

Original Article

Education Policy and Time Assigned for Speech-Language Therapy: Perspective of Speech-Language Pathologists with over 20 Years of Professional Experience in Education

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ABSTRACT

The work of speech-language pathologists (SLP) in educational settings is essential for students with special educational needs. However, little is known about the influence that the length of time assigned for speech therapy by education policy has on their practice. The present study performed the first analysis in Chile of the perspective of SLPs with over 20 years of professional experience regarding the time that public policy assigns to speech therapy sessions in educational contexts. A qualitative study with a constructionist-narrative approach was carried out, and five semi-structured interviews were performed, with the participation of SLPs who had over 20 years of professional experience in education, through deductive content analysis. Results showed that SLPs experience challenges in their practice arising from administrative, organizational, and practical aspects that are consequences of a public policy that does not clearly define the time assigned for speech therapy or its distribution among the different functions that these professionals perform in their educational role. The contribution of this pioneering research to the subject is that the participants suggest changes to the policy, based on the adjustments they have made in their professional practice after 20 years of experience. It becomes necessary to continue investigating the role of SLPs in educational settings, in order to improve their practice and contribute to education policies.

Keywords:

Educational policy; time assignment; speech therapy practice; work experience; speech therapist; educational context

Política educativa y asignación del tiempo para la práctica fonoaudiológica: experiencia de fonoaudiólogos/as con más de 20 años de ejercicio laboral en contextos educativos

RESUMEN

El trabajo de fonoaudiólogos (as) en contextos educativos es esencial para estudiantes que presentan necesidades educativas especiales. Sin embargo, poco se sabe respecto a cómo influye la asignación del tiempo otorgado por la política educativa en sus prácticas fonoaudiológicas. El presente estudio analizó por primera vez en Chile la experiencia de fonoaudiólogos (as) con más de 20 años de ejercicio laboral respecto de la asignación del tiempo definido por la política pública para la práctica fonoaudiológica que se lleva a cabo en los entornos educativos. Se realizó un estudio cualitativo con enfoque construccionista-narrativo. Se realizaron cinco entrevistas semiestructuradas a fonoaudiólogos con más de veinte años de experiencia laboral en educación a través de un análisis de contenido de tipo deductivo. Los resultados muestran que la práctica fonoaudiológica presenta desafíos provenientes de aspectos administrativos, organizativos y prácticos que surgen de una política pública que no define de manera clara la asignación de tiempo y su distribución en las funciones propias del rol fonoaudiológico en educación. El aporte de esta investigación pionera en la temática, es que los fonoaudiólogos entrevistados sugieren cambios a la política implementada a partir de los ajustes que han realizado en sus prácticas profesionales tras 20 años de experiencia laboral. Es necesario continuar en la investigación sobre el ejercicio del rol fonoaudiológico en contextos educativos con el fin de mejorar la práctica profesional y contribuir a la política educativa implementada.

Palabras clave:

Política educativa; asignación del tiempo; práctica fonoaudiológica; experiencia laboral; fonoaudiólogo; contexto educativo

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INTRODUCTION

Education Policy for Students with Special Education Needs (SEN) and the Role of Speech-Language Pathologists in Educational Settings

In Chile, the population of children and adolescents with disabilities between the age of 2 and 17 years is thought to be around 300.000, with 96% of them being enrolled in educational establishments (*Servicio Nacional de la Discapacidad* [National Service for Persons with Disabilities, SENADIS], 2015, p. 63). There are approximately 184,000 students with Special Education Needs (SEN), of whom about 76% have a language disorder, and 20% have an intellectual disability. The remaining percentage corresponds to other health conditions, such as hearing and sight disorders, among others (Holz, 2018, p. 1). In Chile, there are School Integration Programs (*Programa de Integración Escolar*, PIE), which are incorporated into the regular education modality, and special schools that belong to the special education modality, both attending to the needs of children and adolescents with SEN (Holz, 2018, p. 2). Among the different strategies developed to support the education of students with SEN, the incorporation of different professionals of health and social sciences stands out, such as speech-language pathologists (SLP), psychologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and social workers. Thanks to the legal regulations that define their roles and functions, SLPs, psychologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and social workers are able to perform their duties in PIE programs in regular schools, where they are recognized as relevant actors in the academic process of students with SEN (Chilean Ministry of Education [MINEDUC], 2019).

