



# The Engagement of School Psychologists in Educational Transformations

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**Abstract.** This study delves into the role of educational psychologists in Mongolia, with a specific focus on their experiences in schools during the academic year 2022-2023. UNESCO's definition of quality education underscores the importance of holistic student development, including their emotional and psychological well-being. However, Mongolia's current educational evaluation system predominantly centers on knowledge acquisition, prompting a growing demand for increased psychological support in schools. In response to this need, 203 educational psychologists were deployed in schools, and their impact was thoroughly assessed through surveys and interviews. The primary goal was to establish a stable employment system for educational psychologists in schools across Mongolia. Results indicate positive developments, including heightened collaboration between teachers and psychologists. Nevertheless, challenges persist, notably limited cooperation with parents. This research underscores the pivotal roles of educational psychologists in fostering comprehensive student development. It advocates for specialized training, improved working conditions, and enhanced collaboration among teachers, parents, school administrators, psychologists, and social workers within the school environment. Such collaboration facilitates a deeper understanding and effective utilization of the unique expertise provided by educational psychologists in school settings.

**Keywords:** Educational psychologist · Learning/teaching · Mental health · Psychological education · Education · Preventive work · Psychotherapy · Psychological counseling

## 1 Introduction

The objective of education in Mongolia is to cultivate well-rounded citizens possessing the necessary intellectual, moral, and physical capabilities. These citizens should advocate humanistic values and be capable of learning, working, and living independently, as outlined in the Education Law of Mongolia [1]. UNESCO's educational manifesto emphasizes that quality education aims not only to impart traditional academic knowledge, such as literacy and mathematics but also to foster analytical thinking, problem-solving, cognitive development, personal growth, and communication skills in children from an early age within a school setting [2]. In a joint report titled "Vision 2050: Enhancing Equity, Efficiency, and Outcomes in the Education Sector," published by the World Bank (WB) and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sports (MESC), it was noted that student success in Mongolia is primarily evaluated based on knowledge acquisition and physical and cognitive development [3]. The report also identified a lack of focus on emotional development as well as inconsistencies in assessments of outcomes and educational indicators amongst students and teachers. The 2021 outlook report from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) underscored the urgent need for measures to address the long-term detrimental impact on education caused by the emergency response to COVID-19 [4]. In this context, training educational psychologists is essential for:

- 1) Considering the psychological well-being of students, teachers, parents, and guardians,
- 2) Facilitating improved communication and feedback among all parties,
- 3) Creating a healthy and safe school environment conducive to student learning and development while providing support for challenges they may face.

Educational psychologists have the potential to make a significant positive impact by offering comprehensive services that cater to students, teachers, parents, and guardians alike [5]. Consequently, there is a pressing need for training and employing qualified educational psychologists in Mongolia. In 2020, recognizing this need led to collaborative efforts between various institutions to train 203 educational psychologists who now work in elementary schools across Mongolia.

During this period, there is a need to establish a supporting structure for educational psychologists in schools. Within the scope of this research, we aim to examine the state's provision of social and psychological support in the school environment by educational psychologists, assess the availability and demand for psychological services, identify existing

challenges, and enhance the functioning of educational psychologists. The findings from this study will be used to inform government policies, programs, activities, and legal frameworks, ensuring the active participation of beneficiaries in accessing essential services at an appropriate level while enhancing coordination.

### **Theoretical concepts**

In the field of education, a growing body of literature emphasizes the critical importance of investigating social and individual development activity patterns, along with delving into the intricate relationship between society, culture, and methods of self-development [6]. This research direction is foundational and widely acknowledged in educational studies. Educational psychology, as a field, grapples with a range of complex issues. These encompass understanding the intricacies of human cultural formation, including ontogenesis, higher mental functions, cognitive abilities, personal resources, as well as the psychological mechanisms and processes governing their development. This field also explores the patterns of human mental development and the nuanced pathways of personality growth [7]. One of the prominent figures in educational psychology, Russian psychologist I.A. Baeva, is recognized for her extensive work in this area. Her contributions extend to the critical analysis and evaluation of the educational environment, addressing the imperative of ensuring psychological safety within school premises. Her research encompasses investigating and tackling psychological violence within educational settings, devising effective strategies to overcome such challenges, and mitigating negative psychological effects that can impact the well-being of individuals within the school environment. Furthermore, Baeva's influential concept of "Educational Environment Safety-Psychology," first introduced in 2008, has become a cornerstone in understanding and nurturing the evolving psychological state essential for ensuring the well-being and optimal functioning of students within educational settings [8].

