

PROFESSIONAL ADAPTATION PROBLEMS OF NEWLY EMPLOYED SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS AND MECHANISMS FOR OVERCOMING THEM

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Abstract

This article examines the main professional adaptation difficulties faced by newly employed school psychologists and identifies practical mechanisms that can support their successful integration into school settings. The literature shows that early-career specialists often struggle with unclear professional roles, inadequate self-assessment, limited confidence in counseling and corrective work, and weak collegial support, while structured mentoring, supervision, and collaborative professional communities improve adaptation. Based on this evidence, the article argues that adaptation is not only an individual adjustment process but also an institutional responsibility requiring coherent support systems.

Keywords: Professional adaptation, school psychologist, early-career specialists, professional difficulties, mentoring, supervision, psychological support, professional integration, school environment, professional identity, collegial support.

Introduction

The process of professional adaptation for school psychologists who begin their careers in educational institutions is often complicated by the gap between theoretical preparation acquired during university education and the practical demands of the school environment. When entering professional practice, young specialists may encounter difficulties related to unclear professional roles, a wide range of responsibilities, insufficient experience in counseling and psychological-

pedagogical support, and challenges in establishing effective interaction with teachers, students, and parents. Research indicates that young psychologists working in educational institutions frequently experience adaptation difficulties associated with dissatisfaction with professional activities, insufficient clarity of professional goals and tasks, and inadequate levels of professional self-esteem [1].

Contemporary studies in the field of school psychology emphasize that the role of a school psychologist extends beyond individual assessment and includes consultation, preventive activities, evidence-based interventions, and collaboration with the entire school community. The expansion of professional responsibilities requires newly employed psychologists to quickly develop practical competencies, interpersonal confidence, and an understanding of the organizational culture of educational institutions. Therefore, effective professional adaptation becomes an important condition for ensuring both the professional development of psychologists and the quality of psychological support provided to students and other participants of the educational process [2]. From this perspective, studying the professional adaptation process of school psychologists is important not only for individual career development but also for improving the effectiveness of psychological services within educational institutions. Successful adaptation requires the implementation of systematic support mechanisms, including mentoring, professional supervision, collegial cooperation, and participation in professional communities. Such forms of support contribute to strengthening professional identity, increasing confidence in professional activities, and facilitating the integration of young specialists into the school environment [2].

Methods

This study is conducted as a narrative review and conceptual synthesis based on scientific literature addressing the professional adaptation of psychologists in educational settings. The analysis relies on two main scholarly sources: a peer-reviewed study examining the socio-psychological adaptation characteristics of psychologists working in educational institutions and a scholarly article published through the ERIC database that explores the expanded role of school psychologists in supporting early-career professionals [1; 2].

The first source provides empirical evidence regarding the adaptation difficulties experienced by novice psychologists, including challenges related to professional self-perception, clarity of professional responsibilities, and satisfaction with professional activities. The second source contributes to the identification of institutional support mechanisms that facilitate professional integration, including professional learning communities, group-based training, coaching, consultation, and collaborative practices within educational organizations [2].

The review was structured around three main research questions: (1) What factors and difficulties hinder the professional adaptation of beginning school psychologists? (2) What personal, organizational, and social conditions contribute to these adaptation challenges? (3) Which support mechanisms can enhance successful professional integration? The selected sources were analyzed due to their relevance to the research topic, academic reliability, and applicability for understanding both individual and institutional dimensions of professional adaptation.

Results

The analysis of the selected literature revealed several consistent challenges affecting the professional adaptation of beginning school psychologists. The first major difficulty is associated with uncertainty regarding professional roles, goals, and responsibilities. Newly employed specialists may experience difficulties in understanding the boundaries of their professional functions, determining priorities in psychological services, and evaluating the effectiveness of their work. Such uncertainty can negatively influence professional confidence and contribute to dissatisfaction with professional activity [1].

A second important problem concerns the discrepancy between theoretical knowledge and practical competence. Although novice psychologists usually possess fundamental knowledge of psychological assessment and intervention methods, they may experience difficulties in applying these skills in complex school situations that require counseling, preventive work, conflict management, and cooperation with teachers and parents. This gap between expected and actual professional performance may reduce professional self-efficacy and increase emotional strain during the early career period [1; 2].

Another significant factor influencing adaptation is insufficient professional self-assessment and limited reflective practice. Young specialists may either

overestimate their readiness for independent work or underestimate their own abilities when facing challenging cases. Regular supervision and professional feedback are therefore essential mechanisms for developing realistic professional identity and improving decision-making skills. Research on early-career school psychologists indicates that limited access to supervision and mentoring may create situations where specialists feel pressure to work beyond their current level of competence [3].