The work of SLPs is considered important for the rehabilitation of linguistic and communicative disturbances within the community of students with SEN. Currently, three regulatory frameworks can be found that define the role of SLPs in education: Decree n° 1300/02 (*Decreto* n° 1300, 2002), Decree n° 170/09 (*Decreto* n° 170, 2009), and the guidelines for their role and functions within *Programas de Integración Escolar* (PIE) enacted in the year 2019 (MINEDUC, 2019). Regarding special language schools, establishments that admit students with Specific Language Impairment (SLI), Decree 1300/02 maintains in force the aspects related to the length of speech-language therapy sessions. According to this decree, SLPs should work with three children every thirty minutes, once a week, adding a total of four chronological hours every 15 students (*Decreto* n° 1300, 2002). Nonetheless, article 10 has been modified to incorporate new guidelines for the evaluation process, determining that assessments should be biannual, with an initial

evaluation to determine the presence of SLI and a final one to verify if the SLI persists and to establish the support needed by the student. The assessment and reassessment processes are holistic and require the participation of both the SLP and the special education teacher (Modifica Decreto No 1300 exento de 2002, Diario oficial de la República de Chile, 2020 [modification to decree n° 1300, 2002, Government Gazette of the Republic of Chile, 2020]).

On the other hand, Decree 170 defines the terms of the participation and the functions of SLPs in Special Education Schools and PIEs. Additionally, it determines the diagnoses with which these professionals can work. The functions of SLPs in this context are as follows: (a) assessment, (b) diagnosis, (c) individual and group (in-classroom) intervention, (d) writing admission, reassessment, and discharge reports, (e) participation in meetings with the technical staff and the work team, (f) holding individual or group meetings with parents, and (g) keeping a therapy log (*Decreto* n° 170, 2009, p. 170).

In turn, the document *Profesionales asistentes de la educación. Orientaciones acerca de su rol y funciones en Programas de Integración Escolar (PIE)* (“Allied education professionals. Guidelines for their role and functions in School Integration Programs [PIE]”), describes the functions of SLPs regarding three roles: assessment, collaboration, and support (MINEDUC, 2019). The time distributed among these functions is based on the number of students who need intervention, and not on the particular characteristics of each child. According to López et al. (2018), not being aware of the particular attributes of each student results in a standardization of the support they receive. In the case of PIE for language schools and children with SLI, the time assigned for therapy is four chronological hours every 15 students (*Decreto* n° 170, 2009). For other PIEs, for example, those that include students with ASD, the time assigned is three hours for every grade that includes students who are accepted in the integration program. Furthermore, these hours are to be distributed among all the professionals that provide support for those students (Chilean Ministry of Education [MINEDUC], 2013, p. 15).

Speech-Language Therapy and Educational Settings

The role of speech-language pathology in education is to support the learning process of students with linguistic and communicative disorders, in general secondary to a health condition. These are students that require many learning episodes distributed over time during sessions (Eisenberg, 2014). The international literature reveals a lack of consensus regarding the

optimal length of speech therapy. Aspects such as the design of the intervention, the education policy, the characteristics of the student, and their environment suggest that it is not advisable to standardize the length of the sessions since each student is unique (Baker, 2012; Meyers & Plante, 2016; Sugden et al., 2018). In the same line, the international evidence points to the fact that one of the greatest challenges for SLPs in education is the time assigned for their practice, due to the great number of functions that these contexts demand from professionals (Campbell et al., 2016; Furlong et al., 2018; Phoenix et al., 2021).

In Chile and Latin America, the evidence regarding the role of SLPs in education is still scarce. The study by Quintero Uribe and Montoya Otalvaro (2018) shows that SLPs working in education in Colombia feel their labor is unacknowledged, and that they require training in aspects related to education. Similarly, in Chile, the study by Torres et al. (2015) indicates that a self-reflection about the practice of speech-language therapy in educational environments is necessary, as the role that these health professionals must play within schools lacks clarity.

During the last twenty years, the education policy in the country has undergone modifications, mainly oriented toward the access and permanence of students with SEN in academic programs. The above has meant that SLPs have had to gradually adjust their actions to these changes. The information currently available about the experiences and adjustments that SLPs have made to their work in education is insufficient. It is for this reason that this research has been carried out, based on the question "What is the perspective of speech-language pathologists working in education of the time assigned for their practice by education policy?". Being aware of these experiences would allow investigating how these professionals manage their practice, considering the time they have been designated for their functions by public policy, and

knowing what their opinion is about the process, taking into account their experience in educational contexts.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Epistemological viewpoint and method

This research was developed following a qualitative design, with a constructionist-narrative approach, since this allows analyzing the participants' experiences in a particular context (Flick, 2013, p. 231). A narrative is understood as a recount of the professional trajectory of the subjects (Denzin & Lincoln, 2015, p. 60). For this study, the narrative of the experience of SLPs who have worked in education for more than 20 years was analyzed. Knowing and interpreting their stories allows us to closely look at the experiences of the participants, obtaining a wider perspective of the construction of the role, considering the current public policy.

Definition and selection of the participants

The sample was selected using snowball convenience sampling, which allows identifying subjects of interest and through them contacting new participants (Creswell & Poth, 2013, p. 74). The sample selection criteria follow what is recommended for qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2015). In this case, social media was used to search for SLPs with at least 20 years of experience, who had worked through the changes made to public policy. The first professional that was contacted provided information to contact others, and thus successively. The final population of informants was made up of five speech-language pathologists with over 20 years of work experience exclusively in educational contexts. The description of the participants can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Description of the participants.

N°	Gender	Work experience (in years)	Type of School	Type of Education Provided	Educational Levels
1	Male	23	Special Education School (ID and ASD)	Special Education	Kindergarten/Primary/Work Skills
2	Female	22	Special Language School and PIE	Special Ed. – Regular Ed.	Kindergarten/Primary
3	Female	37	Special Language School	Special Education	Kindergarten
4	Male	26	Special Language School	Special Education	Kindergarten
5	Female	41	Special Language School and PIE	Special Ed. – Regular Ed.	Kindergarten/Primary

Instrument and Technique for Information Recollection

To obtain the information of interest, a semi-structured interview was carried out, since it is a flexible instrument that allowed guiding the participants in reporting their professional experience and perspective of the time assigned for their practice. The interview was conducted only once, due to the work commitments of the interviewees. A script was developed and submitted for expert judgment on three occasions, to a group of experts who were qualitative researchers or professional SLPs, and whose work experience ranged from five to ten years. Care was taken that there was coherence between the research dimensions and the format of the 16 questions in the instrument. Table 2 shows the dimensions and subdimensions of the interview.

Table 2. Dimensions and subdimensions of the interview.

Global concept	Dimensions	Subdimensions
Role of speech-language pathologists in education	Professional experience	Professional trajectory and training
		Motivation
	Functions of the speech-language pathologists in education	Characteristics of the students
		Functions of the role itself Functions pertaining to the environment
Perception of the practice	Perception of the practice	Favorable aspects of the practice
		Unfavorable aspects of the practice
Perception of the public policy	Perception of the public policy	Public policy milestones through time
		Impact of public policy on professional activity
		Suggestions for policy improvement Challenges of the role

After each participant was contacted and before starting the procedure, they were asked to sign an informed consent. The interviews were performed individually, with each of them lasting approximately one hour and thirty minutes. They were held in

Santiago, Chile, between April and May 2019, in the participants' workplaces. The interactions were audio-recorded and saved as an encrypted digital file, to which only the author had access.

