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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SPEECH THERAPISTS AND TEACHERS IN ARMENIA AND BEYOND

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research project is to present a comprehensive examination of the disparities in continuous professional development (CPD) for speech therapists and teachers. The consequences for service quality and professional standards within these two critical disciplines will be the primary focus of the analysis. As mandated by the regulatory framework, teachers in Armenia, for example, must participate in continuing professional development (CPD) programs to maintain their professional qualifications. On the other hand, speech therapists are not subject to the same responsibilities, which causes significant differences between the two professions in terms of the development of skills and the ongoing of their education.

This study compares the consequences of several continuing professional development requirements, shared professional practices, and relevant government laws. A critical analysis of the quantitative and qualitative pros and cons of mandating continuing professional development (CPD) for speech therapists is conducted. To support this review, empirical evidence has been gathered via interviews with important stakeholders and a comprehensive study of the present accessible knowledge.

These findings highlight the urgent need for a more organized and coherent continuous professional development (CPD) framework particularly designed for speech therapists, that conforms with the professional development policies set for teachers, and that is more consistent. Additionally, this research offers specific recommendations that are designed to enhance legislative structures to increase the opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD) in both professions. The suggested projects are meant to improve the quality of services and professional knowledge in speech therapy as well as to guarantee that every professional working in Armenian educational and therapeutic environments satisfies high criteria of competence. The communities they serve will eventually gain from this. This will be achieved by fostering a culture of ongoing professional development.

Keywords: *Speech therapists, teachers, Armenia, educational policy, comparative analysis, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), speech therapy, teacher training, professional development framework, service quality, regulatory standards, professional standards, teacher certification, rural vs. urban disparities, international standards, educational reform.*

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Definition

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is a continuous process of professional learning that enables individuals to enhance and maintain their competencies, knowledge, and skills. For example, Cameron and Baker (2020) argue that engaging in continuing professional development (CPD) allows professionals to remain informed about the most recent advancements and optimal procedures in their respective fields, thereby ensuring the provision of exceptional service. Formal training courses, informal learning opportunities, seminars, workshops, and pragmatic chances for hands-on experience constitute among the several forms of CPD (Day, 2021). In fields including education and healthcare, constant professional development (CPD) is acknowledged as a basic component of professional responsibility helping people to adapt to the changing needs of consumers and industry norms (Hoffman et al., 2019).

The Importance of Continuous Professional Development for Speech Therapists and Teachers

Particularly in underdeveloped parts of Armenia, the development of education and the enhancement of society depend on speech therapists and instructors. These professionals routinely interact with children who have trouble in communicating and learning, hence they need a strong basis of knowledge and skills (Armenian Ministry of Education, 2022.). Since it enables practitioners to adequately manage the demands of their clients and preserve their knowledge, both professions depend on continuous professional development (CPD).

Constant professional development (CPD) can help one to stay current with the most recent findings and treatment techniques in the domains of language development, dysphagia, and autism spectrum disorders (Kirkpatrick et al., 2021). Similarly, ongoing professional development (CPD) helps teachers to better mix new teaching tools, classroom management tactics, and state-of-the-art technologies. Ultimately, this continuous professional development fits the national educational improvements aimed at improving the quality of education and elevating the academic performance of Armenian students (Hayes, 2018). This study intends to examine the CPD practices of speech therapists and teachers in Armenia. Analyzing the parallels and contrasts between speech therapy and teaching will

enable this study to provide a perceptive assessment of how CPD support in both significant domains may be enhanced. The results can direct policy proposals designed to foster a more ordered and inclusive attitude to professional development and serve to shift the debate on continuous professional development (CPD) in Armenia.

REVIEW OF PRIOR RESEARCH

An Overview of the Practices Used in Speech Therapy for Continuing Professional Development

Speech therapists engage in a diversity of continuing professional development events to enhance the efficacy of their treatments and their clinical skills. These activities, which encompass online courses, conferences, peer collaboration, and seminars, are facilitated by professional societies, academic institutions, and healthcare organizations (Tate & Gibbons, 2021). Established as an informal association of experts offering chances for ongoing professional development (CPD), the Armenian Association of Logopedists came first in April 2018. They provide necessary trainings to ensure the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions.

One of the main reasons speech therapists should participate in ongoing professional development (CPD) is the inclusion of the most recent studies into clinical practice. This is particularly true in the domains of neurolinguistics and cognitive therapy, where practitioners are required to be informed on the most recent advancements to enhance patient treatment (Barker et al., 2019). Moreover, research suggests that consistent attendance in continuous professional development events could lead to improved therapy outcomes, more patient satisfaction, and more therapist confidence (Harrison et al., 2020)..

