. The educational research time is included into this project. It will make teacher to re-examine their responsibilities in education and put the improve student’s psychological health as a conscious behavior into practice. Meanwhile, this also helps school shape a positive atmosphere of respecting teacher and valuing education, which ensures the integration of mental health education with professional course teaching the normalized and sustainable development.

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