

The Current Status and Strategies for the Professional Adaptability of Newly Hired Psychology Teachers

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Abstract: Educators play a central role in the education system and are crucial for enhancing the national level of education. In today's era, an increasing number of young individuals are entering the education sector, with a considerable proportion being new teachers. The adaptation period for new teachers entering the profession is a key time for deepening their understanding of the educational career. Research through numerous literature reviews has found that while studies on kindergarten and primary and secondary school teachers are abundant, there is a relative lack of research on the professional adaptability of teachers specifically engaged in psychological education. This study aims to address the professional adaptation issues of newly appointed psychology teachers. It intends to provide a sustainable development platform for these new teachers through professional development and targeted solutions to specific problems, helping them to overcome obstacles in their professional growth process. Practical recommendations and strategies are proposed to fill the gaps in existing research.

Keywords: Newly Appointed Psychology Teachers; Professional Adaptability; Sustainable Development.

1. Introduction

According to the data released in the "2023 Statistical Bulletin on the Development of Education in China" by the Ministry of Education, the total number of full-time teachers in our country increased to 18,917,800 in 2023, an increase of 114,200 from the previous year, with an increase of 0.6%. Under the influence of multiple factors such as academic pressure and family environment, many primary and secondary school students face mental health challenges, which has attracted high attention from the nation and society. To address this issue, the Ministry of Education, in conjunction with seventeen other departments, issued the "Comprehensive Strengthening and Improvement of Student Mental Health Work Action Plan (2023-2025)", which clearly requires each primary and secondary school to have at least one full-time or part-time mental health education teacher, and encourages schools to hire teachers with a professional background in psychology. It is expected that the demand for mental health teachers in primary and secondary schools will continue to rise in the coming years.

The most urgent challenge facing newly appointed psychology teachers is adapting to their professional roles and environments. However, surveys show that this group has encountered various difficulties in professional adaptation, including issues related to role transition, psychological resilience, skill reserves, and interpersonal relationships. If these issues are not properly addressed, they may not only affect the teachers' own physical and mental health but could also lead to a sense of frustration, thereby reducing their enthusiasm and efficiency in work [1]. Therefore, the professional adaptability of psychology teachers has become a focus of attention for educational administrators and a new area of academic research.

2. The Concept and Theoretical Foundations of Professional Adaptability for New Hired Psychology Teachers

2.1. Definition of Professional Adaptability

Professional adaptability refers to a set of specific abilities that an individual needs to adapt to the professional environment and solve practical problems in career development. For psychology teachers, good professional adaptability is not only crucial for their professional growth but also affects the overall development of primary and secondary schools and the improvement of educational quality. Cranton and others propose that professional adaptation is the process by which members adjust to their work roles, involving continuous adjustment and adaptation with the unit and organization. In this process, there is a mutual regulatory and interactive relationship between members and the environment[2]. According to human resource management theory, professional adaptability refers to the physiological and psychological traits required for an individual to perform a specific job, which are formed and developed through the interaction of innate conditions and the acquired environment[3]. Zhang Jianping and Zhang Caixia believe that the professional adaptability of new teachers reflects the degree of coordination with the environment after entering the professional field and the dynamic process of quickly transitioning from the student role to a mature teacher based on personal subjective expectations[4][5]. In the early stages of a career, regardless of the field we are in, we may face challenges of professional adaptation, especially for those who have just transitioned from a student role to a new teacher. Fang Lili and Chen Shijian and others understand teacher professional adaptability as the ability of teachers to timely and actively adjust teaching strategies, training objectives, and teaching methods in a specific teaching environment to achieve a harmonious unity of external factors and objective needs [6][7].