From a practical perspective, the domain of educational psychology has evolved into a pivotal educational psychological service, attracting considerable scholarly attention [9]. This area of specialization is recognized as one of the most sought-after and dynamic within the broader field of educational psychology [10]. Numerous scholarly works and studies underscore the significance of educational psychologists in addressing the diverse psychological needs of participants in the educational process, including teachers, school administrators, students, parents, and guardians [11]. Scholarly discourse underscores the urgent challenges and pressing issues that necessitate the professional expertise of educational psychologists. There is a consensus among educators and researchers that the provision of high-quality psychological services within the education sector is paramount, given the multifaceted nature of challenges faced in modern educational environments [12]. Within the practical realm of education, educational psychologists are entrusted with a multifaceted role. They are tasked with providing timely and tailored psychological services to both students and adults within the educational ecosystem [13]. This role extends to the prevention and early intervention of potential psychological issues, including age-related learning difficulties, peer conflicts, and the cultivation of healthy child-adult relationships [14]. Moreover, scholarly literature has shed light on the pivotal role of educational psychologists in supporting children's holistic development through regular lessons and creating a psychologically conducive environment within educational institutions. The aim is to enhance the overall psychological well-being of individuals working and studying within the educational sector [15]. In summary, the field of educational psychology is rich with a diverse body of literature and research that underscores its critical role in addressing the complex psychological needs of individuals within the education sector. This body of work not only acknowledges the importance of this discipline but also emphasizes the urgency of providing high-quality psychological services in educational settings.

## **2 Methodology**

Professionals employed a combination of survey questionnaires and focus group interviews as research methods. The primary objectives of utilizing these methods were as follows:

**Identifying Psychological Issues:** The research aimed to identify psychological problems within the general education school environment by gathering insights from various stakeholders, including school management, training managers, teachers, staff, psychologists, social workers, parents, and guardians. **Determining Areas Requiring Psychologist Support:** Another goal was to pinpoint specific areas within the secondary school environment that necessitated the intervention and support of educational psychologists. **Government Policy Enhancement:** Additionally, the research sought to gather input and perspectives from the involved stakeholders regarding what areas the government should prioritize in enhancing social and psychological services within general education schools. In the process of collecting feedback from secondary school management, training managers, teachers, staff, psychologists, social workers, parents, and guardians through questionnaires and focus group interviews, the following steps were undertaken:

**Questionnaire Development:** The research team designed a comprehensive questionnaire aligning with the research objectives. Careful consideration was given to ensure that the questions were clear, concise, attainable, and easily

understandable for each participant. **Data Collection:** Data was collected from the identified stakeholders through the distribution of questionnaires and the organization of focus group interviews. The cooperation and assistance of school management and staff were instrumental in this data collection phase. **Data Analysis:** The research data was processed and analyzed using IBM SPSS 20.0 software, a statistical analysis package commonly employed in the analysis of social research data. The research report incorporates the outcomes of data analysis, including descriptive and comparative statistics across various participant groups such as school administration, learning managers, teachers, staff, psychologists, social workers, parents, guardians, and others. By combining questionnaire surveys and focus group interviews, the research aimed to comprehensively explore and address psychological issues in the general education school setting, provide support where needed, and contribute to the enhancement of government policies for improved social and psychological services in these schools.

### Research samples

In line to deploy educational psychologists in all elementary schools across Mongolia, the Ministry of Education and Science took significant steps by training a cohort of 203 educational psychologists who commenced their assignments in elementary schools between 2020 and 2023. To assess the effectiveness of this initiative and identify potential challenges, our study focused on the 2022-2023 academic year. We selected educational institutions in Ulaanbaatar City, Khentii Province, and Arkhangai Province to delve into the year-long experiences and work of these educational psychologists.

A total of 12 participants from various roles within the school ecosystem, including school administrators, learning managers, teachers, support staff, educational psychologists, social workers, as well as parents and guardians, took part in our survey. For a more detailed breakdown, the participant composition consisted of 13 educational psychologists, 75 educators, 54 parents, 9 school principals, 29 training managers, 17 social workers, and 68 support staff, totaling 265 individuals. The table below provides a comprehensive overview of the participant distribution across the provinces and cities encompassed in our study.

