

# Occupational Therapists' Perceptions of Current Early Intervention Practice

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## Abstract

This study aimed to identify occupational therapists' (OT) perception of Division of Early Childhood/Early Childhood Personnel Center (DEC/ECPC) competencies, and their application to current early intervention (EI) practice. EI OTs (n=311) were surveyed on demographic information and knowledge of DEC/ECPC common competencies (i.e. family-centered practice). Researchers determined independent variables as years of experience, exposure to competencies, and practice setting; knowledge of competencies as the dependent variable. Most respondents indicated they do not know the competencies.

- Results of this study yielded a basis for more efficient training in EI, and assistance in establishing EI OT competencies.
- Correlational-analytical results suggested those exposed to competencies feel experienced and competent.
- Fair negative correlation existed between years of experience and knowledge of the competencies.

## Methodology

**Overview:** An electronic survey called *Knowledge of Early Intervention Competencies for Occupational Therapists Survey* was disseminated to participants. The survey consisted of two parts: Demographic information (independent variable) and a Likert scale on the knowledge of the DEC/ECPC competencies (dependent variable). Assumptions included that participants responded honestly and knowledgeably about their history, experience, and knowledge of early intervention.

**Participants:** 311 OTs who work or have worked in EI in the United States (EIOTs) were surveyed, obtained through convenience and snowball sampling of multiple social media and AOTA platforms.

**Procedures:** Part 1 of the survey categorized practitioners based on their demographics (years of experience, education, practice setting). Part 2 of the survey examined the practitioners' knowledge of the competencies established in the literature review, the dependent variable (DV).

**Data Analysis:** Correlational-analytcs (Pearson's, Kendall and chi square) and descriptive statistics were conducted based on the data from the survey. Demographic information was the independent variable: years of experience (IV1), education (IV2), practice setting(IV3). Knowledge of the competencies was the dependent variable (analyzed as a Likert-scale and Yes/ No).

## Data

How long have you been providing EI services?

- Less than a year
- 1-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10+ years

Are you familiar with the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) or Early Childhood Personnel Center (ECPC) competencies in EI?

- Yes, I am familiar with the competencies
- No, I am not aware of the competencies

Years of Experience (IV1) relationship on DV			
	Family	Environment	Team
<b>Pearson's Correlation (r)</b>	-0.27	-0.37	-0.40
<b>Kendall's test for Dependency (τ)</b>	-0.31	-0.36	-0.38

\*Statistically significant at p<0.01  
 \*0.25 to -.050 = fair relationship

Practice Setting (IV3) relationship on DV (knowledge of DEC/ECPC competencies)			
Pearson's Chi Square	Descriptive Statistics on Practice Setting Responses to: "Are you familiar with competencies?"		
Chi square value	Setting (IV3)	Yes	No
Likelihood ratio	2.13	37.9%	62.1%
Linear-by-linear association	Center-based	23.1%	76.9%
	Both	36.3%	63.8%

\*Not statistically significant

How familiar are you with...

	I have experienced this many times, can apply it, and have refined my skills in this area	I have experienced this many times and can apply it, but still feel I could learn more to refine my skills	I have experience with this competency, but I am not confident utilizing the information	I have heard of it, but not experienced it	I have never heard of this competency
Family centered practice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interdisciplinary Team	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Importance of child engagement with environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Exposure to the Competencies (IV2) relationship on DV: "How familiar are you with ..."						
	Family		Team		Environment	
	5	4	5	4	5	4
Entry level education	63.6%	36.4%	54.5%	45.5%	63.6%	36.4%
Post-professional education	85.7%	14.3%	100%	0%	100%	0%
Continuing professional education	80.4%	19.6%	84.8%	13.0%	80.4%	19.6%
Work experience/exposure	72.3%	27.7%	78.5%	20.0%	78.5%	21.5%

\*5 - I have experienced this many times, can apply it, and have refined my skills in this area

\*4 - I have experienced this many times and can apply it, but still feel I could learn more to refine my skills

## Data Analysis

- Results may indicate that newer EIOTs (less years of experience) were more knowledgeable of the competencies, while therapists with more years of experience were less knowledgeable of the competencies—based on the fair negative correlation and dependency between IV1 and DV.
- The independent variable of practice setting (IV3) was analyzed with a separate item "Are you familiar with the DEC or ECPC competencies in EI?" The types of IV3 include center-based, home-based, and both through a chi-square and descriptive statistics.
- It cannot be determined if there is a statistical association between the way in which therapists were exposed to the competencies (IV2) and their knowledge of the competencies (DV). Descriptive statistics were conducted to analyze therapists' perception of their practice and knowledge of competencies.

## Discussion

Most respondents indicated that they are not familiar with the DEC/ECPC competencies, regardless of what setting the EIOT practiced. Of those that are familiar, they perceived themselves to be competent, experienced, and able to implement them; with most feeling refined in their skills, and less feeling they can benefit from skill refinement. EIOTs exposed to these competencies through post-professional education yielded the highest level of competence while EIOTs exposed through entry level education yielded the least level of familiarity.

## Future Implications

Future research should investigate whether occupational therapy programs prepare therapists in competencies and continue to analyze other items in the survey. Recommendations include promoting AOTA to offer certification, as well as state competency mandates for EIOTs.