2.2. The Characteristics of the Psychology Teacher Profession

The role and responsibilities of full-time psychology teachers in primary and secondary schools are significantly different from those of hospital psychologists and community psychological workers, mainly in the following two aspects:

2.2.1. Diversified Role Responsibilities

Full-time psychology teachers in primary and secondary schools not only undertake the educator role of ordinary teachers, responsible for the daily teaching and educational work of students, but also play the role of a mental health education counselor, focusing on the mental health and development of students. In addition, for the school and colleagues, they are not only the executors of the school's educational activities but also act as advisors to the school principal in mental health education decision-making and guide other teachers in psychological education.

2.2.2. Educational Attribute Responsibility Characteristics

Compared with the responsibilities of psychologists and community psychological workers, although the role responsibilities of full-time psychology teachers in primary and secondary schools may be variable and complex, their work responsibilities are essentially still in the field of education. Their work responsibilities have the attribute of education, unlike psychologists or counselors who primarily provide mental health services.

Therefore, when performing their duties, full-time psychology teachers in primary and secondary schools need to consider the needs of education and the mental health of students to ensure that their work meets the requirements of education and effectively promotes the mental health of students.

2.3. Relevant Theoretical Foundations

2.3.1. Teacher Professional Development Stage Theory

2.3.1.1 Teacher Professional Development Stage Theory

In her 1969 study on the professional growth of teachers, Fuller initially proposed a three-stage model, including the survival stage, the concern for the situation stage, and the concern for students stage [8]. Later, she further developed this model through the "Teacher Concern Questionnaire" and expanded it into four stages: (1) Pre-service concern stage: In this stage, future teachers focus mainly on their own needs and readiness. (2) Survival stage: New teachers are concerned with their teaching ability, classroom management skills, and external evaluations. (3) Concern for teaching situation stage: Teachers' attention shifts to teaching methods, teaching tasks, and organization. (4) Concern for students stage: Teachers begin to focus more on students' learning needs, social and emotional development. Fuller's model suggests that the content teachers focus on at different stages can be used to measure their professional development level, especially for new teachers who need more improvement in teaching ability, classroom management, and external evaluations. Scholar Ye Lan proposed a five-stage model of teacher professional adaptation, including the non-focus period, the period of seeking attention, the survival period, the period of emphasizing work completion, and the period of self-perfection. She pointed out that newly recruited teachers are in the survival stage, mainly concerned with how to adapt and stabilize in the workplace [9]. Scholars Burden and others proposed another three-stage model, including the survival

stage, the adjustment stage, and the maturity stage. They believe that new teachers are mainly in the survival stage in the early days of their employment, where they are still lacking in mastery of teaching activities and knowledge skills, and are in a state of adaptation to various things[10]. These models emphasize the different focuses and needs of teachers at different professional stages, providing a theoretical basis for the professional development and support of new teachers.

2.3.1.2 Teacher Professional Development Stage and Professional Adaptation of New Teachers

Teacher professional development is a continuous growth process that accompanies the entire career of teachers, from new teachers to mature teachers, each stage facing different challenges and difficulties. After integrating other scholars' understanding of teacher professional development, Jiang Jingying proposed two perspectives: one is to regard teacher professional development as the process of teachers' professional growth; the other is to see it as the methods and strategies to promote this growth process[11]. Zhang Qun believes that teacher professional development is a lifelong process of learning and growth, in which teachers continuously absorb new knowledge and master professional skills. Other scholars have studied from the perspective of teachers' self-growth, considering teacher professional development as the growth process of individual teachers, with these two aspects integrating and penetrating each other[12]. Wu Wenjing pointed out that the professional growth of new teachers is a long-term accumulation process that requires experiencing a dynamic and progressive development stage. This process includes educational concepts, teaching knowledge and skills, interpersonal relationships, and other aspects[13]. New teachers need to have a good grasp of the professional field and social relationships to adapt to the professional environment as soon as possible, establish a comprehensive professional quality structure, provide theoretical support for their professional adaptation, and gradually reduce confusion and obstacles in career development.

