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**Professional development needs of early
intervention providers of preschoolers with
moderate and severe disabilities in Saudi Arabia**

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Abstract:

Research literature indicates that ongoing professional development makes a difference in enhancing the knowledge, abilities, and necessary skills for early intervention providers of preschoolers with moderate and severe disabilities (MSD). The purpose of this study was to assess the professional development needs of early intervention providers of preschoolers with MSD in Saudi Arabia. This research implemented a descriptive survey design to provide quantitative research findings. The study included a sample size of 92 early intervention providers (EIPs). The researcher used descriptive statistics to analyze the demographic characteristics of the participants and to determine participants' responses towards the basic characteristics, objectives, and standards of professional development programs at the Disabled

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Children's Association (DCA) in Saudi Arabia as well as their perceived teaching abilities. The Somers' D tests were conducted to compare several proportions among the items. ANOVA also was used to determine whether a significant difference existed among all independent and dependent variables. The research results discovered that the basic characteristics, objectives, and standards of professional development programs at the DCA in Saudi Arabia that provide early intervention providers with the knowledge, skills, and abilities were in the high level of quality. The findings also indicated that perceived teaching abilities of EIPs were in the high level, while "teaching Self-Help skills" was in the moderate level. There was a significant difference between perceived teaching abilities and the number of hours spent in a professional development course, at $p < .05$. Providers who spent five or more hours of professional development during the past year had higher means and influences in teaching the five achievement skills researched in this study. Overall, there was agreement between the criteria of the programs offered in the centers of the DCA and the perceptions of the early intervention providers about their professional development needs, which were both at the high level. The researcher recommends that stakeholders in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries should develop appropriate and effective early intervention programs like the ones offered at the DCA centers, which will contribute to enhancing the quality of education for providers and their students with disabilities, including preschoolers with MSD.