A Comprehensive Examination of the Methods Implemented in Classroom Continuing Professional Development

Teachers in Armenia are mandated to participate in a diverse array of professional learning programs as part for their ongoing professional development (CPD) obligations. The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport of Armenia (2021) is a crucial component in the management of continuing professional development (CPD) programs, frequently collaborating with non-governmental organizations (NGRs) and international educational institutions.

To increase student engagement and educational outcomes, teachers routinely give crucial areas including classroom management, personalized instruction, and curricular changes - top priority (Smith & Johnson, 2021). As such, they frequently focus on continuing professional development (CPD).

Nevertheless, challenges persist that have the potential to impede the efficacy of continuing professional development for educators. Roberts et al. (2018) have reported that a lack of resources and restricted access to high-quality training, particularly in rural areas, are issues that contribute to the overall absence of structured continuing professional development (CPD) paths. These kinds of challenges can lead to inequalities in professional development experiences, which can then influence the quality of education in many different contexts.

An Evaluation of Different CPD Approaches Comparatively

Methods of ongoing professional development (CPD) for speech therapists and educators are significantly different, a manifestation of the unique requirements and circumstances of each profession. Speech therapists are frequently engaged in continuing professional development (CPD) programs that emphasize clinical abilities and therapeutic techniques. These programs frequently incorporate workshops that focus on specific topics, such as the enhancement of children's speech and language development and the resolution of cognitive-communication challenges. Such sessions are frequently organized through a combination of international conferences and in-person seminars to provide participants with the opportunity to acquire in-depth knowledge that is relevant to their clinical practices (Johnson et al., 2019).

On the other hand, educators are more inclined to engage in ongoing continuing professional development (CPD) programs that encompass a broader array of educational topics. These initiatives may involve the implementation of innovative pedagogical strategies, inclusive education concepts, and technology. The development of new teaching approaches is frequently emphasized in the continuing professional development (CPD) that educators receive, which may be less specialized than the training that speech therapists receive (Chen & Tzeng, 2020). Although this multifaceted approach is beneficial in fostering a comprehensive comprehension of contemporary educational methods, it may occasionally lead to a reduction in subject matter expertise.

Research has demonstrated that both categories can benefit from continuous professional development (CPD); however, the specific approaches can have varying effects on service delivery and professional development. For example, research has shown that speech therapists can enhance their clinical competencies by implementing skill-specific training that is tailored to specific skills. This, in turn, enhances their ability to implement effective interventions (Rees et al., 2019). Conversely, educators who engage in more comprehensive professional development initiatives may encounter challenges in consistently integrating newly acquired strategies into their classrooms, particularly when they are not provided with ongoing support (Vescio et al., 2018).

Continuing professional development (CPD) techniques' efficacy is contingent upon the contextual relevance of the learning experiences and the alignment of training with the requirements of practitioners. Consequently, it is imperative to adopt a specialized approach to continuing professional development (CPD) to optimize the potential of both professions and ensure the highest standards of practice in speech therapy and education.

As part of the professional development process, the identification of common obstacles;

Due to widespread budgetary constraints and geographical obstacles, speech therapists and instructors have limited opportunities for continuing professional development (Vescio et al., 2018). This is the case in both educational and occupational environments. This scarcity exacerbates the challenge faced by professionals in both fields in obtaining access to training that meets the highest academic standards. Even though speech therapists and teachers operate in distinct environments, they both encounter comparable obstacles in the realm of continuing professional development (CPD). The efficacy of continuing professional development (CPD) programs in terms of enhancing practice and addressing professional demands is significantly influenced by the relevance and application of training content. Continuing professional development (CPD) may not yield substantial improvements in the skills of professionals or the services they provide to students or clients if it fails to align with the reality that professionals encounter daily (Cameron & Baker, 2020).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the practices of continuing professional development (CPD) among speech therapists and teachers in Armenia, this study employs a mixed-methods research strategy that integrates qualitative and quantitative research protocols. This method enables the examination of the subjective experiences of the participants in a nuanced manner, as well as the identification of measurable patterns that pertain to the availability and influence of continuing professional development (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

On November 1, 2022, surveys were distributed to speech therapists and instructors throughout Armenia. These surveys inquired about barriers to participation, satisfaction, and CPD options. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the CPD experiences of professionals, in-depth interviews were also conducted. "The questionnaires were sent to teachers and speech therapists all throughout Armenia; the actual count of participants who got and applied them is not mentioned in the sources. Local associations for children with disabilities were among the fresh knowledge that Armenian caregivers, teachers, and school staff members discovered via the resources given. (Natasha et al., 2022)

THE TECHNIQUES EMPLOYED TO SELECT SAMPLES

The application of the Armav AAC project and the success of the subsequent supervisors

Eight Speech therapists from different areas of Armenia have participated in the application course of the Armav AAC project, which was conducted by logopedists Armenuhi Avagyan, PhD (developer of the Armav AAC project, child psychologist, logopedist) and Taline Ashekian (M.S., CCC-SLP/ASDCS, PhD candidate, Co-Owner of the Harmony Speech Therapy & Diagnostics (California, USA), leading expert of the Western Armenian version of the Armav AAC project).