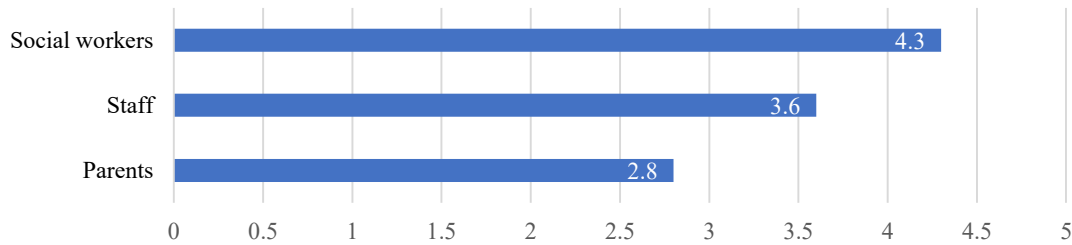
**Table 1.** Respondent Breakdown

	Arkhangai Province	Khentii Province	Ulaanbaatar City	Total
Educational Psychologists	4	4	5	13
Teachers	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>75</b>
Parents	22	12	20	54
School Principals	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>
Training Managers	5	10	14	29
Social Workers	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>17</b>
Staff	20	26	22	68
Total	82	89	94	265

## 3 Result

Cooperation and support from various stakeholders play a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of psychologists' work within the school environment. The study results indicate positive developments in the collaboration between school teachers and staff with educational psychologists, as they have deepened their understanding of psychologists' roles and activities, resulting in increased cooperation. However, a noteworthy finding is the relatively lower level of cooperation between parents and guardians. Teachers are actively partnering with psychologists to connect students with these professionals, introduce them to students, and engage in advocacy efforts. This highlights the significance of collaborative efforts between psychologists and educators in achieving common goals. Conversely, the study revealed a lack of cooperation between parents and psychologists in most surveyed schools. This could be attributed to the relatively new and evolving nature of psychology as a field in Mongolia, leading to limited public awareness and understanding of psychology. Consequently, there is an urgent need to implement comprehensive psychological education programs for parents. Collaborative efforts between educational psychologists and parents can serve as an initial platform for disseminating psychological knowledge to the wider public.

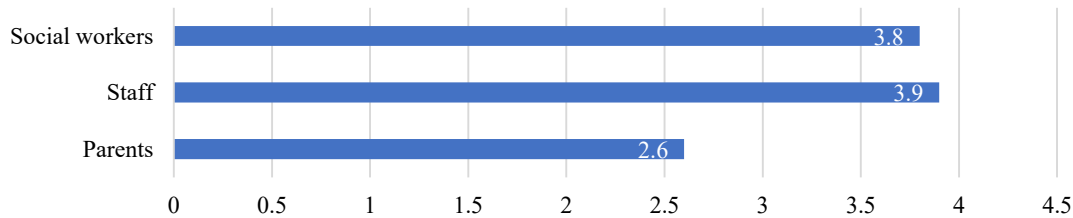
Psychologists and social workers both acknowledge the importance of enhanced collaboration but may have differing perceptions of their respective roles. To optimize cooperation, it is essential to establish a clear and unified framework for collaboration [16]. During the survey, social workers and educational psychologists expressed the need for a more precise delineation of the educational psychologist's responsibilities and division of duties, as illustrated in Figure 1 of the research results.



**Fig. 1.** Assessment of Psychologist's Collaboration with Other Parties

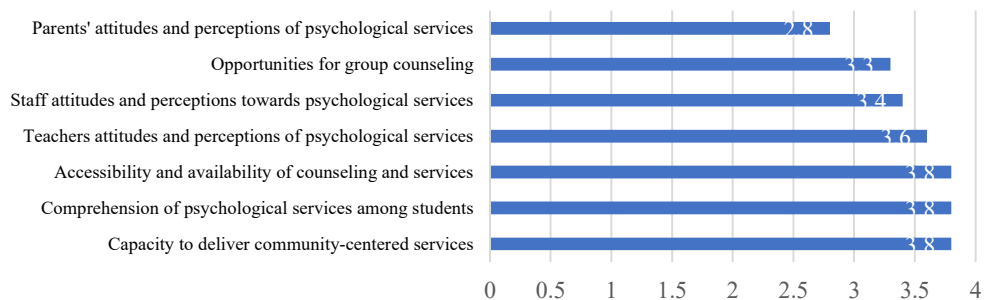
The findings indicate a strong understanding of and support for the educational psychologist's role by other school staff members. During the focus interviews, employees stressed the importance of fostering participation in psychological activities among various stakeholders within the school environment. They emphasized the need to raise awareness, promote support, and encourage self-help when individuals require psychological services. Undoubtedly, school administrators emerged as the key proponents of support, a sentiment consistently echoed in our focus group discussions. Both school administrators and educational psychologists emphasized the critical nature of full support from school management. Such robust support would enable educational psychologists to operate independently and carry out their psychological activities without undue interference.

