Pretertiary psychology education in Europe: a survey of approaches to teacher education and continuing professional development of school psychology teachers

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1. Introduction

Pretertiary psychology education (PTE) in Europe Until recently, the research focus of psychology education has been mainly on the undergraduate level; studies on PTE are rare (but see Banyard, 2008, and Rowley & Dalgarno, 2010, on PTE in the UK; Ktiler, 2009, on PTE in Europe). As far as the authors are aware, no cross-European comparison studies of PTE have been published.

Under the auspices of the European Federation of Psychology Teachers’ Associations (EFPTA, http://www.efpta.org), a survey of PTE in Europe was conducted byletcher et al., 2009, by means of a quantitative online questionnaire. Responses were received from psychology teachers in seven countries. A database of psychology curricula was constructed and concerns of teachers were identified. The survey found that “psychology education” exists in a variety of guises; though not labelled as such, psychology is taught in diverse forms (seemingly) as an optional and social, religious and philosophical subject. However, it was PTE leading to HE entry qualifications (e.g. Moritz, Malitza, International Baccalaureate, English A-levels, Scottish Higher) that has given rise to the main concerns regarding TE and is therefore the focus of the current study.

Teacher education (TE) & continuing professional development (CPD) in Europe The model of TE for the major status (QTS) in Europe have been identified: simultaneous and consecutive (Eurydice, 2002); a further distinction is made by Ostend (2009), into “English” and “French” models. The Council of the European Union (EU) has engaged in efforts to improve the quality of TE in Member States, in view of agreed areas including teachers’ specialist knowledge and pedagogical skills (European Commission (EC), 2007). Two major publications have been on TE and CPD in the EU: in Eurydice (2009), and FER (2009). The EC’s “Common European Principles for Teacher Competences & Qualifications” (2011) asserts a range of competences and training elements for CPD development needs that should be met by both initial TE and CPD.

2. Methods

Pretertiary psychology education (PTE) in Europe Until recently, the research focus of psychology education has been mainly on the undergraduate level; studies on PTE are rare (but see Banyard, 2008, and Rowley & Dalgarno, 2010, on PTE in the UK; Ktiler, 2009, on PTE in Europe). As far as the authors are aware, no cross-European comparison studies of PTE have been published.

2.2. Objectives

The objective of the present study was to assess TE and CPD for psychology teachers in Europe. The focus of the current study was to assess TE and CPD for psychology teachers in Europe.

2.3. Research project

The research project was conducted in three phases. The first phase was a desk study, involving a review of existing literature and reports on PTE in Europe. The second phase was a survey of TE and CPD for psychology teachers in seven countries: Germany, France, Poland, Sweden, Finland, Italy, and Norway.

2.4. Participants

The survey participants were psychology teachers from the seven countries. The survey was conducted online, with the help of national psychology teachers’ associations. In this context, the current small-scale action research project was conducted. The survey was conducted online, with the help of national psychology teachers’ associations.

2.5. Data collection

Data were collected through an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to assess the quality of TE and CPD for psychology teachers. The questionnaire was designed to assess the quality of TE and CPD for psychology teachers.

2.6. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The analysis was conducted using Excel software. The analysis was conducted using Excel software.

3. Results and Discussion

Nature of initial TE – general aspects

There were differences between countries:

- In most countries, the subjects of psychology education included the subjects of psychology and the subjects of other school subjects.
- In Germany, psychology education is considered a special subject, while in France, it is considered a general subject.
- In Sweden, psychology education is considered a general subject, while in Finland, it is considered a special subject.
- In Italy, psychology education is considered a general subject, while in Norway, it is considered a special subject.

There were differences among countries in the level of the subjects of psychology education:

- In most countries, the subjects of psychology education were taught at the secondary school level.
- In Germany, the subjects of psychology education were taught at the junior secondary school level.
- In France, the subjects of psychology education were taught at the senior secondary school level.
- In Sweden, the subjects of psychology education were taught at the junior secondary school level.
- In Finland, the subjects of psychology education were taught at the senior secondary school level.
- In Italy, the subjects of psychology education were taught at the senior secondary school level.
- In Norway, the subjects of psychology education were taught at the senior secondary school level.

There were differences among countries in the methods of teaching the subjects of psychology education:

- In most countries, the subjects of psychology education were taught using traditional methods, such as lectures and classroom discussions.
- In Germany, the subjects of psychology education were taught using project-based learning.
- In France, the subjects of psychology education were taught using a combination of traditional methods and project-based learning.
- In Sweden, the subjects of psychology education were taught using project-based learning.
- In Finland, the subjects of psychology education were taught using a combination of traditional methods and project-based learning.
- In Italy, the subjects of psychology education were taught using project-based learning.
- In Norway, the subjects of psychology education were taught using a combination of traditional methods and project-based learning.

4. Limitations of methodology

The samples were targeted for the specific purpose of obtaining their special knowledge of PTE and CPD. There was no intention to generalize findings to a wider population. Possibilities, types of assessments and reliability may include: research bias, in all of which psychology teachers were interested in an interesting and promising PTE. Interpretation of responses was English. The first language was not the first language. However, a degree of concern was achieved through triangulation of interview and focus group data. The standardized protocol and structured nature of the interviews provided some degree of internal reliability.

5. Conclusions

This small-scale initial exploration of an as yet under-researched topic has shown many areas of similarity, as well as some major differences in TE and CPD for PTE in Europe. There was greater variation, and concern, over initial TE:

- poor access to TE for PTE in some countries:
  - England: limited TE student places; QTS for FE sector not valid for schools
  - Germany: not available in all Länder
  - Scotland: no TE courses; QTS for FE sector not valid for schools
- deployment of non-specialist staff to teach psychology in the 15-19 age band, suggesting that the relevance of teachers’ specialist expertise for their students’ learning is underserved by school leaders (England, Scotland)
- these teachers’ developments: the major obstacles to TE for psychology in England and Scotland must be addressed, in order to enhance the quality of CPD, and psychology graduates’ career opportunities, the levels that obtain in other European countries and in other subjects.

Possibilities for future research: status of psychology v. other school subjects; PTE for younger learners and embedding in school curriculum; students’ perceptions of PTE; psychological-pedagogical skills; PTE curriculum, and how they are determined.

References