

ENHANCING PEDAGOGICAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT AND FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT IN ARMENIAN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS: TOWARD AN INCLUSIVE MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Following Article 17, Part 7 of the “Law on Education” of the Republic of Armenia, pedagogical-psychological support services for students are provided at three levels: school, territorial, and republican.

This paper outlines the regulatory framework, examines the peculiarities of service provision, and discusses challenges associated with assessing children's special educational needs - including those with speech disorders. The study reveals significant gaps in the current assessment processes by drawing on an extensive literature review, document analysis, and empirical data collected from specialists in academic institutions and regional support centers.

The findings underscore the need for a comprehensive, standardized model that aligns with internationally recognized indicators of functionality, disability, and health. Such a model would facilitate improved planning, intervention, and resource allocation for children with special educational needs in Armenia.

Introduction

In the Republic of Armenia, the provision of occupational-psychological support services in educational organizations is regulated by the “Law on Education.” Specifically, Article 17, Part 7 establishes a multi-tiered system whereby such support is delivered at the school, territorial, and republican levels. These services aim to create unique educational conditions that facilitate children's educational, developmental, and social inclusion - particularly those with speech disorders and other functional impairments.

Recent amendments to the law (e.g., the April 13, 2017, Order No. 370-N and subsequent revisions) have mandated that the assessment of special educational needs incorporate internationally recognized indicators of functionality, disability, and health. However, current research indicates that the implementation of these standards is inconsistent. In practice, assessments have been based on a limited set of dysfunctions (initially five, now expanded to eight) that do not fully capture the complexity of a child's functional status. Moreover, the process of occupational-psychological evaluation is intertwined with a medical model that often requires only minimal professional intervention. These shortcomings necessitate re-examining the assessment procedures and developing a new model for occupational-psychological support services.

Review of the literature

Over the past two decades, inclusive education has emerged as a cornerstone of educational reform globally, emphasizing the need for tailored support services that address academic and developmental challenges. Central to these efforts is providing pedagogical-psychological support, which is pivotal in facilitating all students' full participation, including those with disabilities and special educational needs (Guichard & Grande, 2018; Law, 1991). In the Republic of Armenia, this support is framed by the “Law on Education” (2009–2023), which, under Article 17, Part 7, mandates a structured, three-tiered service delivery system at the school, territorial, and republican levels.

National initiatives in Armenia have increasingly aligned with international frameworks such as the World Health Organization’s International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health for Children and Youth (ICF-CY) (World Health Organization, 2007). These frameworks emphasize that functional assessment should capture a broad spectrum of a child’s abilities and challenges, moving beyond traditional, narrow classifications. Despite these progressive policies and the amendments enacted via the April 13, 2017, Order No. 370-N and subsequent revisions, practical challenges persist. Empirical studies have indicated that current assessment practices in Armenia tend to rely on outdated dysfunction classifications - initially focusing on five, and more recently eight, domains (e.g., voice, speech, hearing, vision, intellectual, and motor functions) -which may not fully encompass the multifaceted nature of children’s developmental and speech-related disorders (Harutyunyan, 2024); Aslanyan & Grigoryan, 2022; Harutyunyan, 2015).

International research underscores the importance of adopting a comprehensive, evidence-based approach to functional assessment to inform effective occupational-psychological and speech therapy interventions (Albrecht & Khetani, 2016; Anaby et al., 2014). For instance, studies have demonstrated that the environment and context significantly mediate children’s participation and development, suggesting that assessments must be multifactorial and context-sensitive (Anaby et al., 2014). Similarly, global directives - such as those from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD, 2006) - stress the rights of all children to receive individualized, high-quality support, thereby providing a strong impetus for reform in national assessment practices.

Within Armenia, the gap between policy and practice is further accentuated by variability in professional preparedness. Many educators, speech therapists, and support specialists have reported insufficient training in applying internationally validated functional assessment tools, which leads to inconsistent identification of special educational needs (Aslanyan & Grigoryan, 2022; Harutyunyan, 2015). These shortcomings not only hinder the accurate diagnosis of developmental and speech disorders but also compromise the planning and delivery of targeted interventions aimed at fostering both academic and social inclusion.

Furthermore, recent national research has pointed to the need for systematically integrating functional assessment data into the planning and execution of pedagogical-psychological support services. For example, studies have highlighted that the current evaluation methods often fail to capture the specific requirements of children with speech disorders, thus limiting the effectiveness of subsequent therapeutic interventions (Aslanyan, 2023). Such findings are echoed in international literature, which advocates for models that blend rigorous assessment protocols with practical intervention strategies to support inclusive education (Guichard & Grande, 2018; Law, 1991).