It's important to recognize that the role of an educational psychologist primarily yields long-term impacts, rather than immediate, tangible, or easily measurable outcomes [17]. Consequently, if school management can cultivate an understanding among all school stakeholders that psychological services have enduring benefits, it lays the groundwork for the sustainable continuation of this new system throughout Mongolia.



**Fig. 2.** Assessment of Psychologist's Collaboration with Other Parties

When evaluating the service provision environment in the schools included in the study, certain indicators stand out. The schools show promise in terms of offering community-oriented services and the students' comprehension of psychological services. They also exhibit potential for providing individual counseling and services. However, there is room for improvement in areas such as group counseling within schools and enhancing the overall environment. One noteworthy aspect is the need to increase awareness among parents and guardians regarding psychological services. For a more detailed breakdown of these findings, please refer to Figure 3 in the research report.



**Fig. 3.** Evaluation of the Psychological Service Delivery Environment

The study findings underscore the pressing need for the training of Educational Psychologists in specialized areas such as counseling for students facing critical issues, including those at risk of suicide and those who have experienced abuse within the school environment. Additionally, it is imperative to establish clear standards for the activities of educational psychologists, encompassing guidelines for student-counselor ratios and determining the optimal number of psychologists required for each school. The diversity of students across urban and local schools introduces variations in the student-to-psychologist ratio, posing challenges and burdens on the effective execution of their duties. To address this, it is crucial to calculate the appropriate number of psychologists based on the student population in schools. This calculation should also encompass adequate compensation, incentives, and resource allocation. The study highlights that establishing standardized workplace conditions for educational psychologists, streamlined document management processes, enhancing stakeholders' understanding of psychological education, and reinforcing support for psychologists are essential to creating a conducive and stable working environment for them. Although the specific challenges faced by each school may differ, the presence of an educational psychologist can offer school administrators, social workers, teachers, and parents valuable insights into the diverse skill sets and multifaceted relationships of these professionals.

Moreover, educational psychologists play a pivotal role in making psychological services more accessible and dispelling the misconception that such services are exclusively for individuals with severe issues. Their presence fosters the understanding that everyone can benefit from psychological counseling and support, contributing positively to the school community and society as a whole.

#### 4 Conclusion

1) The research results revealed that everyone is aware of a psychologist's role within the school environment. Furthermore, there has been an increase in support and understanding of psychologists' activities in both schools and local administrative organizations. This indicates an improvement in many people's psychological education, with access to psychological services through school activities, educational psychological services, and the development of psychologist-teacher collaboration in supporting educational institutions.

2) The school community tends to appreciate and respect the direct and indirect outcomes of a psychologist's work. However, their ability to reach every child is limited, prompting school management to express the need for additional staff. Collaboration among psychologists, parents, guardians, teachers, and staff members has brought psychological services closer to people's lives while promoting the use of psychological knowledge.

3) Psychologists who worked with mentors displayed better working methods and skills compared to those without mentors. The absence of professional guidance from a mentor led some psychologists to struggle with planning and reporting their activities, resulting in decreased quantitative and qualitative indicators of effectiveness.

4) Due to insufficient legal regulations governing psychologists' work, aspects such as control systems, salary incentives, performance reviews, and vacation policies remain unclear. Some psychologists experience high workloads without opportunities for job-based professional growth. Consequently, their health may be at risk, which can lead to resignations or job losses due to inadequate working conditions in local areas.

5) The research highlights potential risks of psychologists' contributions being perceived negatively by others. Factors contributing to this outlook include inadequate public psychological education, limited initiative from clients, and insufficient engagement with psychological services.

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