

# The Perspectives of Preparing Psychology Practitioners in Armenian Universities

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**Abstract**—The problem of psychologist training remains a key priority in Armenia. During the Soviet period, the notion of a psychologist was obscure not only in Armenia but also in other Soviet republics. The breakup of the Soviet Union triggered a gradual change in this area activating the cooperation with specialists from other countries. The need for recovery from the psychological trauma caused by the 1988 earthquake pushed forward the development of practical psychology in Armenia. This phenomenon led to positive changes in perception of and interest to a psychologist profession. Armenian universities started designing special programs for psychologists' preparation. Armenian psychologists combined their efforts in the field of training relevant specialists.

During the recent years, the Bologna educational system was introduced in Armenia which led to implementation of education quality improvement programs. Nevertheless, even today the issue of psychologists' training is not yet settled in Armenian universities. So far graduate psychologists haven't got a clear idea of personal and professional qualities of a psychologist. Recently, as a result of educational reforms, the psychology curricula underwent changes, but so far they have not led to a desired outcome. Almost all curricula in certain specialties are aimed to form professional competencies and strengthen practical skills.

A survey conducted in Armenia aimed to identify what are the ideas of young psychology specialists on the image of a psychologist. The survey respondents were 45 specialists holding bachelor's degree as well as 30 master degree graduates, who have not been working yet. The research reveals that we need to change the approach of preparing psychology practitioners in the universities of Armenia. Such an approach to psychologist training will make it possible to train qualified specialists for enhancement of modern psychology theory and practice.

**Keywords**—Practitioners, Psychology Degree, study, professional competencies.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE problem of psychologist training remains a key priority in Armenia. During the Soviet period, the notion of a psychologist was obscure not only in Armenia but also in other Soviet republics. The breakup of the Soviet Union triggered a gradual change in this area activating the cooperation with specialists from other countries.

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## II. ACTUALITY OF RESEARCH

During the recent years, the Bologna educational system was introduced in Armenia which led to implementation of education quality improvement programs. Nevertheless, even today the issue of psychologists' training is not yet settled in Armenian universities. So far graduate psychologists haven't got a clear idea of personal and professional qualities of a psychologist. Recently, as a result of educational reforms, the psychology curricula underwent changes, but so far they have not led to desired outcome. Almost all curricula in certain specialties are aimed to form professional competencies and strengthen practical skills.

Various perceptions of a psychologist image or its absence prevent a student from having a core idea for building professional skills and accumulating special knowledge around it. The lack of information on the number of components of important professional quality system and on a hierarchy structure, as well as the absence of a clear-cut indicator of a specialist formation gives rise to a need for classification of existing knowledge and search for an adequate solution to training psychologist-specialists in Armenian educational system.

Professional activity is characterized by application of diverse and comprehensive knowledge, complex nature of psychological situations, requiring their coordinated use, which prevents the direct transformation of knowledge into practical application. In order to ensure the move from student's studies to professional activities, a common pattern of joint activities of students and university teachers is to be developed. The patterns of transmission of theoretical knowledge are clear, a student acquires knowledge through various types of activities, but formation of practical skills is still unclear and the duties of students and teachers for practical skills acquisition are not yet differentiated.

The absence of a common opinion among the researchers studying the professional practical abilities allows us to conclude that there is a need for classification of existing knowledge and search for an adequate solution to the issue of preparation of psychology specialists. For that purpose it is important to define the minimal and sufficient list of universal indicators of success in preparation of psychology specialist [1].

Based on our extensive experience of working with students, we conclude that the students' perceptions of

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psychology specialty are not free from stereotypes; they represent a combination of scientific and daily knowledge.

Such an image forms a professional ideology and idea of his or her place in the professional community. Professional opportunities and abilities, consequently undergoing certain changes may identify the professional behavior of future psychology specialists. When organizing the educational process, the main task is to gradually transform the students' ideas into well-grounded knowledge and skills.

In order to state the composition of important professional qualifications of a psychologist, one needs to identify the structure of psychologist's activities. Many authors guided by practical interest, point out psychologist qualifications that are necessary either for a counselor or diagnostician or school psychologist. This is not true, since psychologist's activities are linked to various aspects of life.

So, the formation of a professional identity of a psychologist is a vulnerable process [2].

Referring to psychological practice Ch. Trungpa writes: "The basic job of professional healers in general and psychotherapists, in particular, is to facilitate the process of becoming humans in the true sense of the word and inspire others experiencing spiritual hunger in obtaining full human existence" [4].