The findings also highlight the role of professional isolation as a barrier to successful adaptation. When educational institutions lack collaborative professional environments, novice psychologists have fewer opportunities to exchange experiences, receive feedback, and learn effective models of practice. The absence of methodological guidance may slow the transition from academic knowledge to everyday professional activity. Similar patterns have been identified in broader educational research, where structured induction programs, mentoring, and professional communities demonstrate positive effects on the retention and professional development of beginning specialists [4].

The reviewed evidence suggests several effective mechanisms for improving professional adaptation. The first mechanism is organizational and methodological support, including clearly defined job responsibilities, practical guidelines, and structured procedures for psychological assessment, counseling, and preventive activities. The second mechanism is professional supervision, which supports reflection, ethical decision-making, and the development of professional competence among young psychologists [3].

The third mechanism involves creating a collaborative professional environment based on mentoring, peer interaction, and continuous professional learning. Group seminars, professional learning communities, and coaching practices allow novice specialists to learn through observation, discussion, and guided practice. Evidence from research on induction and mentoring programs confirms that systematic support structures contribute to stronger professional commitment, improved practice, and successful integration of early-career professionals into educational organizations [4].

Overall, the findings demonstrate that professional adaptation of school psychologists should be understood not only as an individual adjustment process but also as an institutional responsibility. Successful adaptation occurs when

personal professional development is supported by organizational resources, experienced mentors, and a culture of collaboration.

Discussion

The findings of this review indicate that professional adaptation should be understood not simply as an individual process of adjusting to a new workplace, but as a complex transition from academic preparation to independent professional practice. For novice school psychologists, adaptation involves not only the application of psychological knowledge and methods but also the development of professional identity, communication skills, and the ability to function effectively within the organizational culture of a school. When professional expectations, responsibilities, and evaluation criteria remain unclear, beginning specialists may experience uncertainty, difficulties in decision-making, and an imbalance between perceived competence and actual professional readiness [1].

This perspective explains the significant role of supervision and mentoring in the adaptation process. Supervision provides a structured environment in which young psychologists can analyze professional situations, reflect on their actions, and receive expert feedback. Through this process, practical experiences are transformed into professional knowledge and more effective strategies for solving complex school-related problems are developed. Previous studies emphasize that access to supervision and mentoring contributes to the formation of professional confidence, ethical awareness, and reflective skills among early-career psychologists [3].

Similarly, professional learning communities, coaching, and collaborative forms of professional development create opportunities for novice specialists to learn through observation, discussion, and shared problem-solving. Such approaches reduce professional isolation and support the gradual development of competence within authentic school contexts. Research on professional support systems demonstrates that adaptation is more successful when educational institutions create environments where beginning specialists are viewed as developing professionals who require guidance, feedback, and continuous learning opportunities rather than immediate independent performance at an expert level [2; 4].

An important implication of these findings is that professional adaptation mechanisms should become an integral part of educational institution policy. Effective adaptation requires clear definitions of professional roles, manageable workloads, regular evaluation and feedback procedures, access to experienced mentors, and opportunities for professional dialogue. In addition, structured activities such as case discussions, peer consultation groups, and targeted professional training focused on school-specific psychological challenges can strengthen the professional stability of young psychologists.

Therefore, the responsibility for successful adaptation should not be placed solely on the individual specialist. A supportive organizational environment, professional community, and systematic institutional support are essential conditions for preventing early professional burnout, improving retention, and ensuring the effective functioning of psychological services in educational institutions [1; 3].

Conclusion

Newly employed school psychologists often encounter a range of professional adaptation challenges, including unclear professional roles, limited confidence in applying counseling and corrective methods, insufficient integration into the professional community, and a lack of systematic methodological support. These difficulties may hinder the development of professional identity and reduce the effectiveness of psychological services during the early stages of professional activity [1; 2].

The analysis shows that successful adaptation requires the implementation of structured support mechanisms, including professional supervision, mentoring, access to a unified professional environment, and collaborative forms of learning such as coaching and professional learning communities. These approaches provide opportunities for reflection, experience exchange, skill development, and gradual integration into the organizational culture of educational institutions [2; 3].

Thus, professional adaptation of school psychologists should be viewed as a shared responsibility between the individual specialist and the educational institution. Sustainable professional development is achieved when personal efforts are supported by a well-organized institutional system that provides

guidance, feedback, professional cooperation, and continuous learning opportunities [1; 4].

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