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The perceived and the experienced curriculum in secondary schools in light of citizenship education: Similarities and differences between four European countries

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Abstract

The focus of this research is on a comparison between the perceived curriculum (what teachers perceive and implement) and the experienced curriculum (what students experience) in light of citizenship education. The sample of this comparative research consists of secondary school teachers and students. Specifically, 545 Cypriot teachers, 219 Italian, 131 Portuguese and 91 Romanian participated in this study. Also, the student sample consists of 1282 Cypriot students, 3572 Italian, 315 Portuguese and 368 Romanian. Statistical analyses of the results aim to show similarities and differences between teachers understanding of their teaching and students experiences in light of important aspects of citizenship education such as empathy and collaboration, inclusion and participation.

Keywords: *Citizenship education; experienced curriculum; comparative research; empathy.*

Literature review

Important aspects of citizenship education are empathy and collaboration, inclusion and participation. These aspects are among the key competences and qualifications for teachers in Europe, who should be able to work with others; to work with knowledge, technology and information; and to work with and in society (European Commission, 2005).

It is widely accepted that high-quality education plays a crucial role in promoting students' learning, personal fulfilment and social skills (European Commission, 2005). Learning is influenced by many educational factors, including students' perceptions of the appropriateness of the learning environment (Fraser, 1994, McRobbie and Fraser, 1993); teaching and instructional styles; the examples provided; the teaching model used in the design of lessons and the difficulty level of the academic tasks (Bull and Solity, 1987).

Although students' perceptions might not be consistent with the reality generated by outside observers, investigating their perceptions provides rich information for understanding students' cognition and classroom processes, as well as it presents the range of reality for individual students and subgroups in the classroom (Knight and Waxman, 1991).

Dispositions such as empathy (the ability to express concern and take the perspective of a student) are important for educators to possess in order to facilitate positive interactions among students (Tettegah and Anderson 2007). Branwhite (1988) supports that students' positive perception of their teachers' empathy influences academic motivation, as well as influences the development of empathy in children (Hoffman, 2000).

Thus, this study places its emphasis on the differences between the perceived curriculum and the experienced curriculum (Goodlad, 1983; 1979) through the investigation of teachers' and students' perceptions regarding their teaching competences and experiences respectively in light of citizenship education. .

Aim and research questions

This study aims to compare the results of a questionnaire study conducted in four different countries (Romania, Portugal, Italy, Cyprus), which investigated teachers' and students' perceptions towards important aspects of citizenship education, i.e., empathy, collaboration, inclusion and participation.

Research questions of the study are as follows:

- Are teachers' and students' perceptions congruent?
- Do teachers' perceptions in different countries have any similarities?
- Do students' perceptions in different countries have any similarities?
- Are there any patterns of answering the questionnaire in each country?
- Are there any common patterns of answering the questionnaire between countries?
- What are the differences between perceived and experienced curricula concerning important aspects of citizenship education?

Methodology

Participants

The sample of this comparative study consists of secondary school teachers and students. Specifically, 545 Cypriot teachers, 219 Italian, 131 Portuguese and 91 Romanian participated in this study. Also, the student sample consists of 1282 Cypriot students, 3572 Italian, 315 Portuguese and 368 Romanian. In total, participants were 986 teachers and 5537 students.

Instruments

The instruments used for this study were two questionnaires, one addressed to students and one to teachers. The teachers' questionnaire measures teachers' understanding about the characteristics of their teaching, while the students' questionnaire refers to students'

experiences regarding teaching. The statements in the students' questionnaire correspond to the statements in the teachers' questionnaire and vice versa so as to allow comparison between students' and teachers' perceptions. The questionnaires were developed by the Italian team and translated from Italian to Greek, Portuguese and Romanian. An effort has been made to use the same questionnaires in the four European countries participating in this research (Cyprus, Italy, Portugal, and Romania), adapting them to the school context, in order to allow comparison of results between the countries.

The students' questionnaire consists of 27 statements scaled from 1 to 5 (Likert Scale). Each statement has two parts: The first part refers to the frequency in which the teachers' behaviour is observed (1 = never, and 5 = always) and the second part to the number of teachers that behave in this way (1 = no one and 5 = all of them). Also, background information (class, gender and nationality) were collected by participants.

The teachers' questionnaire consists of 39 statements scaled from 1 to 5 (Likert scale - 1 = never, and 5 = always). A second part of the questionnaire consists of questions about teachers' background factors. Hence, further data were collected about teachers' gender, age, years of experience, level of education and discipline of teaching.