The professional portraits of a *psychologist-counselor* and *psychologist-diagnostician* obtained by R. Cattell and co-authors are presented in the form of efficiency equations [6]:

$$\text{Efficient psychotherapist} = 0.72A + 0.29B + 0.29H + 0.29N;$$

$$\text{Efficient psycho-diagnostician} = 0.31A + 0.78B + 0.47N;$$

where factor A is simple minded, natural, sociable; B: strong logical mind, smart; H: bold and even impertinent; N: attractive, consciously loyal, tactful.

R. Kočiūnas, a well-known specialist in psychological counseling, has generalized a number of qualities which may represent the core personal model of an efficient psychologist-counselor [5].

These are: authenticity, openness to one's own experience, deepening of self-knowledge, personal strength and identity, assumption of personal responsibility, realistic goal setting, empathy, and tolerance for uncertainty.

Besides tolerance for uncertainty, the tolerance in general is also an important indicator. For a psychology specialist it means that each person is free to follow his or her beliefs and respect other people's right to it. Tolerance also means to recognize that people are different by their appearance, public position, language, behavior and values, their right to live on the Earth and maintenance of their individuality, rather than to force others accept his/her own judgments.

Besides, communication skills are to be distinguished as a decisive factor for activity efficiency. The communication skills are a system of internal resources necessary for constructing an efficient communication process.

In drawing the psychologist professionogram, R.V. Ovcharova, a Russian researcher, mentioned the need for the qualities which cannot be considered components of a

psychogram, rather, they are, in general, desirable positive qualities (cheerfulness, leadership qualities, friendliness etc.) [7].

When compiling the list of qualities necessary for efficient activities of a psychologist various researchers emphasize the qualities which enhance the implementation of activities at a standard and high professional level. The psychology specialty does not imply strict rules and standards, similar situations and activity algorithms, so it is impossible to foresee and develop all feasible situations and problems that can be faced by a specialist. This is the very reason why the causality of the activities' psycho-physiological criteria is missing in the psychologist's job.

Some authors deem personal characteristics of a psychologist as a main tool in his or her activities.

Based on the summary of the research of various authors, we have classified important professional qualities and asked Armenian psychologists to delete the qualities that are not needed and add the ones required. We had 10 participants having 10 and more years of practical psychological work experience. As a result, we have obtained the following classification of important professional qualities of a psychologist as shown in Fig. 1. The negative qualities (impediments) for the psychology specialty are also noteworthy. In many cases along with quality description, the psychologists proposed to exclude them. As a result, a set of qualities impeding the specialty was formed, while important qualities were divided into two sets. One of them is a set of standard absolute qualities which are mandatory and the other one is relative and super standard (i.e. desired) qualities.

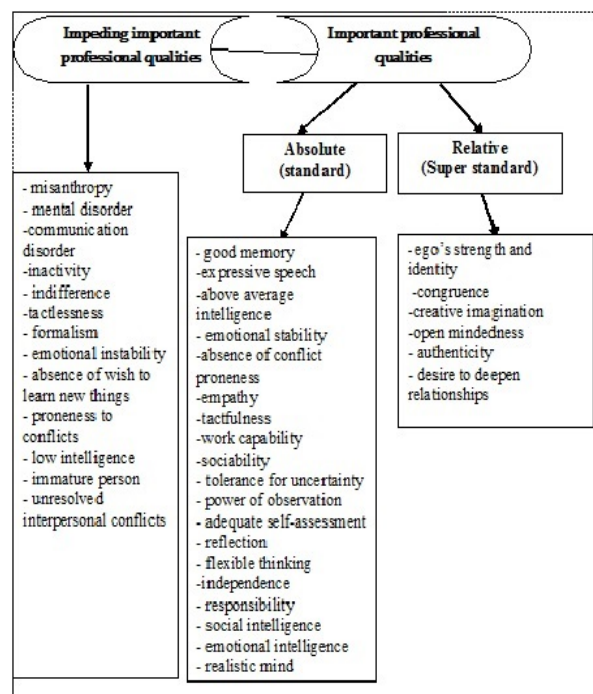


Fig. 1 Classification of psychologist's important professional qualities

The formation of a psychologist image and acquisition of professional skills are considered a result of education. Educational programs are designed on the basis of a psychologist image. But the question how successful is the process of achieving it by means of education remains open. In order to train practitioners in psychology the following is deemed necessary:

- ✓ Clear articulation of the psychological and professional qualities necessary for efficient activities;
- ✓ Designing of educational programs to form and enhance the mentioned qualities;
- ✓ Designing of new educational programs based on which it will be possible to achieve the desired outcomes;
- ✓ Tools development allowing measurement of educational output.

In Armenia there are no special training programs for psychology practitioners and psychologists can work with a psychologist qualification obtained from the university. It is presumed that the university should provide for the required professional and personal qualities and have a clearly defined concept of a specialist.

### III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### A. Materials

A survey conducted in Armenia aimed to identify what are the ideas of young psychology specialists on the image of a psychologist. The survey respondents were 45 specialists holding bachelor's degree as well as 30 master degree graduates, who have not been working yet.

#### B. Methods

The survey was conducted using a qualitative research methodology. We have employed an open type questionnaire implying free answers. The questionnaire was named *Psychologist's professional and personal qualities* to include questions pertaining to professional and personal qualities of a psychologist.

TABLE I  
PSYCHOLOGIST'S PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL QUALITIES

1.	In your opinion what personal characteristics must have a psychologist? (please list)
2.	In your opinion what professional characteristics must have a psychologist? (please list)
3.	What do you think which personal characteristics disturb the effectiveness of psychologists professional activity? (please list)
4.	What do you think which professional characteristics disturb the effectiveness of psychologists professional activity? (please list)
5.	In your opinion, who is a psychologist?
6.	Specify the qualities of psychologist whom you know which made you trust him.

As shown in the questionnaire included open questions regarding the personal qualities that impede psychologists' activities. After identifying the group of questions, we selected 6 experts to fill in the questionnaire and mark the unclear ones. Based on the data obtained from experts we chose a group of the questions which were perceived unambiguous and the nature of the answers to them was in accordance with

our goal. The most frequently repeated characteristics emphasized in the given answers related to professional competencies that, in the students' opinion, were required based on the information of professional guidelines. Besides, we obtained a narrative image of a psychologist which we analyzed in terms of its context. Special psychology literature apart from other specialty psychogrammes contains a psychogram of a psychologist to describe the required qualities of a practicing psychologist. It is worth noting that the list of the qualities depends on cultural peculiarities.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned above, the psychologist psychogrammes obtained from the countries of the Former Soviet Union were adjusted by Armenian psychologists to take into consideration Armenian peculiarities. So, Armenian psychologists did not agree with the need for some qualities. Hence, in order to design a psychogram of a psychologist we have compiled a questionnaire to be answered by Armenian psychologist experts having more than 10 years of psychological practice. Having generalized the descriptions, we have made a set of qualities for each question. The experts in their descriptions answered the question what personal qualities are required for a psychologist. The answers can be summarized in the following qualities:

- Interested in people
- Observation
- Responsibility
- Open mindedness
- Ability to draw conclusions
- Ability to achieve certain harmony in personal life
- Ability to notice personal problems and try to solve them.

The experts' answers to the question regarding the professional qualities of a psychologist were similar:

- Awareness of psychology schools
- Knowledge of development peculiarities of an individual
- Knowledge of the factors affecting the formation of personal problems
- Familiarity with classical psychology
- Flexible mind.

Among the personal qualities hindering activities the following was singled out:

- Self-concentratedness, narcissism
- Indifference toward other people
- Excessive criticism.

Among the personal qualities hindering professional development following was singled out:

- Careerism
- Centered approach to laws and regulations
- Centered approach to conceptions and ethics.

### V. CONCLUSION

As a result, we got a psychologist psychogram which is based on the Armenian cultural specifics. Following the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data, we conducted a comparative analysis of the descriptions prepared by

students and experts. On the basis of the above descriptions we made 3 sets that were arranged by common quantitative indicators of the mentioned qualities. The sets were arranged in descending order. The first set included the descriptions where the prevailing portion of characteristics was close to the image of a psychologist, i.e. to the psychogramm that was based on the experts' description. The second set included the descriptions that contained less typical qualities, while the third set contained separate qualities or personal peculiarities necessary for the profession without portraying the entire picture.

The survey outcomes were discussed at a meeting with students. The students that were more successful in mentioning relevant qualities pointed out that they had participated in training courses and such trainings changed their ideas of a psychologist. The students having mentioned the least number of qualities stated that they used only the indicator of high academic performance and did not deem it necessary to participate in extra trainings.

So there are drawbacks to forming personal and professional qualities of a psychologist among the psychology graduates, these drawbacks affect their further professional activities.

The survey results contribute to a better understanding of the prevailing role of competences rather than basic personal qualities in describing the psychologist's image. So we can conclude that in training a psychologist the primary role is attached to the formation of relevant notions of a psychologist as compared to the formation and improvement of relevant skills. At the initial stage of education the question regarding the personality of a psychologist is of primary importance while the formation of competencies is a result of educational components.

Such an approach to psychologists' training may help us to understand the following:

- ✓ Motivation of future specialists as to why they want to become psychologists (how important is their specialty for them),
- ✓ What personal qualities should have psychologists (during their studies what specific qualities will be of primary importance),
- ✓ How should a specialist use professional knowledge for personal development (whether he or she is prone to start from his/her personal changes).

Such an approach to psychologist training will make it possible to train qualified specialists for enhancement of modern psychology theory and practice.

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