In light of these challenges, this study aims to bridge the gap between international best practices and national implementation in Armenia by proposing a comprehensive model for occupational-psychological support and functional assessment. The model integrates internationally recognized indicators - such as those outlined by the ICF-CY—with the specific contextual needs identified in Armenian educational settings. By doing so, the proposed framework seeks to enhance the accuracy of assessments, improve the planning of tailored

interventions, and ultimately contribute to developing an inclusive educational environment that benefits all students.

This research not only responds to the calls for reform articulated in national legislative amendments and policy documents (Republic of Armenia, 2009 - 2023; Order No. 370-N, 2017) but also contributes to the international discourse on inclusive education by offering insights into the practical challenges and potential solutions for integrating occupational-psychological support within diverse educational contexts. Future studies and policy initiatives can build upon this model to further refine assessment practices and support services, ensuring every child receives the appropriate educational opportunities and developmental support they need to thrive.

Methodology

This study employed a multi-method approach comprising literature review and document analysis, empirical data collection, and comparative analysis.

Literature Review and Document Analysis as a thorough review of national legislation (e.g., the “Law on Education” and subsequent amendments), ministerial orders, and methodological guidelines was undertaken to outline the current regulatory framework. The empirical data was collected from professionals working in regional pedagogical-psychological support centers, including special educators, speech therapists, and school teachers. Structured surveys, interviews, and observations were conducted to assess their level of knowledge regarding functional assessment criteria and the delivery of support services.

The study's comparative analysis compared the existing assessment criteria against internationally accepted standards, such as the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health for Children and Youth (ICF-CY).

Respondents

316 respondents from various educational and support service-providing institutions across Armenia participated in the study. The respondents were categorized into two primary groups: special educators, speech therapists, school teachers, rehabilitation specialists from pedagogical-psychological support teams, and postgraduate students engaged in special education research and practice.

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1.

The demographic characteristics of the participants.

<i>Group</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Special Educators, Speech Therapists, Teachers, Support team Specialists, etc.	236	75
Postgraduate Students	80	25
TOTAL	316	100

Results

Knowledge of Functional Assessment Criteria

The survey responses revealed significant discrepancies in the familiarity with functional assessment criteria - especially those based on internationally recognized frameworks such as the ICF-CY. As summarized in Table 2, many professionals working directly in special education and rehabilitation indicated insufficient knowledge regarding these assessment tools.

Table 2.

Familiarity with Functional Assessment Criteria by Professional Group

Group (%)	Sufficient Knowledge (%)	Insufficient Knowledge (%)	Ambiguous/No Knowledge (%)
Special Educators, Speech Therapists, Teachers, Support team Specialists, etc.	35	70	35
Postgraduate Students	50	30	20

In contrast to the frontline professionals, postgraduate students demonstrated a relatively higher level of awareness - 50% reported sufficient familiarity with the current international indicators. This gap suggests a pressing need for ongoing professional development and training, especially for practitioners directly involved in service delivery.

Evaluation of Service Delivery Processes

Respondents also questioned the clarity and effectiveness of the current pedagogical-psychological support service delivery guidelines. The results indicated considerable variability:

- 40% of respondents believed the existing guidelines were clearly and effectively implemented.
- 35% reported that the procedures were ambiguous.
- 25% found the guidelines to be unclear.

Table 3 illustrates this distribution:

Table 3.

Clarity of Pedagogical-Psychological Support Service Delivery Processes

Clear	Ambiguous	Unclear
40%	35%	25%

Regional Variability and Operational Gaps

Analysis of qualitative interview data revealed notable regional disparities. Urban centers, particularly in Yerevan, generally reported higher levels of professional training and more standardized practices than regional centers. Several respondents highlighted that the current functional assessment methods rely on outdated classifications - originally developed to assess only five to eight domains (e.g., voice, speech, hearing, vision, intellectual, and motor functions). This limitation compromises the effective identification of complex developmental and speech disorders, affecting intervention planning.

Furthermore, only about 40% of respondents felt that the existing assessment protocols effectively informed subsequent pedagogical-psychological and speech therapy interventions. The majority (approximately 60 - 70%) indicated a lack of practical guidance on integrating internationally recognized functional indicators into the assessment process. These findings underscore the discrepancy between the legislative framework and its practical implementation.

Overall, the results indicate the following factors, which are indicated in Table 4. At the same important to stress that these findings provide a robust foundation for the proposed model, aiming to bridge the gap between policy and practice in the pedagogical-psychological support system in Armenia

Table 4.

Results and factors indicating them

Factor	Description
Demographic Distribution	A balanced representation of practitioners and researchers across various roles.
Knowledge Gaps	There is a significant deficiency in familiarity with contemporary functional assessment criteria among special educators and rehabilitation specialists, in contrast to postgraduate students.

Operational Inconsistencies	There are ambitions to apply existing guidelines and regional disparities in implementing pedagogical-psychological support services.
Need for Standardization	Reliance on outdated assessment classifications highlights the urgent need for a comprehensive, evidence-based model that aligns with international standards and improves the planning and delivery of support services.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore several critical issues within the current framework of pedagogical-psychological support and functional assessment in Armenian educational institutions. Despite a well-defined legislative framework, such as the “Law on Education” and subsequent amendments (Republic of Armenia, 2009–2023), our results reveal that gaps between policy intent and practical implementation remain.

Knowledge and Training Deficits

The significant discrepancies in familiarity with internationally recognized functional assessment criteria - such as those derived from the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health for Children and Youth (ICF-CY; WHO, 2007) - are particularly concerning. Frontline practitioners (special educators, speech therapists, and rehabilitation specialists) reported insufficient knowledge compared to postgraduate students, who generally demonstrated higher levels of awareness. This disparity suggests that while recent academic curricula may incorporate contemporary frameworks, the continuous professional development of those actively engaged in service delivery is lacking. These findings are consistent with international literature emphasizing robust training programs to ensure practitioners can effectively apply modern assessment tools (Guichard & Grande, 2018; Law, 1991).

Operational Inconsistencies

The variability in service delivery processes, as evidenced by the mixed responses regarding the clarity of guidelines, further highlights the operational challenges faced by professionals in the field. Approximately 60 - 70% of respondents indicated that the current assessment protocols do not adequately inform the planning of occupational-psychological and speech therapy interventions. Regional disparities exacerbate this operational inconsistency; urban centers such as Yerevan report more standardized practices than regional centers. Such differences may lead to unequal educational opportunities for children with special educational needs, thus impeding the broader goal of inclusive education as advocated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD, 2006).

Assessment Model Limitations

A critical limitation identified in the study is the continued reliance on outdated classifications of dysfunction - initially designed to assess a narrow set of domains (e.g., voice, speech, hearing, vision, intellectual, and motor functions). These classifications are insufficient for capturing the comprehensive spectrum of developmental and speech disorders. International research has long advocated multifactorial and context-sensitive assessment models (Albrecht & Khetani, 2016; Anaby et al., 2014). The failure to integrate such models within the current system in Armenia limits the precision of diagnosis and the effectiveness of subsequent interventions.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The discussion of these results leads to several important implications. First, there is a clear need to develop standardized training programs that equip practitioners with the knowledge and skills to implement modern, evidence-based assessment frameworks. Second, establishing a comprehensive model that integrates internationally recognized indicators with the local context is essential. Such a model would improve the accuracy of assessments and facilitate more targeted and effective intervention planning, thereby contributing to better educational and developmental outcomes for children with special needs.

Furthermore, policymakers should consider revising existing guidelines to ensure they are clear and practically applicable at all service delivery levels. This revision should include explicit recommendations on bridging the gap between medical and educational functional assessment models, fostering a more holistic approach to occupational-psychological support.

Limitations and Future Directions

While this study provides valuable insights into the current state of occupational-psychological support services in Armenia, several limitations must be acknowledged. The sample, although diverse, may not fully capture the nuances of regional differences across all districts. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases regarding the perceived adequacy of knowledge and operational practices. Future research should aim to incorporate longitudinal studies and direct observational methods to validate these findings further. There is also a need for experimental studies to test the efficacy of the proposed comprehensive model in real-world settings.

Conclusion

In summary, this study illuminates significant shortcomings in the knowledge base and the operational framework of occupational-psychological support services in Armenia. Addressing these issues by aligning national practices with international standards is imperative for advancing inclusive education. Enhancing professional training, revising assessment protocols, and implementing a standardized, comprehensive support model are critical steps toward ensuring that all children, particularly those with developmental and speech disorders, receive the tailored support they need to thrive in the educational environment.

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