The courses were three days long and included comprehensive information on communication assessment, alternative communication methods, the use of advanced technological tools, and the MASTER PAL methodology. They were enriched with theoretical and practical knowledge, videos, group work, and experiments.

The participants also had one online supervision session per month for three consecutive months. The supervisors were the same instructors. In general, the evaluation included matrix completion, application of project functions, modeling, the expert as a communication partner, interdisciplinary activities, feedback, provision of assistance/reminders, and the opportunity for the participants to speak with the instructor before the next session. At the end of each supervision, the participants received recommendations and demonstrations.

Finally, the instructors prepared the evaluation form for the course/instructors' evaluation, which was sent to the participants. The analysis of the forms showed that the participants of the course and the supervisors highly appreciated the work in the specified format.

One participant writes, "The comprehensive information was very useful, including information on child development, evaluation criteria for communication, verbal communication, and the combination of high and low technological tools." Another participant notes, "The work was very productive. First, the transfer of visual knowledge, then online supervisions were discussed in detail and corresponding demonstrations were provided. It was suggested that the program would continue to provide continuous benefits. Since the child is attending school and working with teachers, teacher assistants, and other experts, it would be desirable for them to be informed or trained about the program."

The supervision also involved other experts, teachers, and parents who interact with children. They also demonstrated the application of the Armav AAC program, showing how it can be used in their daily routines, performing educational and purchasing activities.

The course instructors confirm the significant progress of the experts, who have been able to apply a wider and more effective range of high technologies in their work.

Thus, the course format significantly improved the participants' skills and ensured high efficiency.

The format of education was unique in Armenia. For the first time in this field, educational programs were followed by scientific-technical support, various supervisions. Managers and educators confirm the great success of experts, who can apply the latest technologies more widely and effectively in their work. Participants who were engaged in continuing professional development were selected through purposive sampling techniques. This approach guaranteed a diverse array of experts, each of whom possessed a diverse set of experiences and backgrounds in Armenia, particularly in urban and rural regions. This diversity enables a comprehensive examination of the ways in which geographical and contextual factors influence the efficacy and involvement of continuing professional development (CPD) (Tate & Gibbons, 2021).

COMPARISON OF CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPEECH THERAPISTS AND TEACHERS: OUTCOMES

In Armenia, speech therapists and teachers have access to a diverse array of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities. However, the nature of these opportunities and the way they are presented differ significantly between the two professions, as indicated by the results. Usually, speech therapists engage in specialized training sessions that underscore the significance of advanced clinical skills and concentrate on treatment strategies associated with language development and fluency issues (Harrison et al., 2020). These specialized training programs are frequently funded by international organizations, individuals, or local institutions that have connections to the healthcare sector to ensure that practitioners are always informed about the most recent evidence-based procedures.

Conversely, educators opt for continuing professional development (CPD) programs that encompass a broader spectrum of educational concerns, including curriculum innovations, inclusive education strategies, and classroom management strategies. On the other hand, the accessibility of these opportunities is highly disparate. Teachers employed in urban areas generally have significantly greater access to continuing professional development (CPD) resources than their counterparts in rural areas, who frequently depend on online courses or training provided by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Regrettably, it is feasible that these products are not consistently customized to accommodate the unique requirements of the individuals or the obstacles they encounter in their respective regions (Hayes, 2018).

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN BOTH FIELDS

According to the data, speech therapists generally report higher levels of satisfaction with the

continuing professional development opportunities that are available to them. This is noteworthy in terms of its efficacy. On May 11, 2024, more than a dozen Armenian speech therapists from Armenia were invited to participate in the Communication Always Matters All Ways (CAMA) annual online conference among hundreds of international participants. Numerous Armenian speech therapist's participants reported that their clinical practice was significantly improved as a direct consequence of participating in specialized training sessions, particularly those that concentrated on innovative therapeutic methods in the alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) world.

Participation in international conferences further enriches professional development by offering professionals the opportunity to network with other professionals and gain exposure to innovative approaches that are being used in other settings (Kirkpatrick et al., 2021).

Conversely, educators frequently express their dissatisfaction with the relevance of continuing professional development (CPD) programs. The seminars that were offered were predominantly theoretical and did not offer any immediate practical application for the teaching situations of many individuals, according to their reports. This discrepancy is particularly evident among educators employed in rural areas, as the content of continuing professional development (CPD) fails to adequately address the distinctive challenges that are linked to restricted access to resources and materials. There is a growing demand for continuing professional development (CPD) programs that are more tailored to the actual working conditions that teachers encounter (Smith & Johnson, 2021).