Information Analysis Technique

The interviews were transcribed literally and a content analysis was carried out using the Atlas.ti software, version 9. Content analysis allows systematically describing the sense of qualitative data, by reducing the information to relevant categories (Flick, 2013, p. 170). According to the guidelines by Creswell & Poth (2013), the analysis followed the steps described below:

- (a) The interviews were read repeatedly to have a general idea of the text.
- (b) A deductive method was used to select quotes that captured the experiences and opinions of the participants that were related to the dimensions of the interview.
- (c) The quotes were re-read and codes were created.
- (d) Additional codes were created using an inductive method, where recurring topics that were not originally a part of the interview were selected.
- (e) Global topics were identified and coherence was checked between the codes. At this stage, some codes were eliminated and others were added.
- (f) The resulting codes were compared, observing the level of coherence with the initial category. From this procedure, sub-codes were generated.
- (g) Codes and sub-codes were grouped into four categories that constitute the content of this document.

Ethical Implications

This study is a part of a larger line of research that seeks to analyze the role of allied education professionals and the inclusive education policy in Chile. This line of research has been approved by the Ethics-Scientific Committee of *Universidad Mayor*.

RESULTS

The results of the investigation are exposed below, grouped into four categories that allow visualizing the different topics that emerged from the participants' narratives. Table 3 presents the categories and subcategories that arose from the analysis.

Table 3. Description of the categories of analysis and codes.

Category	Code	Sub-code
Work experience	Benefits of the accumulated experience	Professional autonomy
Functions of the speech-language pathologist in education	Functions defined by the policy	Technical functions
		Administrative functions
Perception of work activities	Favorable aspects	Speech Therapy practice
		Appreciation for the role
	Unfavorable aspects	Time assigned by policy
Perception of the policy	Suggestions for changes to the policy	Time assigned and functions of the SLP
		Inclusion of SLPs in the intervention of other SEN
		Assessment and diagnostic criteria

First Category: Work Experience

According to the interviewees, having more than 20 years of experience in educational contexts provides them with benefits and work conditions that differ from what less experienced SLPs with less experience encounter. The participants mentioned that they have gained enough autonomy to make decisions, mainly about the length of therapy sessions: “in my job, speech and language intervention is privileged, here the ‘three-kids-every-half-hour’ rule does not apply” (I2:24); “the director allows me to carry out individual sessions, because she trusts my work” (I5:25). They also report that they are valued and acknowledged within the educational community, arguing that they participate actively in their school’s technical staff and their opinions are taken into account: “I am part of the school’s management team, my function is to guide the technical team in the decision-making processes” (I5:30).

Second Category: Functions of the SLP in Education

Concerning the functions that these professionals perform in their workplaces, they report these are in line with what Decree 170 stipulates: assessment, reassessment, intervention, report writing,

and conferences with parents. The participants separate the functions they perform as SLPs, and from this separation, three sub-codes emerge: (a) technical functions: “my main function in the school is to assess the children, to carry out interventions” (I5:26); (b) administrative functions: “within the administrative ones is, for example, to upload the reports of the sessions to digital platforms such as Napsis” (I5:33); (c) collaborations with the educational community, for instance, they mention they act as master of ceremony for school events, or they manage some of the school’s technical aspects: “(...) I am also in charge of networking, because I enjoy collaborating (laughs)” (I2:16). Additionally, they report participating in activities inherent to the dynamics of a school, such as being in charge of bulletin boards: “I am in charge of the Speech-Language Pathology bulletin board, and of the security and school coexistence plan” (I3:42).

Third Category: Perception of Work Activities

The participants mentioned that one of the most favorable aspects of their job is seeing the students make progress, as well as feeling valued by the teachers, directors, and parents. This correlates to the accumulated work experience, which allows them to make changes to what is proposed by the policy regarding speech-language therapy, the intervention modality, and the length of sessions: “fortunately, in that school, I have the director’s trust, who allows me to work outside of the classroom with the children with more severe problems, and for those who are doing better we work in the classroom, with their teacher; I am also able to adjust the times of the sessions” (I5:13).

Regarding the unfavorable aspects of their practice, the informants highlight the length of the sessions defined by public policy. The SLPs understand that they should perform the functions stipulated by education policy, however, they mention that the time assigned is not enough for those functions, and in consequence, the following aspects are affected:

- (a) The number of students: The professionals treat a high number of students, with hours that are insufficient to complete all of the tasks that the policy defines: “each week I see 120 students with SLI in 40 chronological hours, and time is not enough to complete all my tasks” (I3:62).
- (b) Administrative work: Administrative responsibilities are excessive, and there is no official amount of time defined by the policy to perform them: “there is a lot of paperwork, filling in forms, writing reports every three months (...) you find yourself wrapped up in documents that no one reads, and precious time is wasted” (I1:33).

- (c) Assessment and reassessment: This process is critical and it requires time that the policy does not formally specify. In order to complete these tasks, the professionals find themselves in the need to stop carrying out interventions: “when we start the assessments or reassessments, it becomes impossible to keep the children’s therapy sessions, impossible to sustain this amount of workload” (I3:89).
- (d) Speech-Language Therapy: The time assigned by the public policy is insufficient to approach the special educational needs of the students: “the time we have for planning and creating activities, the most demanding part of an intervention, is very limited and we work under a lot of pressure” (I1:56). Furthermore, some routines reduce the time available for therapy: “between going to the classroom to pick up the children and coming back to the therapy room you lose five minutes, then you lose another five minutes getting them to settle. So you are only left with 20 minutes for the session” (I5:23). On the other hand, working with children can be more demanding than normal, hence they require different types of material to support their therapy, which implies longer planning times: “kids are demanding, they like technology, it is challenging to create material for them, this requires time” (I4:38).
- (e) Interaction with teachers and other professionals: This topic emerged frequently among the interviewees. Public policy demands collaborative work with teachers but does not define the amount of time for this: “it is difficult to include the teacher because there is not enough time” (I1:49).

Fourth Category: Perception of the Public Policy

The perception of the interviewees is that, in the last two decades, there have been crucial advances in the education policy, which have generated an interesting source of employment for SLPs. They mention that the changes have been favorable since they have positioned SLPs as important actors in the learning process of students with SEN. However, they report that the times assigned for their practice have not been modified and that the functions pertaining to the role have in fact increased. They argue it is essential to make this issue visible since it not only affects the practice of speech-language therapy in educational establishments but also hinders the progress of the support provided to students. With this in mind, they propose the following changes to education policy:

- (a) Diagnostic tests: The participants report that the tests that Decree 170 requires for accepting a student in the programs do not fully adjust to the characteristics and diversity of the students they work with. Therefore, they suggest changing

them: “I have experience performing assessments, and I can see that these tests do not adjust to the current reality of the children, the responses obtained are doubtful. Our hands are tied, and we do not have the freedom to adapt the assessments according to the characteristics of each child. If the child does not respond, it is SLI, and this is just not possible” (I1:61).