Data analyses

Data were entered and statistics calculated by SPSS 19.0 for Windows program.

ANOVA – *one way* and Post-hoc Scheffe analysis was used to determine whether there were significant group (country level) differences in the dependent variables. Separate analyses were performed for all items included in the teachers' questionnaires and for all items in the students' questionnaire.

FACTOR Analysis was used to reveal underlying scales in the questionnaires. Separate analyses were conducted for each country and for all countries together for all the items in each of the questionnaire. For the students' questionnaire, factor analysis was performed for the first part of the questionnaire, which refers to the frequency in which the teachers' behaviour is observed.

Results

1. ANOVA – one way and Post-hoc Scheffe analyses

1.1 Teachers' Questionnaire

ANOVA – *one way* analysis showed statistically significant differences among countries in all statements of the questionnaire, except from the following seven:

- *St. 8*: Promote elements of teaching that have a pedagogical value (F=1.396, p=0.243)
- *St. 17*: Arrange their work based on the available time (F=1.045, p=0.372)
- *St. 19*: Grade students' tests in time (F=0.830, p=0.478)

- *St 24*: Try to make their interlocutors feel comfortable (F=2.485, p=0.059)
- *St. 35*: Respect the responsibilities they undertake towards students and colleagues (F=0.325, p=0.808)
- *St. 37*: Try to behave unbiased, appreciating students' differences (F=1.558, p=0.198)
- *St. 38*: Try to offer equal opportunities (F=1.878, p=0.132)

The above result indicates that in all countries teachers consider themselves responsible and unbiased towards students promoting students' equality. Similar results are shown by Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test.

Post-hoc Scheffe analysis was conducted for the statements with statistically significant differences. The analysis revealed a non clear pattern among countries, as different combination of means appeared in the statements. Table 1 presents the results of Post-hoc Scheffe analysis for a selection of statements that refer to citizenship education.

Table 1: Post-hoc Scheffe analysis for a selection of statements in the Teachers' Questionnaire

Statements	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
1. Prove to be people available to relate with students' families (F=35.058, p=0,000)	Cyprus (3.76)	Portugal (4.22) Romania (4.37) Italy (4.38)	
4. Engage their students in setting rules (F=27.021, p=0,000)	Cyprus (4.21)	Portugal (4.57) Romania (4.58) Italy (4.69)	
5. Accept students critique (F=18.068, p=0.000)	Romania(3.92)	Portugal (4.20) Italy (4.41)	Italy (4.41) Cyprus (4.47)
6. Accept students viewpoints without criticising them (F=7.066, p=0.000)	Romania (4.18) Portugal (4.33) Cyprus (4.40)	Cyprus (4.40) Italy (4.56)	
11. Empathy towards students' learning difficulties (F=26.157, p=0.000)	Italy (3.92) Romania(3.98) Portugal (4.05)	Cyprus (4.36)	
20. Collaborate with students (F=17.216, p=0.000)	Italy (4.05)	Portugal (4.37) Cyprus (4.44) Romania (4.55)	
21. Promote cooperative learning using the team dynamic (F=4.328, p=0.005)	Italy (3.90) Cyprus (4.06) Romania (4.15)	Cyprus (4.06) Romania (4.15) Portugal (4.20)	
23. Maintain a calm, peaceful and interactive climate (F=6.142, p=0.000)	Italy (4.14) Cyprus (4.22) Portugal (4.31)	Portugal (4.31) Romania (4.43)	

1.1 Students' Questionnaire

ANOVA – one way analysis showed statistically significant differences among countries in all statements ($p=0.000$). The same result was found using Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric Test. Post-hoc Scheffe analysis was conducted to reveal where the differences lie by analysing pairs of means. A pattern in almost all statements in which Cyprus has the lowest mean score and Romania the highest was revealed. Table 2 presents the results of Post-hoc Scheffe analysis for a selection of statements that refer to citizenship education.

Table 2: Post-hoc Scheffe analysis for a selection of statements in the Students' Questionnaire

Statements	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
1. Maintain a good attitude in their relations with students (F=104.063, p=0.000)	Cyprus (3.03) Italy (3.08)	Portugal (3.38)	Romania (3.88)
2. Do not discriminate students (F=33.339, p=0,000)	Cyprus (3.03) Italy (3.08)	Portugal (3.38)	Romania (3.64)
3. Allow students to express their own opinions (F=13.434, p=0.000)	Cyprus (3.37) Italy (3.41) Portugal (3.56)	Romania (3.79)	
4. Admit that they are wrong, do not get angry (F=45.533, p=0.000)	Cyprus (2.96) