

Professional Learning for School Counselors: Exploring Strategies for Supporting Students' Emotional and Psychological Well-Being

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Abstract:

Students' emotional and psychological well-being has become an increasingly important concern in contemporary education, requiring school counselors to develop effective and contextually responsive professional practices. This study explores how professional learning shapes school counselors' strategies for supporting students' emotional and psychological well-being. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the study examines counselors' professional learning experiences and their application in counseling practices through interviews, observations, and relevant document analysis. Data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns connecting professional learning, counselor competence, and student support strategies. The findings indicate that professional learning functions as a continuous process that strengthens counselors' ability to identify students' emotional and psychological needs, establish empathetic communication, provide individual and group counseling, promote emotional regulation, implement preventive and developmental support, and collaborate with teachers, parents, school administrators, and external professionals. The findings further demonstrate that professional learning becomes more meaningful when knowledge and skills are translated into reflective and context-sensitive counseling practices. However, the implementation of professional competencies may be constrained by workload, limited resources, stigma, and coordination challenges. The study concludes that sustainable, practice-oriented, and reflective professional learning is essential for strengthening school counseling services and promoting students' emotional and psychological well-being.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

Student mental health and psychological well-being have increasingly become important dimensions of contemporary education. Schools are not only places for academic learning but also social environments in which students develop emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, resilience, self-understanding, and decision-making capacities. The World Health

Organization emphasizes that supportive school environments can contribute to students' psychosocial development and broader educational outcomes, positioning schools as important settings for promoting mental health and well-being (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). Consequently, educational systems are increasingly expected to integrate mental health promotion into everyday educational practices rather than treating psychological well-being as an issue that exists separately from learning.

The importance of student mental health is particularly evident during adolescence, a developmental period characterized by substantial emotional, social, and psychological changes. Students may experience academic pressure, interpersonal difficulties, identity-related concerns, social exclusion, family problems, and uncertainty about their future. These experiences can influence their emotional stability, school engagement, relationships, and academic participation. Mental health promotion in schools therefore needs to address not only psychological problems after they emerge but also preventive and developmental dimensions that strengthen students' socio-emotional competencies. School-based approaches that foster socio-emotional skills, resilience, and mental health literacy have consequently become increasingly important components of educational practice (WHO, 2019; WHO, UNICEF, & UNESCO, 2023).

Within this context, school counselors occupy a strategic position in providing psychological and developmental support for students. Unlike approaches that focus exclusively on academic achievement, school counseling encompasses students' personal, social, emotional, and educational development. Counselors can assist students in recognizing emotional difficulties, developing coping strategies, strengthening interpersonal relationships, making informed decisions, and accessing appropriate professional services when more specialized intervention is required. Recent international guidance also identifies school counselors and psychologists as important points of contact within school-based mental health and psychosocial support systems, particularly in assessment, support planning, referral, and coordination (UNESCO, 2025).

However, the existence of counseling personnel within schools does not automatically guarantee effective psychological support. The quality of school counseling is strongly influenced by counselors' professional knowledge, practical skills, ethical awareness, confidence, and ability to respond appropriately to students' diverse needs. School counselors are increasingly required to work with complex issues that extend beyond traditional counseling activities, including emotional distress, anxiety, peer conflict, bullying, social adjustment, digital-related problems, and emerging mental health concerns. Such developments require continuous professional learning so that counselors can update their knowledge and strengthen their capacity to respond to changing student needs (Ohrt et al., 2020).

Professional learning is therefore an essential component of school counselor development. Professional development should not be understood merely as participation in occasional workshops or training sessions, but as a continuous process through which counselors develop knowledge, skills, reflective capacity, and professional judgment. Research on mental health-related professional development indicates that training can improve educators' knowledge and awareness, although improvements in practical communication and implementation do not necessarily occur automatically (Ohrt et al., 2020). This finding suggests that effective professional learning needs to move beyond knowledge transmission toward opportunities for practice, reflection, collaboration, feedback, and contextual application.

For school counselors, professional learning should particularly strengthen competencies related to early identification, communication, emotional support, referral, and collaborative intervention. Counselors need to recognize signs that may indicate emotional or psychological difficulties while also understanding the boundaries of their professional responsibilities. They are not expected to diagnose every psychological condition or replace specialized mental health professionals; rather, their role includes creating supportive relationships, identifying concerns, providing appropriate school-based assistance, and connecting students with relevant services when necessary (WHO, 2026). Professional learning should therefore help counselors distinguish

between developmental counseling, preventive support, and situations requiring specialized referral.

One important area of professional learning is the development of strategies for supporting students' emotional well-being. Emotional support can involve active listening, empathetic communication, individual counseling, group counseling, social-emotional learning activities, problem-solving strategies, and opportunities for students to express and reflect on their experiences. Such strategies are particularly relevant because students may not always communicate psychological difficulties directly. Counselors therefore require interpersonal and observational competencies that enable them to establish trust and create environments in which students feel safe to discuss personal concerns. Evidence from school-based interventions suggests that structured programs targeting mental health and emotional well-being can produce positive outcomes, although implementation quality and contextual conditions remain important (Scholz et al., 2023).

In addition to individual counseling, school counselors increasingly need to engage in preventive and developmental practices that reach students more broadly. Classroom-based counseling activities, social-emotional learning, group interventions, and collaboration with teachers can create opportunities to promote emotional competencies before serious psychological difficulties develop. Nevertheless, systematic evidence indicates that school counselor-facilitated classroom interventions remain relatively limited in the research literature, despite the recognized role of counselors in supporting students' social and emotional development (Slaten et al., 2024). This situation highlights the need to strengthen counselors' professional capacity to translate counseling knowledge into preventive and developmental practices within everyday school contexts.

The effectiveness of professional learning also depends on how counselors translate acquired knowledge into actual school practices. Professional development that is disconnected from counselors' everyday challenges may have limited impact on student support. Effective learning opportunities should therefore be contextual, practice-oriented, collaborative, and responsive to the problems counselors encounter in their schools. Professional learning can include case discussions, supervision, peer collaboration, reflective practice, simulation, mentoring, and ongoing consultation. A broader review of school-based mental health professional development similarly suggests that effective capacity-building requires attention not only to training content but also to implementation conditions, support systems, and the practical context in which professionals work (Mason et al., 2025).

The Indonesian context further demonstrates the importance of strengthening school counseling competencies. Research on Indonesian school counseling has identified several challenges in responding to students' mental health concerns, including limited skills, time constraints, inadequate infrastructure, stigma, and broader school-system barriers (Purnomo & Basuki, 2024). These challenges indicate that improving student psychological well-being cannot rely solely on the availability of counseling services. It also requires systematic professional learning that enables counselors to develop practical strategies, collaborate with other members of the school community, and navigate institutional and cultural constraints. Professional development consequently becomes a mechanism for strengthening both individual counselor competence and the broader capacity of schools to respond to students' psychological needs.

Although existing research has examined school-based mental health interventions, teacher training, counselor-led social-emotional programs, and school counseling practices, an important gap remains in understanding how professional learning specifically shapes the strategies used by school counselors to support students' emotional and psychological well-being. Previous studies have demonstrated the potential benefits of training and school-based counseling interventions, but less attention has been given to the connection between counselors' professional learning experiences and the concrete strategies they subsequently employ in their daily interactions with students. This gap is particularly significant because professional

competence is not simply a matter of possessing knowledge; it involves the ability to translate knowledge into context-sensitive counseling practices, interpersonal responses, preventive activities, and appropriate referral decisions (Ohrt et al., 2020; Slaten et al., 2024).

Accordingly, this study explores professional learning among school counselors by examining the strategies they develop and employ to support students' emotional and psychological well-being. The study focuses on how professional learning contributes to counselors' understanding of students' psychological needs, their approaches to emotional support, their preventive and developmental counseling practices, and their collaboration with teachers, families, and other support systems. By positioning professional learning as a bridge between counselor education and everyday school counseling practice, this study seeks to contribute to discussions on teacher education and professional development while providing practical insights into strengthening school-based psychological support. The central research question is: How does professional learning shape school counselors' strategies for supporting students' emotional and psychological well-being?

Method (منهج)

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how professional learning shapes school counselors' strategies for supporting students' emotional and psychological well-being. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on understanding professional practices, experiences, perceptions, and contextual processes rather than measuring the effectiveness of a particular intervention. The case study design enabled the researchers to examine professional learning and counseling practices within their natural educational context and to develop an in-depth understanding of how counselors translate professional knowledge into everyday practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). A case study is particularly appropriate when the phenomenon under investigation is closely connected to its real-life context and requires evidence from multiple sources.

The case was defined as the professional learning and counseling practices of school counselors in supporting students' emotional and psychological well-being within a bounded educational setting. The boundaries of the case were established according to the institutional context, the participants involved in counseling activities, and the professional learning experiences relevant to student well-being. Defining the case in terms of time, place, participants, and activities was important to maintain analytical focus and ensure that the phenomenon could be examined in sufficient depth (Yin, 2018). The study therefore concentrated on the relationship between counselors' professional learning and their practical strategies for understanding, supporting, and responding to students' emotional and psychological needs.

Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in school counseling and professional learning activities. The primary participants consisted of school counselors who had experience providing counseling, emotional support, developmental guidance, or related student well-being services. Where relevant, teachers and other school personnel involved in student support were also considered as supporting informants. Purposive selection was used because participants needed to possess relevant knowledge and experience concerning the phenomenon being investigated. The selection process focused on participants who could provide detailed information about professional learning experiences, counseling practices, challenges, and strategies for supporting students' psychological well-being (Patton, 2015).

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: semi-structured interviews, classroom or counseling-setting observations, and document analysis. The use of multiple sources allowed the researchers to examine the phenomenon from different perspectives and

strengthen the depth and credibility of the case analysis. Multiple data sources are a central characteristic of qualitative case study research because interviews, observations, and documents can provide complementary evidence about the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The integration of these sources also enabled the researchers to compare reported professional practices with practices observed in the educational setting.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school counselors to explore their experiences of professional learning and the ways in which such learning influenced their counseling practices. The interview questions addressed counselors' understanding of student mental health and emotional development, professional training experiences, strategies for identifying students' needs, approaches to emotional support, counseling techniques, collaboration with teachers and parents, referral practices, and challenges encountered in providing psychological support. The semi-structured format allowed the researchers to maintain consistency across interviews while providing opportunities for participants to elaborate on experiences and issues that emerged during the conversations.

Observations were conducted to examine how professional knowledge and counseling competencies were enacted in educational practice. Attention was given to counselors' communication with students, active listening, empathetic responses, questioning techniques, emotional support, problem-solving guidance, confidentiality practices, and interactions with teachers or other school personnel. Observations also considered the broader school environment in which counseling activities occurred, including factors that might facilitate or constrain counselors' ability to provide psychological support. Observation data were recorded through structured field notes and reflective notes to capture both observable practices and contextual conditions.

Document analysis was used to complement interview and observation data. Relevant documents included counseling programs, professional development materials, counseling guidelines, student-support procedures, activity reports, lesson or guidance plans, and other institutional documents related to student well-being, where access was ethically and institutionally permitted. The analysis focused on identifying how professional competencies and student well-being were conceptualized in institutional planning and how these expectations corresponded with counselors' reported and observed practices. Document analysis also helped identify similarities and differences between formal expectations and the practical implementation of school counseling.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the principles developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). The analysis began with repeated familiarization with interview transcripts, observation notes, and relevant documents. Initial codes were then generated to identify meaningful segments related to professional learning, counselor competencies, emotional support, psychological support, preventive counseling, communication, collaboration, referral, and implementation challenges. Related codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories and potential themes. The themes were reviewed and refined to ensure that they represented coherent patterns across the dataset and were relevant to the research question. Braun and Clarke's approach provides a flexible framework for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data.

The analysis specifically examined the relationship between professional learning experiences and the strategies used by school counselors. Rather than treating professional development simply as participation in training activities, the analysis considered how counselors interpreted and applied professional knowledge in their interactions with students. Particular attention was given to whether professional learning contributed to counselors' ability to recognize emotional difficulties, communicate empathetically, provide appropriate support, promote students' emotional competencies, collaborate with other stakeholders, and determine

when referral to specialized services was necessary. This analytical focus enabled the study to connect professional learning with observable and reported changes in counseling practice.

To strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed data triangulation by comparing evidence obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. Emerging interpretations were also reviewed against the overall dataset to ensure that themes were supported by sufficient evidence. Where appropriate, member checking was used to clarify participants' statements and confirm the accuracy of researchers' interpretations. An audit trail was maintained throughout the research process to document decisions concerning data collection, coding, theme development, and interpretation. These procedures were intended to enhance the credibility, dependability, and transparency of the qualitative findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and their right to withdraw from participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by removing identifying information from transcripts, field notes, and the final report. Particular care was taken when dealing with information concerning students' emotional or psychological conditions because such information may be sensitive. The researchers therefore limited data collection to information relevant to the research objectives and ensured that individual students, counselors, and institutions could not be identified in the reporting of findings.

Result (نتائج)

The thematic analysis identified several interconnected patterns concerning professional learning and school counselors' strategies for supporting students' emotional and psychological well-being. The findings indicate that professional learning was not perceived merely as participation in formal training, but as an ongoing process involving the acquisition of knowledge, development of counseling skills, reflection on professional experiences, and adaptation to students' changing needs. Across the data, professional learning appeared to influence how counselors understood students' emotional difficulties, selected appropriate counseling strategies, communicated with students, and collaborated with other members of the school community. The findings were organized into twelve interconnected themes: continuous professional learning, identification of students' needs, empathetic communication, individual counseling, group counseling, preventive support, emotional regulation, referral and collaboration, professional reflection, contextual adaptation, implementation challenges, and integrated student support.

The first theme concerned continuous professional learning as a foundation for counseling practice. Counselors described professional learning as an ongoing process rather than an activity limited to formal workshops or certification programs. Learning was developed through training, professional discussions, consultation with colleagues, self-directed learning, reflection on counseling experiences, and engagement with emerging issues affecting students. This finding suggests that professional competence develops through the continuous interaction between formal knowledge and practical experience. Such a pattern is consistent with recent evidence emphasizing that effective professional development for school-based mental health promotion needs to move beyond isolated training toward sustained capacity-building and practical support (Dinnen et al., 2024).

The second theme involved early identification of students' emotional and psychological needs. Counselors emphasized the importance of recognizing changes in students' behavior,

emotional expression, participation, interpersonal relationships, and academic engagement. Identification was not limited to students who explicitly requested counseling but also involved observations and information obtained through interactions with teachers and other school personnel. This indicates that counselors' professional learning contributes to their sensitivity toward potential indicators of emotional difficulty and enables them to distinguish between ordinary developmental challenges and concerns requiring more systematic support. Early identification therefore functioned as an important starting point for determining appropriate counseling responses.

The third theme was empathetic communication and the development of trusting relationships. Effective counseling was associated with counselors' ability to listen attentively, demonstrate empathy, avoid premature judgment, and create a psychologically safe environment. Counselors recognized that students may be reluctant to disclose personal difficulties when they perceive adults as judgmental or when they fear stigma. Consequently, communication was treated not simply as a counseling technique but as a relational foundation for psychological support. The findings indicate that professional learning strengthened counselors' awareness of the importance of listening, appropriate questioning, emotional validation, and confidentiality in developing productive counseling relationships.

The fourth theme concerned individual counseling as a strategy for responding to specific student needs. Counselors used individual counseling to provide more focused support for students experiencing emotional difficulties, interpersonal problems, academic pressure, adjustment challenges, or personal concerns. The counseling process involved listening to students' experiences, helping them identify problems, exploring possible responses, and encouraging them to develop appropriate coping strategies. Rather than immediately providing solutions, counselors attempted to facilitate students' understanding of their own situations and their capacity to make constructive decisions. This approach positions counseling as a developmental process that supports student autonomy rather than simply resolving an immediate problem.

The fifth theme was group counseling and collective emotional support. The findings indicate that some student concerns could be addressed through group-based activities that provided opportunities for interaction, sharing experiences, developing interpersonal skills, and learning from peers. Group counseling and related activities were particularly relevant for issues involving peer relationships, communication, emotional awareness, and social adjustment. Through group interaction, students could recognize that their difficulties were not necessarily unique and could develop alternative perspectives through interaction with others. This finding is consistent with broader evidence that school-based interventions can address multiple dimensions of student mental health and emotional well-being when they are implemented within supportive educational environments.

The sixth theme involved preventive and developmental counseling strategies. Counselors did not limit their work to students who had already experienced significant psychological difficulties. They also engaged in activities intended to strengthen students' emotional competencies, self-awareness, resilience, interpersonal skills, and coping abilities. Preventive strategies included guidance activities, classroom-based support, group activities, discussions, and programs addressing social-emotional development. The findings suggest that professional learning encouraged counselors to adopt a broader understanding of their role in which counseling contributes to the promotion of psychological well-being as well as the response to existing problems. This is particularly relevant because systematic evidence indicates that school counselors' classroom-based interventions remain an important but comparatively underdeveloped area of practice.

The seventh theme was supporting students' emotional regulation and coping strategies.

Counselors described the importance of helping students understand and manage emotional responses when facing academic pressure, interpersonal conflict, disappointment, anxiety, or other stressful experiences. Counseling strategies focused on helping students identify emotions, understand possible triggers, consider alternative responses, and develop constructive coping mechanisms. The emphasis was therefore placed not simply on reducing negative emotions but on helping students develop greater awareness and control of their emotional responses. This finding reinforces the importance of socio-emotional development as part of comprehensive school-based mental health support.

The eighth theme concerned collaboration and referral as components of professional counseling practice. The findings indicate that counselors recognized the limits of school-based counseling and the importance of collaboration when students required additional support. Collaboration could involve teachers, school administrators, parents or caregivers, and external mental health professionals. Referral was considered particularly important when students presented concerns beyond the counselor's professional scope or when more specialized psychological or clinical services were required. This finding is significant because effective school mental health support requires coordination across multiple levels rather than relying on counselors to address all student difficulties independently. Evidence from the Indonesian context similarly identifies collaboration with external counselors and professional training as important potential responses to challenges in school counseling.

The ninth theme was professional reflection and self-evaluation. Counselors used their experiences with students as opportunities to evaluate the appropriateness of their counseling approaches and consider how future interactions could be improved. Reflection involved examining communication patterns, counseling responses, student reactions, and the effectiveness of particular strategies. Professional learning therefore occurred not only before counseling activities but also through reflection after counseling encounters. This finding suggests that reflective practice serves as a bridge between professional knowledge and contextual application, enabling counselors to continuously adjust their practices according to students' needs.

The tenth theme involved contextual adaptation of counseling strategies. The findings show that counselors did not apply professional knowledge in a rigid or uniform manner. Instead, strategies were adapted according to students' developmental characteristics, personality, emotional condition, family circumstances, peer relationships, and the broader school environment. A counseling approach considered appropriate for one student was not necessarily appropriate for another. This adaptability indicates that professional competence involves judgment and contextual sensitivity rather than simply the mechanical application of counseling techniques. Such contextualization is particularly important in Asian school counseling contexts, where recent research has identified the need for context-sensitive models and updated professional training.

Figure 1. Integrated Model of the Findings

Dimensi Utama	Temuan
Professional Learning	Continuous learning, professional reflection
Counselor Competence	Early identification, empathetic communication, contextual adaptation
Counseling Strategies	Individual counseling, group counseling, preventive support, emotional regulation, collaboration & referral
Student Outcomes	Emotional regulation, psychological safety, social/relational well-being

The eleventh theme concerned challenges in implementing professional learning in everyday counseling practice. Several contextual challenges emerged, including limited time, competing school responsibilities, differences in students' needs, limited institutional resources, stigma surrounding psychological problems, and the need for stronger coordination among stakeholders. These challenges created a gap between what counselors learned through professional development and what they were able to implement consistently in practice. The findings therefore indicate that professional learning alone is insufficient unless accompanied by organizational support, adequate resources, opportunities for consultation, and a school culture that recognizes student mental health as an important educational concern. Similar challenges have been documented in Indonesian school counseling, particularly regarding skills, time, infrastructure, stigma, and school-system constraints.

The final theme was integrated student support through professional learning. Taken together, the findings demonstrate that professional learning shaped a broad set of interconnected counseling strategies, beginning with the identification of students' needs and continuing through empathetic communication, individual and group counseling, preventive support, emotional regulation, collaboration, referral, and professional reflection. These practices indicate that counselors' professional development has the greatest practical value when it strengthens their ability to integrate knowledge, interpersonal skills, professional judgment, and contextual understanding. Rather than functioning as isolated techniques, the strategies formed an integrated approach to supporting students' emotional and psychological well-being. The findings therefore position professional learning as a mechanism that connects counselor education with everyday school-based mental health practice.

Discussion (مناقشة)

The findings demonstrate that professional learning plays a central role in shaping school counselors' capacity to support students' emotional and psychological well-being. Rather than functioning as a one-time training activity, professional learning emerged as a continuous process involving knowledge development, skill improvement, professional reflection, and adaptation to changing student needs. This finding suggests that counselor competence is developed through the interaction between formal professional development and everyday counseling experiences. Such an interpretation is consistent with research indicating that professional development for school-based mental health support is more meaningful when it is connected to practitioners' actual needs and supported through ongoing learning opportunities rather than isolated training sessions (Ohrt et al., 2020; Mason et al., 2025).

The findings further indicate that continuous professional learning strengthens counselors' ability to identify students' emotional and psychological needs at an early stage. Counselors' attention to behavioral changes, emotional expression, social interaction, and academic engagement demonstrates that psychological support begins before students enter formal counseling sessions. Early identification requires professional sensitivity and the ability to interpret student behavior within its developmental and contextual background. This finding reinforces the broader view that schools have an important role in promoting mental health through early recognition, supportive relationships, and appropriate referral mechanisms (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). Professional learning consequently functions not only to improve counseling techniques but also to develop counselors' professional judgment.

Empathetic communication emerged as another important mechanism connecting professional learning with effective counseling practice. The findings suggest that students are more likely to communicate personal concerns when counselors create relationships characterized by active listening, empathy, trust, and non-judgmental interaction. This is

important because psychological support cannot be reduced to the application of standardized counseling procedures. It requires relational competence that enables counselors to understand students' experiences and respond appropriately to their emotional conditions. From this perspective, professional development should provide opportunities for counselors to practice interpersonal communication and reflective listening rather than concentrating exclusively on theoretical knowledge.

The use of individual counseling illustrates how professional learning can be translated into personalized student support. The findings suggest that counselors sought to understand students' particular circumstances and encouraged them to identify problems, consider possible responses, and develop constructive coping strategies. This approach positions students as active participants in the counseling process rather than passive recipients of advice. The emphasis on student agency is particularly relevant to emotional development because students need opportunities to understand their own emotions and develop strategies for managing challenges. Professional learning therefore contributes to counseling practice when it enables counselors to move from directive problem-solving toward facilitative and developmental approaches.

The findings also highlight the value of group counseling and collective forms of emotional support. Group-based activities provide students with opportunities to communicate, share experiences, develop interpersonal skills, and learn from peers. These practices extend the role of school counseling from individual problem resolution toward the development of a supportive social environment. This finding corresponds with research showing that school-based mental health and well-being programs can be strengthened when interventions address students within their broader social and educational environments (Scholz et al., 2023). Thus, professional development should prepare counselors not only for individual counseling but also for designing and facilitating group and classroom-based activities.

Preventive and developmental counseling constitute another significant implication of the findings. Counselors were not limited to responding to students after psychological problems became visible; they also engaged in activities aimed at strengthening emotional awareness, resilience, coping skills, and interpersonal competence. This orientation is consistent with the broader movement toward promoting mental health within schools rather than treating mental health exclusively as a clinical concern. School counseling can therefore contribute to a culture of well-being by incorporating preventive activities into routine educational practices. The systematic review by Slaten et al. (2024) is particularly relevant in this regard because it highlights the potential role of school counselors in classroom-based activities that support students' social and emotional development.

Emotional regulation emerged as an important target of counseling practice. The findings indicate that counselors helped students recognize emotions, understand possible triggers, and consider more constructive responses to stressful situations. Emotional regulation is particularly important because students' ability to manage emotions influences their relationships, engagement, decision-making, and participation in learning. Professional learning can strengthen this area by providing counselors with practical frameworks for supporting students' emotional competencies. At the same time, such support should remain developmentally and contextually appropriate, recognizing that students differ in their emotional experiences, coping resources, family environments, and social circumstances.

Another important finding concerns collaboration and referral. Counselors recognized that school-based counseling has professional boundaries and that some student concerns require collaboration with teachers, parents or caregivers, school leaders, or external mental health professionals. This finding challenges an individualistic view of counseling in which the counselor is expected to solve every psychological difficulty independently. Instead, effective student support requires a coordinated system in which different actors contribute according to

their roles and expertise. This interpretation is particularly important in the Indonesian context, where research has identified limited resources, professional capacity, stigma, and coordination as continuing challenges in school counseling (Purnomo & Basuki, 2024).

Professional reflection and contextual adaptation further demonstrate that professional learning does not end when formal training is completed. Counselors continuously interpret their experiences, evaluate their responses, and adjust their strategies according to students' needs and school conditions. This reflective dimension is important because counseling practices cannot always be standardized across students or contexts. A strategy that is appropriate for one student may be ineffective for another because of differences in developmental stage, personality, family circumstances, peer relationships, or emotional condition. Professional learning therefore needs to cultivate reflective practitioners who can critically evaluate their own practice and make context-sensitive professional decisions.

The findings also reveal that professional learning may have limited impact when structural and organizational conditions do not support its implementation. Time constraints, competing responsibilities, limited resources, stigma, differences in student needs, and insufficient collaboration can create a gap between what counselors learn and what they are able to implement. This finding supports the argument that professional development should be understood as part of a wider organizational system rather than as an individual responsibility of the counselor. Mason et al. (2025) similarly emphasize that implementation of school-based mental health interventions is influenced by contextual and organizational factors. Consequently, schools need to provide time, leadership support, collaboration opportunities, supervision, and appropriate resources to enable professional learning to influence practice.

Taken together, the findings support an integrated model in which professional learning strengthens counselor competence, counselor competence shapes counseling strategies, and counseling strategies contribute to students' emotional and psychological well-being. The contribution of this study lies in emphasizing the connection between professional learning and the practical strategies used in everyday school counseling. Professional development becomes meaningful when counselors can translate knowledge into early identification, empathetic communication, individual and group counseling, preventive support, emotional regulation, collaboration, referral, reflection, and contextual adaptation. This integrated perspective extends the understanding of school counselor professional development beyond training participation and positions it as an ongoing process of professional learning, practice, reflection, and improvement.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that professional development programs for school counselors should be designed around authentic school-based challenges rather than theoretical content alone. Training should incorporate case-based learning, counseling simulations, reflective supervision, peer consultation, collaborative problem-solving, and opportunities to apply newly acquired competencies in real school contexts. Professional development should also strengthen counselors' capacity to recognize the boundaries of school counseling and establish effective referral pathways. Such an approach can help bridge the gap between counselor education and everyday practice while strengthening the capacity of schools to provide comprehensive emotional and psychological support for students.

Conclusion (خاتمة)

This study concludes that professional learning plays a central role in strengthening school counselors' capacity to support students' emotional and psychological well-being. The findings indicate that professional learning should not be understood merely as participation in formal

training programs, but as a continuous process involving knowledge development, practical skill enhancement, professional reflection, and contextual adaptation. Through ongoing professional learning, counselors can strengthen their ability to identify students' emotional and psychological needs at an early stage, establish empathetic communication, provide individual and group counseling, promote emotional regulation, implement preventive and developmental support, and collaborate with teachers, parents, school administrators, and external professionals when referral is required. These findings highlight that effective counseling practice emerges when professional knowledge is translated into context-sensitive strategies that respond to students' diverse developmental, emotional, social, and psychological needs.

The study further suggests that professional development for school counselors should move beyond knowledge transmission toward practice-oriented and reflective learning. Training programs need to incorporate authentic school cases, counseling simulations, communication practice, peer consultation, supervision, collaborative problem-solving, and opportunities for counselors to reflect on their professional practice. Organizational support is also essential because limited time, workload, resources, stigma, and coordination barriers may restrict the application of competencies acquired through professional learning. Conceptually, the study proposes a continuous relationship between professional learning, counselor competence, counseling strategies, and students' emotional and psychological well-being. Therefore, strengthening school counseling systems requires not only competent counselors but also sustainable professional learning environments that enable counselors to continuously develop, adapt, and improve their practices in response to the changing needs of students.

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