- (b) Diagnostic categories: All the interviewees agree that the policy should be updated regarding diagnostic categories since there are students who present special education needs that affect their academic performance and that are not included in the policy: “diagnoses should be seen from a broader perspective, because sometimes we assess children with phonological disorders and, what can I do with them? It is a pity, I cannot admit them and then they are left to their luck” (I3:59).
- (c) Incorporation of SLPs into the work with other SEN: The participants express that their participation should be extended to other diagnostic categories and SEN, which would help formalize their work in schools for students with intellectual disabilities, hearing disorders, etc.: “the presence of a speech-language pathologist as part of the staff should be mandatory in special education schools because in special schools not everyone has the necessary support, and they do not consider speech therapy, which is extremely necessary for children with permanent SEN” (I5:79).
- (d) Time designated for speech-language therapy: The interviewees state that it is necessary to increase the amount of time assigned for the interventions, administrative work, and collaboration with other professionals. They state that these three tasks are where more time is required, as they are essential within the educational context. Regarding the intervention, the professionals suggest increasing the length of sessions in special language schools to 45 minutes: “I propose 45 minutes twice a week, in groups of two (I1:64)”. In addition, they suggest counting with an official allocation of time for the completion of administrative tasks, preparation of material, and collaboration with other professionals: “to have an official amount of time designated for planning and for creating materials, like the famous 70/30 that teachers have, which to me seems like an excellent contribution” (I2:43).

DISCUSSION

This study analyzed, for the first time in Chile, the perspective of speech-language pathologists with more than 20 years of professional experience, of the time that public policy assigns to

their practice in educational settings. The results reveal that the appreciation the establishment has for their experience allows them to adjust the times assigned by the policy. Similarly, the SLPs have the autonomy to make decisions, supported by the management teams of the schools where they work. Furthermore, due to this recognition, they are able to design their interventions, moving away from the role defined by the education policy. However, they maintain that the insufficient amount of time affects their practice. In addition, they emphasize that the large amount of administrative work takes time away from the intervention process, despite the adjustments they make. In this regard, the literature indicates that the work of SLPs in education involves a significant amount of administrative tasks (Pring et al., 2012; Reeter, 2012). According to this evidence, it is crucial to analyze the nature of the administrative work that the policy demands, and the possible ways in which this work could become more efficient.

Another important issue mentioned by the participants is the lack of time to hold meetings with other members of staff. This situation has been found in other studies, where it has been found that the absence of an official distribution of time prevents SLPs from sharing work with other professionals (Charitaki et al., 2018; Glover et al., 2015; Manor-Binyamini, 2020; Suc et al., 2017). Among the functions described in Decree 170 (*Decreto* n° 170, 2009) and in the document *Profesionales Asistentes de la Educación. Orientaciones acerca de su rol y funciones en Programas de Integración Escolar (PIE)* (MINEDUC, 2019), it is stipulated that the SLP should collaborate with and support educators. These roles are framed in functions related to the design of diverse, organized, and planned strategies in conjunction with teachers and other professionals for the care of students with SEN. However, although both documents refer to the aforementioned roles, they do not clearly specify official times to carry out these actions. The participants have faced these challenges by adjusting their practice, which differs from what the policy establishes. These adjustments emerge from observing the needs of the students, the internal dynamics of the schools, and the support of the families that the SLPs count on to carry out their role.

Time allocation is one of the suggested changes. The subjects believe that individual 30-minute or 45-minute sessions working with two students would allow for progress to be made. In this regard, some studies report that there is significant progress when the intervention is intense and distributed over time, and that effectiveness increases in high-frequency and longer-length treatments (Bellon-Harn, 2012; Frizelle et al., 2021; Schmitt et al., 2017). Therefore, according to the informants, working

with two students with SEN every 45 minutes in special language schools should be the minimum time that the policy suggests to support students with SLI. This proposal should be studied in order to establish if indeed that amount of time is optimal for achieving progress with those students.

Another suggested change is related to the need to update and expand the diagnostic categories described in Decree 170. This would extend the coverage of speech-language therapy to children with SEN who currently do not receive this type of support because speech and language therapy is only included in special language schools and for students with ASD who attend PIE (MINEDUC, 2009). Concerning this point, the interviewees believe that the incorporation of SLPs into the curricula of special schools and PIE working with students with intellectual disabilities and hearing disorders, among others, should be official. The rationale for this suggestion is that the work done with these types of students, who also present communicative and linguistic disorders, is left at the discretion of the technical teams and not of the SLP since the policy does not formally stipulate it.

