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CRITERIA AND DIAGNOSTIC METHODS FOR ASSESSING THE PROFESSIONAL ADAPTATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

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Abstract

This article examines the criteria and diagnostic methods used to assess the professional adaptation of school psychologists. Professional adaptation is understood as the process through which a newly employed or early-career school psychologist aligns professional knowledge, practical skills, ethical standards, and workplace behavior with the demands of the school environment. The analysis shows that effective assessment requires multiple criteria, including role clarity, consultation skills, data-based decision making, emotional self-regulation, collaboration, and adherence to professional ethics. The article also highlights diagnostic methods such as observation, performance rubrics, supervision-based evaluation, self-assessment, portfolio analysis, and multi-source feedback.

Keywords: school psychologists, professional adaptation, assessment criteria, diagnostic methods, supervision, evaluation rubrics, professional competence, school psychology.

INTRODUCTION

Professional adaptation is one of the most important stages in the professional development of school psychologists, as it determines how effectively a specialist transitions from academic preparation to independent professional practice. The



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school psychologist's work is characterized by a wide range of responsibilities, including psychological assessment, consultation, preventive activities, corrective interventions, crisis support, collaboration with teachers and parents, and adherence to professional and ethical standards. Therefore, the level of adaptation cannot be evaluated only by the duration of employment or the completion of assigned tasks; it should be assessed through a comprehensive analysis of professional competencies, behavioral indicators, interpersonal effectiveness, and the ability to function successfully within the educational environment [1; 4].

Professional adaptation assessment requires clearly defined criteria that reflect the specific characteristics of school psychological practice. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) emphasizes that the evaluation of school psychologists should be based on comprehensive professional practice domains, including data-based decision-making, consultation and collaboration, intervention development, prevention, ethical responsibility, and continuous professional growth. Such an approach allows adaptation to be understood as a dynamic process of competence formation rather than simple adjustment to workplace conditions [1; 4].

Modern professional standards indicate that effective adaptation assessment should include both qualitative and quantitative diagnostic approaches. These may involve observation of professional activities, analysis of documentation, self-assessment methods, supervisor evaluations, interviews, competency-based assessment tools, and feedback from colleagues. Such methods help identify not only the current level of professional readiness but also areas requiring further development and support [2; 5].

The importance of diagnostic methods is especially relevant during the early stages of a school psychologist's career, when specialists often experience difficulties related to role clarification, professional decision-making, communication with



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educational staff, and application of theoretical knowledge in real situations. Supervision and mentoring systems are considered important mechanisms for identifying adaptation difficulties and supporting professional growth [5; 6].

Thus, the assessment of school psychologists' professional adaptation should be based on an integrated model that combines professional competence criteria, psychological readiness indicators, social interaction skills, and the ability to independently solve practical problems. Such an approach makes it possible to identify adaptation challenges in a timely manner and create effective conditions for professional development [7; 9].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article is based on a qualitative review and conceptual analysis of professional standards, evaluation frameworks, and scientific materials related to the assessment of school psychologists' professional adaptation. The analyzed sources include documents developed by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), professional practice guidelines, competency frameworks, evaluation rubrics, and materials describing psychodiagnostic approaches in school psychological practice. The selection of sources was based on their relevance to professional competence assessment, adaptation processes, supervision, and performance evaluation mechanisms in educational settings [1; 4; 10].

The research method applied in the study was document analysis, which allowed comparison and systematization of the main criteria used to evaluate school psychologists' professional adaptation. The analysis focused on the following dimensions: professional knowledge, practical competence, communication and collaboration skills, ethical responsibility, flexibility, decision-making ability, and continuous professional development. These dimensions were examined as key



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indicators reflecting the transition from initial professional preparation to effective independent practice [2; 7].

Special attention was given to the diagnostic methods used for assessing adaptation and professional competence. The study analyzed the effectiveness of such methods as direct observation, competency-based evaluation rubrics, supervisory assessment, self-assessment questionnaires, portfolio analysis, and multi-source feedback. These approaches were considered not only as measurement tools but also as mechanisms for identifying professional development needs and supporting early-career school psychologists [5; 6].

The methodological approach of the study is based on the assumption that professional adaptation should be assessed as a multidimensional process. Therefore, the analysis does not consider adaptation as a single outcome but as a combination of professional behavior, psychological readiness, interpersonal effectiveness, ethical practice, and the ability to improve through reflection and professional learning [1; 9].

RESULTS

The analysis of professional standards and evaluation models indicates that the assessment of school psychologists' professional adaptation should be based on a set of interrelated criteria. The first criterion is professional role understanding, which reflects the psychologist's awareness of professional responsibilities, service boundaries, ethical requirements, and the specific functions of school psychological support. Clear understanding of professional roles reduces uncertainty and contributes to more effective integration into the educational environment [3; 4].

The second criterion is consultation and collaboration competence. School psychologists operate within a complex social system that requires continuous



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cooperation with teachers, school administrators, students, families, and other specialists. Therefore, the ability to communicate effectively, coordinate actions, and provide professional consultation is considered a central indicator of successful adaptation [2; 7].

The third criterion is evidence-based professional practice, which includes the ability to collect, analyze, and use psychological assessment data for decision-making. Adapted specialists should demonstrate competence in selecting appropriate assessment methods, interpreting results, planning interventions, and monitoring outcomes. This criterion reflects the transition from theoretical knowledge to practical application [4; 10].

Another important criterion is ethical and professional behavior. School psychologists must demonstrate confidentiality, respect for individual differences, responsibility in documentation, and adherence to professional standards. Ethical competence is particularly significant because psychological services involve sensitive information and complex interpersonal situations [3; 7].

The fifth criterion is adaptive performance, which refers to the ability to respond effectively to changing educational conditions, manage professional demands, prioritize tasks, and maintain effectiveness under pressure. This indicator reflects the psychologist's flexibility and readiness to function in diverse school environments [8; 9].

The sixth criterion is professional development orientation, including participation in supervision, mentoring, continuing education, and reflective practice. Research-based professional frameworks emphasize that adaptation is not completed after initial employment but continues throughout professional growth. Regular feedback and learning opportunities strengthen competence and reduce professional difficulties among beginning specialists [5; 6].



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The reviewed literature identifies several diagnostic methods for assessing adaptation. Direct observation allows evaluation of real professional behavior during counseling sessions, consultations, meetings, and assessment activities. Performance-based rubrics transform professional expectations into measurable indicators and help determine different levels of competence development [8].

Supervision-based assessment is particularly valuable for newly employed psychologists because it combines evaluation with professional support. Through supervision, specialists receive feedback, analyze difficult cases, and improve professional decision-making. This approach contributes not only to accountability but also to professional growth [5].

Additional methods include self-assessment, which encourages reflection on personal strengths and areas for improvement, and portfolio analysis, which provides evidence of professional activity through reports, intervention plans, documentation, and professional development records. Multi-source feedback involving supervisors, colleagues, teachers, and other stakeholders is also important because school psychology is based on collaboration and interaction within the educational community [7; 9].

The NASP evaluation model emphasizes that valid assessment of school psychologists should not rely on a single indicator or isolated performance measure. Instead, effective evaluation requires the integration of multiple sources of evidence and should combine professional accountability with developmental support. Therefore, the assessment of professional adaptation is most effective when it functions simultaneously as a diagnostic process and a mechanism for improving professional competence [1].



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DISCUSSION

The obtained results demonstrate that professional adaptation of school psychologists should be understood not as a single personal characteristic but as a complex and multidimensional process that includes professional, psychological, social, and organizational components. A specialist may possess sufficient theoretical knowledge but experience difficulties in practical application, communication with educational stakeholders, workload management, or understanding professional boundaries. Therefore, the assessment of adaptation should consider the real conditions of school practice and the specific requirements of psychological services within educational institutions [1; 4].

The analysis confirms that comprehensive evaluation models, such as the NASP practice framework, are more appropriate than narrow assessment approaches based only on the completion of specific tasks. School psychologists perform a wide range of professional functions, including psychological assessment, consultation, intervention planning, prevention, collaboration, and ethical decision-making. Consequently, adaptation should be evaluated through the integration of different professional competencies rather than through isolated indicators [1; 4].

The effectiveness of diagnostic procedures increases when several assessment methods are combined. Direct observation provides information about actual professional behavior in real working situations, including communication style, counseling skills, and decision-making processes. Evaluation rubrics contribute to objectivity by establishing clear competency indicators and criteria for different levels of professional development. Portfolio analysis demonstrates evidence of professional activity, while supervision creates opportunities for reflection, feedback, and correction of professional difficulties [5; 6].



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The combination of diagnostic methods allows evaluators to identify the specific reasons behind adaptation difficulties. Such difficulties may result from insufficient professional knowledge, limited practical experience, low confidence, weak communication skills, inadequate methodological support, or unclear institutional expectations. Therefore, assessment should not be limited to identifying shortcomings; it should also serve as a basis for designing individual professional development strategies [7; 9].

The results also highlight the importance of organizational factors in the adaptation process. Professional adaptation depends not only on the individual characteristics of the psychologist but also on the conditions created by the educational institution. Supervision, mentoring, professional collaboration, and balanced workload distribution create a supportive environment that facilitates competence development and improves professional stability [5; 9].

At the same time, unfavorable institutional conditions may negatively influence the perception of a psychologist's effectiveness. Even a professionally prepared specialist may experience difficulties when there is insufficient support, excessive workload, lack of feedback, or unclear expectations. Therefore, assessment systems should consider both individual professional characteristics and organizational context in which the psychologist performs his or her duties [1; 7]. Thus, professional adaptation assessment should function not only as a control mechanism but also as a developmental tool. When diagnostic procedures are linked with supervision, mentoring, and continuous professional learning, they contribute to improving competence, strengthening professional identity, and ensuring higher quality psychological services in schools [5; 6].



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CONCLUSION

The assessment of school psychologists' professional adaptation should be based on a comprehensive set of criteria reflecting the complexity of school psychological practice. The main criteria include professional role understanding, consultation and collaboration competence, data-based decision-making skills, ethical behavior, adaptive performance, and commitment to continuous professional development [1; 4].

The most effective diagnostic methods are those that combine different sources of information and provide a complete picture of professional functioning. Direct observation, competency-based rubrics, supervision-based evaluation, self-assessment, portfolio analysis, and multi-source feedback allow a more objective and reliable assessment of adaptation processes [5; 7].

A comprehensive approach to adaptation assessment makes it possible not only to identify professional difficulties but also to create targeted support mechanisms for school psychologists. Therefore, evaluation should be connected with mentoring, supervision, professional learning opportunities, and institutional support systems. Such an approach contributes to the development of professional competence and improves the effectiveness of psychological services in educational institutions [9; 10].

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