2.3.2. Role Theory

In the 1930s, George Herbert Mead, the founder of social symbolic interactionism, proposed role theory. This theory posits that individuals adapt to the social environment based on society's objective expectations and demonstrate specific patterns of behavior through their own subjective abilities[14]. Role theory, combined with disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology, provides a new perspective for studying the professional adaptation of new teachers. Researchers have applied role theory to the field of teacher education and have provided an in-depth interpretation of the teacher's role. They argue that the teacher's role refers to the teacher's unique position in the educational system and their understanding of societal expectations, which is manifested through patterns of behavior. This viewpoint emphasizes that the teacher's role is not only a manifestation of individual behavior but also reflects society's expectations of the teaching profession. Understanding the teacher's role is particularly important for new teachers, as they need to understand and adapt to new social expectations and educational environments. Through the application of role theory, new teachers can better understand their professional identity and how to effectively fulfill their duties within the educational system. This helps them find their place in the process of professional adaptation and gradually form educational and teaching behavior patterns that align with

societal expectations[15].

2.3.3. Holland's Theory of Person-Vocation Fit

In 1959, American vocational psychologist John Holland proposed "Holland's Theory of Person-Vocation Fit." [16] This theory is based on an in-depth analysis of individual personality traits and different job attributes. Holland categorized vocational interests into six types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. He believed that there is a close relationship between an individual's personality traits and their career choices, meaning that the environment in which a person grows up influences their personality formation, which in turn affects their career choices later in life. Holland's theory also suggests that while individuals may have two or more interest types simultaneously, usually only one type dominates. There are certain relationships among the six vocational types, with adjacent types being most closely related, types one step apart having a moderate relationship, and opposite types being the most distant. Holland's Theory of Person-Vocation Fit is significant for understanding individual career choices and adaptation. It helps individuals recognize how their personality traits influence career choices and provides a theoretical basis for career counseling and planning. For teachers, understanding their Holland vocational type can help them better understand their work inclinations, allowing them to find roles and positions that are more suitable for them in their teaching careers.

3. The Current Status of Professional Adaptability for New Hired Psychology Teachers

3.1. Performance in Teaching Ability

New teachers often encounter a series of confusion and problems during their professional growth. Zhao Changmu's survey of new teachers found that they face issues such as unfamiliarity with the textbooks, difficulty in grasping the key and challenging points of teaching, inflexible teaching methods, inability to effectively stimulate student enthusiasm, weak teaching management leading to poor classroom discipline, ineffective communication with students, lack of understanding of students' learning needs and conditions, difficulty in answering students' difficult questions, inability to properly handle classroom emergencies, lack of teaching materials, difficulties in dealing with colleagues, inadequate teaching facilities, and unfluent teaching language[17]. Nan Jiwen's research revealed that new teachers have many confusions about educational and teaching events, such as maintaining classroom order, choosing teaching methods, and the contradiction between teaching design and implementation[18]. Feng Jianrong pointed out that the research on the adaptability of new teachers is mainly manifested as difficulty in grasping teaching key points, low teaching efficiency, difficulty in switching roles in student management and counseling, lack of methods to motivate students, interpersonal difficulties, and unclear understanding of their own professional identity and career development[19]. Lu Hongfang further proposed that new teachers face issues such as role transformation and environmental adaptation after starting their jobs, specifically lacking in teaching business knowledge and skills, such as classroom control and mastery of teaching materials and methods[20]. Internationally, the issue of professional adaptability of

beginning teachers is also quite common. Veenman's research shows that the five major challenges faced by beginning teachers in the educational and teaching process include maintaining classroom order, motivating students, dealing with student diversity, evaluating student work, and establishing good relationships with parents[21]. These studies reveal that new teachers face multiple challenges in the early stages of their careers and need professional development and support to help them overcome these difficulties.

