

The academic background of teachers working in specialized classes with adolescents who have autism spectrum disorder

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Background

In Quebec, a majority of students with autism spectrum disorder [ASD] are educated in specialized classes within a mainstream school. Their teachers usually have an academic background in special education, but they are not equally prepared to work with children with ASD. In addition, the teaching profession requires a constant actualization of knowledge and skills and teachers must always adapt to the numerous changes that will occur during their career. However, unfavorable conditions to a thoughtful approach towards their professional development still exist. Moreover, researchers found insufficient data demonstrating empirically the efficiency of professional development on students learning.

Objectives

This study, which is financed by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and is part of a larger research project, aims to compare 1) the initial training and the continuing education and training of teachers working in specialized classes with adolescents who have autism spectrum disorder and 2) their needs for further continuing education and training.

Methods

The participants consisted of fifteen teachers (fourteen women and one man) working in specialized classes with six to ten adolescents with autism spectrum disorder. Each participant took part in a semi-structured interview based on an interview grid and a questionnaire regarding their sociodemographic and occupational characteristics. The teachers' training was subjected to an exploratory and descriptive analysis, with transcripts of the teachers' comments coded in two Excel files.

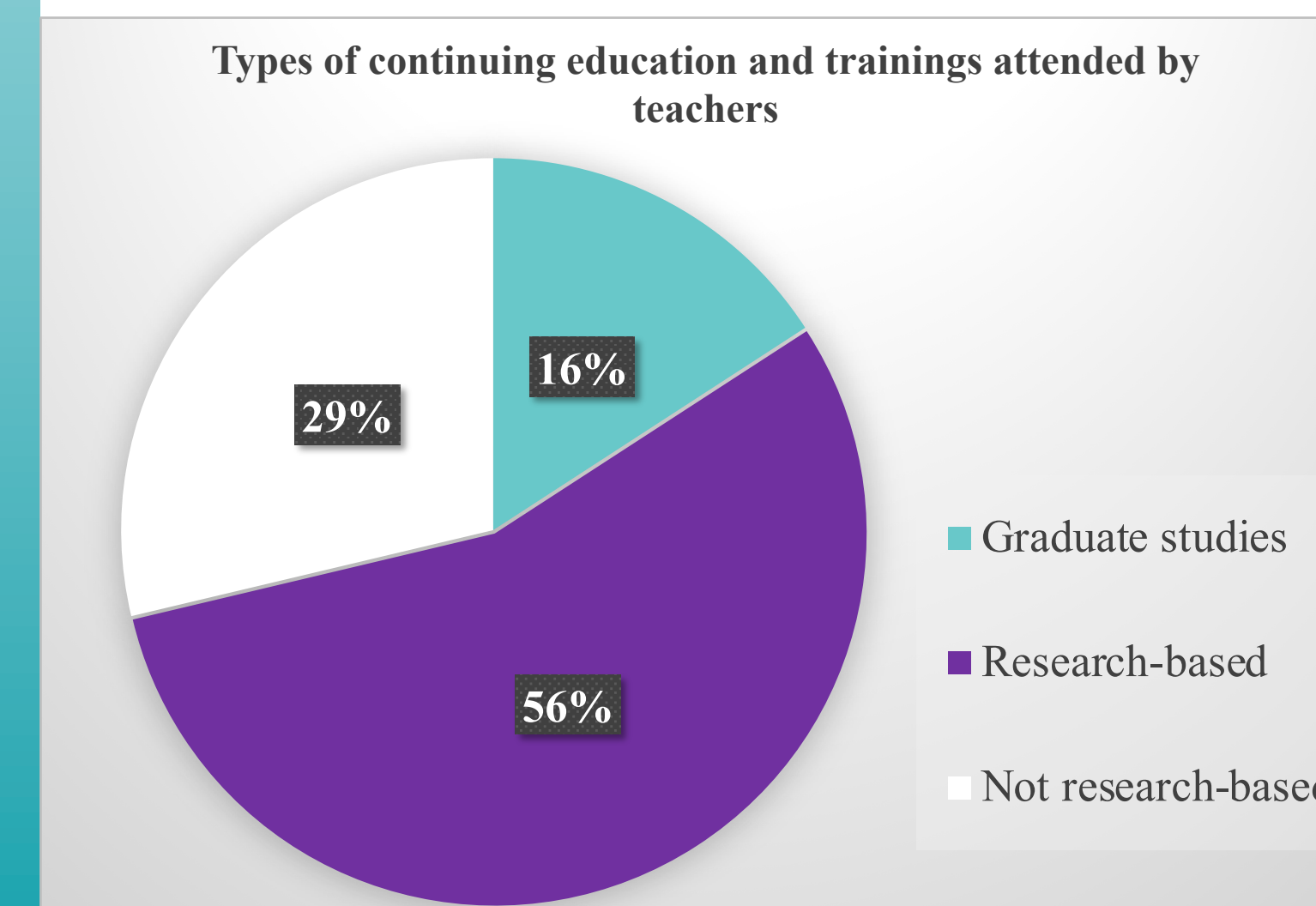
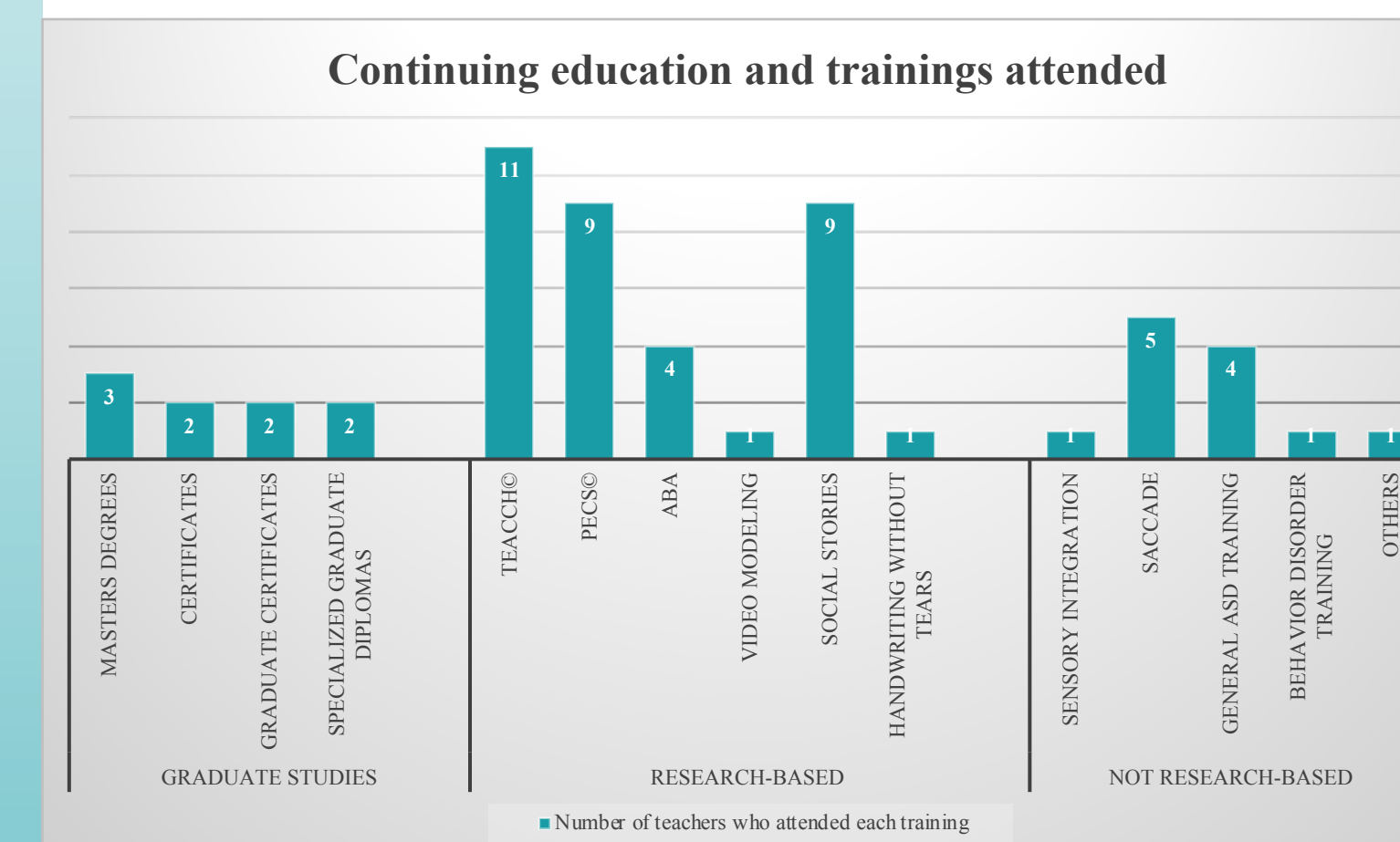
Results

The teachers' needs are large and varied regarding subjects of continuing education and training:

- Applied behavior analysis (ABA)
- Anxiety and emotions
- Sexuality
- Behavior
- Executives functions
- Evaluation of learning
- ASD specific instruction
- Differentiated instruction
- Evaluation of competencies
- Multi-level instruction and evaluation

Results

The teachers' initial training is homogeneous, most of them holding a bachelor's degree in Special education. The teachers' continuing education and training is very heterogeneous in both quantity and quality. Furthermore, many trainings followed by teachers are not research-based.



Results

Important findings

- Large diversity of trainings
- Half trainings are research-based
- Over a quarter of trainings are not researched-based
- Only a few teachers have attended a graduate program
- 93% of teachers have followed 5 continuing education programs or less in their entire career.

Conclusions

The continuing education and training of teachers working with adolescents who have ASD must be oriented and recognized by a board that would implement obligatory guidelines for professional development. And, to ensure their quality, trainings should only be provided by renowned experts certified by this board. Moreover, according to research, supervision is the best form of training for professional development. Therefore, teachers should have the opportunity to be supervised by qualified professionals.

References

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