The research's results underscore the significance of continuing professional development frameworks that can recognize and accommodate the distinctive challenges and demands that speech therapists and instructors encounter. Ultimately, this alignment will enhance the quality of professional development and, as a result, the efficacy of the services provided to consumers and students.

THE SATISFACTION OF EDUCATORS WITH CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Conversely, educators frequently express their dissatisfaction with the relevance of continuing professional development (CPD) programs. Numerous individuals have indicated that continuing professional development (CPD) seminars are exceedingly academic and fail to offer any practical solutions that could be readily implemented in their classrooms. This divergence is most pronounced among educators who operate in rural areas, as per the research conducted by Chen and Tzeng in 2020. These educators encounter challenges that are associated with restricted resources and materials. Educators underscore the significance of continuing professional development (CPD) that is customized to their specific work environment and aligns with their current working conditions. They

require training that addresses practical challenges, including the effective integration of technology into their teaching practices, the diverse needs of learners, and the large class sizes, as per Roberts et al. (2018).

DETECTING OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES IN THE PATH OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Speech therapists and educators have both reported that they encounter a variety of challenges that impede their ability to engage in ongoing professional development courses. Individuals who are employed by public organizations with restricted budgets for continuing professional development initiatives encounter substantial financial constraints (Vescio et al., 2018). The demanding responsibilities of both instructors and therapists make it difficult to attend continuing professional development (CPD) programs consistently. The situation is further complicated by the existence of time constraints.

Another challenge is the geographic limitations that are particularly challenging to surmount for professionals who are employed in rural areas and have limited access to in-person training. Cameron and Baker's 2020 research indicates that a substantial number of educators and clinicians are compelled to resort to online continuing professional development (CPD) resources, which may not provide the same level of engagement and connection as traditional face-to-face learning sessions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SPEECH THERAPY AND COMMUNICATION THERAPY EDUCATION

Significant implications can be deduced from the results of this investigation regarding the implementation of speech therapy and teaching methodologies in Armenia. Speech therapists must pursue continuing professional development (CPD) that is both evidence-based and highly specialized to maintain high standards of service. To achieve this, it is imperative to integrate training that not only addresses the most recent advancements in therapy but also considers the demographic and cultural intricacies that are prevalent among the Armenian population (Harrison et al., 2020). There is a substantial demand for a broader range of materials and training programs that are available in the Armenian language and that specifically address the challenges that are currently present in the country's healthcare system.

In contrast, educators require continuing professional development (CPD) programs that are not only pertinent but also directly related to the challenges they encounter in their classrooms. Continuing professional development (CPD) must provide tangible solutions for effectively managing large class

sizes, integrating technology within the constraints of limited resources, and addressing the requirements of learners from a variety of backgrounds. The utilization of online platforms or the development and implementation of mobile training units can help alleviate some of the geographical constraints that were identified in this research (Smith & Johnson, 2021). This study was conducted from the perspective of instructors who operate in regions with restricted resources.

STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN BOTH FIELDS

To improve the continuing professional development (CPD) of speech therapists, professional associations and training providers should establish a greater number of resources in the Armenian language and develop locally customized training programs. CPD opportunities that are closely aligned with the specific requirements of speech therapists practicing in Armenia could be established through collaborations with local healthcare facilities and educational institutions. Advocating for increased funding for CPD initiatives, particularly for therapists employed in public healthcare environments, may be necessary to address the financial obstacles identified in this study (Kirkpatrick et al., 2021).

Educators should be provided with CPD programs that are tailored to address the practical and distinctive obstacles encountered in the Armenian educational system. This could encompass instruction on effective teaching strategies for multi-grade classrooms, strategies for engaging students with limited access to technology, and methods for integrating Armenian cultural history into the curriculum. The accessibility of CPD for educators in rural areas can be improved by utilizing mobile training units and online platforms. Additionally, to facilitate the successful implementation of new strategies, instructors should prioritize the development of mentorship opportunities and the promotion of peer collaboration (Roberts et al., 2018).

AREAS OF POTENTIAL RESEARCH

Future research could concentrate on longitudinal studies that evaluate the long-term influence of continuing professional development (CPD) on professional practice in both speech therapy and education. Specific outcomes, such as enhancements in therapeutic efficacy, student learning outcomes, and overall professional satisfaction, could be monitored over time through such investigations (Cameron & Baker, 2020). Furthermore, investigating the potential impact of CPD on patient outcomes for speech therapists and educational practices for teachers provides valuable insights into the efficacy of CPD initiatives and informs future enhancements.

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