3.2. Communication and Interaction with Students

Wang Xiaomian's research on the professional adaptability of new teachers indicates that they face many challenges in educational instruction, student management, school environment adaptation, and handling interpersonal relationships. In particular, communication with parents and dealing with relationships between teachers and students, colleagues, and leaders are considered the most difficult issues for new teachers. This finding reflects a common phenomenon in teacher education where there is an emphasis on knowledge over skills, including a lack of training in social abilities such as communication and interpersonal relationship management[22].

3.3. Communication and Collaboration with Colleagues and Coping with Work Pressure

Dai Rui's research found that there are many instances of maladjustment among beginning teachers in the process of professional adaptation and emphasized that new teachers should coordinate and harmonize their professional relationships with colleagues, students, parents, and school leaders to promote their professional development[23]. Taylor and Dale's research shows that regardless of how competent beginning teachers are in teaching, they still encounter confusion in teaching. These issues include a lack of necessary teaching skills, a lack of understanding of the actual situation of students, and a few students disrupting the teaching order. Additionally, new teachers also have communication problems, such as self-denial and self-doubt, being shy about seeking help from experienced teachers, and neglecting their own puzzle, including overburden and burnout[24]. These studies reveal the diverse challenges faced by new teachers in the process of professional adaptation and emphasize the importance of professional relationships and the shortcomings of teacher education in cultivating new teachers' social skills. These findings are significant for designing effective teacher support and professional development programs.

4. Issues in the Professional Adaptability of New Hired Psychology Teachers

4.1. Insufficient Professional Knowledge and Skills

Researchers have found that new psychology teachers face major challenges upon joining the profession, including a lack of good psychological qualities, inadequate foundational skills, and difficulties in effectively communicating and interacting with colleagues and leaders in primary and

secondary schools. The process of adapting to the environment is also slow. From a microscopic perspective, new psychology teachers have gaps in their teaching and educational abilities compared to experienced teachers. Their teaching process is rigid, lacks flexibility, and they lack the ability to organize activities. They also face communication issues when interacting with students. Qian Yiqi (2009) categorizes the influencing factors for beginning teachers at the time of their entry into the profession into internal individual factors and objective external factors. Internal individual factors include the teacher's educational background and experience, while objective external factors include professional identity, self-adjustment, career advancement, teacher collaboration, and interpersonal relationships[25]. Tan Min (2013) believes that the adaptability of new teachers is mainly affected by factors such as educational value orientation, interpersonal communication skills, and research pressure[26]. These studies show that the challenges faced by new psychology teachers are multifaceted, encompassing both internal individual factors and objective external factors. Understanding these influencing factors is crucial for developing targeted support and training plans to help new teachers better adapt to their teaching roles.

4.2. Lack of Teaching Experience and Practical Ability

Ding Chunyan (2016) analyzes the difficulties in the professional adaptation of new teachers and identifies five factors that affect their adaptability: (1) Difficulty in mastering the diversity of roles: New teachers often need to play multiple roles in education and teaching, such as educators, counselors, and collaborators with colleagues, which is a challenge for them; (2) Insufficient integration of theory and practice in actual work: There is a gap between the theoretical knowledge learned during their university education and the actual teaching situations, and new teachers need time to learn and adapt to applying theory to practice; (3) Personality and behavior characteristics are the main causes of interpersonal relationship pressure: New teachers' personality traits and behavior patterns may affect their communication with colleagues, students, and parents, resulting in interpersonal relationship stress; (4) Insufficient attention to the construction and optimization of the teaching environment by various departments: Schools and educational departments provide insufficient support for new teachers, including a lack of adequate training and guidance, as well as necessary teaching resources; (5) The nature of the job makes it difficult for teachers to psychologically adapt: The complexity and pressure of teaching work may make it difficult for new teachers to adapt psychologically, especially in dealing with student issues and communicating with parents. These factors collectively affect new teachers' professional adaptability[27]. Therefore, to help new teachers better adapt to their teaching roles, support and assistance are needed from various aspects, including professional development, psychological counseling, provision of teaching resources, and improving school culture.