Regarding the updating of diagnostic categories, the tendency in English-speaking countries is to use the term Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), which is considered to better encompass the symptomatology of language disturbances. Moreover, it allows focusing on the impact these issues have on social and academic performance, more than on the cutoff score of standardized tests (McGregor et al., 2020). DLD differs from SLI mainly in the heterogeneity of its symptoms, affecting the different aspects of language. It also has a poor prognosis, affects social communication and academic performance, and can co-exist with ADHD, motor disorders, dyslexia, and behavioral or emotional disturbances (Llorenç et al., 2021; McGregor et al., 2020). In Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, on the other hand, the study by Llorenç et al. (2021) suggests analyzing and diagnosing the condition with an emphasis on socio-emotional and academic aspects. In addition, the authors invite the Hispanic scientific community to carry out a process of reflection and consensus, similar to that held by the English-speaking scientific community, to evaluate whether a change in the diagnosis from SLI to DLD suits the clinical characteristics of the population of Hispanic children and adolescents with language disturbances. This information is especially relevant for SLPs since reaching a consensus about a diagnosis allows evidence to be gathered regarding its prevalence, as well as the actions necessary to approach it (Cáceres-Assençó et al., 2020). In Chile, data provided by the Ministry of Education in 2018 revealed that approximately 76% of the child and adolescent population enrolled in special language schools or School

Integration Programs presented a language disorder (Holz, 2018). This fact proves the need for SLPs to support this type of student. Therefore, the proposal to analyze the pertinence of a change from SLI to DLD goes beyond nomenclature, as it involves studying the clinical picture and reaching agreements both on the diagnostic terms and on the approach to speech-language therapy. Regarding public policy, research on the change to this diagnostic category would provide information to rethink the role of the SLP in education, where the adjustment to the time assigned for therapy is one of the central axes of change.

In conclusion, the changes that the participants of this research propose originate in the characteristics and needs that arise within the educational settings where they work. Similarly, the adjustments that they make to their practice are based on the internal dynamics of the schools. The experiences of SLPs in educational settings may be unknown to the actors in charge of designing and implementing public policies at the ministerial level. The international evidence on approaches to address the design and implementation of education policy leans toward the involvement of the professionals that work in educational environments, in order to possess real-life knowledge about the challenges that the policy should address (Skedsmo & Huber, 2019). This would allow focusing on solutions, practices, and innovations that come from professionals with experience in the field (Schrüder & Krüger, 2019). Thus, it is essential to further investigate the practice of SLPs in education.

This research highlights challenges that are relevant to the discipline, aimed at generating evidence that allows visualizing the necessary changes to the existing policy. This stems from the fact that the times currently assigned by public policy for speech-language therapy do not allow the community of students with SEN to achieve the progress they need to enhance their academic journey.

FINAL COMMENTS

Research shows that the work of SLPs in education is hampered by administrative, organizational, and practical factors. These difficulties arise from a public policy that does not clearly define the length of time assigned to complete the functions that these professionals perform in educational settings or its distribution among said functions.

The narratives provided by the participants of this study reveal that they often make adjustments to the role defined by public policy, especially concerning the time designated to carry out their

work. The aforementioned changes are supported by the directors of the schools, who value the work experience of the SLPs. However, it is unknown if professionals with fewer years of experience can make the same kind of adjustments to what is determined by the policy. Having access to this information would allow for a better understanding of the needs that emerge from the practice of SLPs in educational settings, which in turn would be useful evidence for professional training in universities, as well as for political actors who work in the design of the public policy.

The findings of this research prove how distant the design of education policy is from the context in which it is implemented. Research on the correct dosage for intervention would provide the background to efficiently allocate the resources that the State invests in students with SEN.

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