4.3. Weak Psychological Adjustment Ability

The universality and persistence of the problems in the professional adaptation of beginning teachers indicate that this is an important issue that requires continuous attention and resolution. Previous studies have revealed the common

confusions faced by beginning teachers in the process of professional adaptation, mainly focusing on teaching tasks, interpersonal support and assistance, psychological adjustment, and maintaining class order. Ma Shunlin (2008) points out that the factors affecting teachers' professional ability to adapt include three aspects: school-related factors, such as an uneven distribution of workload and learning load, making it difficult for teachers to adapt to the teaching needs of different grades; guidance teacher-related factors, such as insufficient and ineffective support from mentor teachers, leading to a lack of necessary support and guidance for new teachers; and individual teacher-related factors, such as a lack of interpersonal skills and self-development awareness, lack of planning in work, and vulnerability to negative factors brought about by frustration[28]. Wang Xi (2019) categorizes the factors affecting the professional adaptation ability of beginning teachers into personal factors and external factors. Personal factors include pre-service education, teacher professional identity, moral quality, and professional development consciousness, which directly affect teachers' ability and attitude to adapt to their profession. External factors include school environment and living environment, training activities, and teacher culture, which provide support and resources for teachers or pose challenges and pressures[29]. These studies show that the professional adaptation of beginning teachers is influenced not only by personal traits and skills but also by external environmental and organizational support. Therefore, to improve the professional adaptation ability of beginning teachers, it is necessary to address both personal and external environmental aspects, providing systematic support and training, improving school culture, increasing teacher collaboration and communication, and establishing an effective mentor support system.

4.4. Unclear Career Development Planning

Zhu Wenshan's (2013) research categorizes the factors affecting teacher professional adaptation into subjective and objective aspects. Subjective factors include teachers' career aspirations, career motivation, and personality traits, which directly affect teachers' adaptation and satisfaction with their career. Objective factors include traditional concepts, social status and treatment, influence from family and friends, and school management, which also have a significant impact on teachers' professional adaptation[30]. Zhang Wenping and Li Qiao (2016) believe that economic shocks, work experience and burden, personal character, career expectations and ability, and social pressure also influence the professional adaptation of new teachers to some extent. These factors interact with each other, jointly determining the adaptation and development of new teachers in their career paths[31]. Sun Shiwu (2006) summarizes the factors affecting new teachers' professional adaptation from both personal and external environmental aspects. Personal factors include teachers' career development expectations and motivation, while external factors include the apprenticeship system, management, and administrative affairs, and the teacher culture atmosphere, which provide support and challenges for new teachers' professional adaptation[32]. Wang Li (2016) categorizes the factors affecting teacher professional adaptability mainly into four aspects: teachers' interpersonal communication ability, educational values and teaching ability, onboarding and online training, and society's expectations of teachers. These factors cover multiple aspects

from personal skills to social expectations, highlighting the complexity and multidimensionality of teacher professional adaptation[33].

These studies reveal the various factors that affect teacher professional adaptation and emphasize the importance of personal traits, external environment, social expectations, and professional development. To help new teachers better adapt to their teaching roles, comprehensive support and guidance are needed from these different perspectives.

5. Strategies to Enhance the Professional Adaptability of Newly Hired Psychology Teachers

5.1. Personal Level Strategies

Newly hired psychology teachers play a crucial role in the process of professional adaptation. They need to proactively adjust their mindset, leverage their personality strengths, and enhance their professional abilities through practical experience. Here are some specific strategies and suggestions to help new teachers improve their professional adaptability: **Mindset Adjustment:** New teachers should maintain a positive and optimistic attitude, approach work challenges and difficulties with a determination and patience to solve problems. **Leveraging Personality Strengths:** Utilize personal characteristics such as patience, attentiveness, creativity, etc., to enhance teaching effectiveness and interpersonal skills. **Practical Experience:** Participate in teaching activities, school projects, and other professional development opportunities to gain practical experience and improve professional skills. **Pre-service Preparation:** Prior to becoming a teacher, focus on developing teaching skills, professional knowledge, and psychological quality to lay a solid foundation for their career. **Self-reflection:** Regularly reflect on teaching practices to identify areas for improvement and create improvement plans. **Interpersonal Skills:** Learn effective communication techniques to build good relationships with students and colleagues, which is crucial for professional adaptation. **Reasonable Expectations and Planning:** Set realistic career expectations and create clear short-term and long-term career plans. **Professional Development Self-awareness:** Actively seek learning and growth opportunities to enhance professional knowledge and skills. **Information-based Teaching Design:** Master and utilize modern information technology such as multimedia and internet resources to enrich teaching content and methods and improve teaching effectiveness. **Case Teaching and Other Teaching Methods:** Use a variety of teaching methods such as case teaching, heuristic teaching, and experiential teaching to enhance student interest and engagement. **Teaching Resource Collection and Utilization:** Utilize resources like hot topics, real-world social cases, historical figures, and traditional Chinese stories, combined with mental health education knowledge, to design teaching.

5.2. School-level Support and Strategies

Improving the teacher professional training system and creating a harmonious and democratic school environment is essential for enhancing educational quality and teacher professional development. Here are suggestions for supporting newly hired psychology teachers in primary and secondary schools: **Democratic and Harmonious School Environment:** Schools should strive to create a democratic, open, and inclusive environment that encourages teachers and

students to actively participate in decision-making and express opinions, promoting teamwork and mutual assistance. **Training Management System:** Schools should establish a systematic training management system that provides comprehensive professional training and development opportunities for newly hired psychology teachers, including classroom teaching skills, psychological counseling methods, and professional ethics. **Scaffolding Platform:** Provide support and guidance to help newly hired psychology teachers overcome difficulties in the process of professional adaptation and improve teaching and psychological counseling abilities. **Objective and Fair Evaluation System:** Establish a comprehensive, objective, and fair evaluation system to assess the professional performance and growth of new teachers, providing constructive feedback and guidance. **"Senior-junior" Mentorship System:** Implement a "senior-junior" mentorship system, with experienced teachers guiding new teachers to adapt to the work environment more quickly. **Improved Parent Communication Skills:** Through training and practical opportunities, enhance new teachers' ability to communicate with parents to establish good school-family cooperation relationships. **Focus on New Teachers' Growth:** Schools should regularly assess new teachers' adaptation and address their problems in a timely manner, providing necessary support and resources. **Mentorship Training Model:** Try to implement a mentorship training model, allowing new psychology teachers to practice and learn under the guidance of mentors to meet their professional development needs and motivation.

5.3. Social Level Support and Strategies

Ensuring the salary and benefits, as well as enhancing the professional status and social recognition of newly hired psychology teachers, is the responsibility of the state and relevant social sectors. To promote the realization of this goal, we propose the following related suggestions: **Policy Development:** The state and relevant social sectors should formulate relevant policies to ensure that the salary and benefits of newly hired psychology teachers are not lower than those of other educators, and they should be adjusted reasonably based on their professional capabilities and workload. **Government Support:** The government should increase its investment in psychological education, providing necessary financial support and policy support to ensure that the professional development of psychology teachers is valued and guaranteed. **Role of Education Administration:** The education administration should strengthen the pre-service education and management of new teachers, establish and improve regulations and systems, and provide support and guidance for their professional development. **Enhancing Social Recognition:** Society should actively create a respect for teachers and education atmosphere, improving the social recognition of newly hired psychology teachers. This can be achieved through various means such as media publicity, community activities, and family education. **Status Enhancement:** Among the teaching staff, psychology teachers should enjoy equal status and treatment as ordinary teachers, and they should receive corresponding respect and recognition.

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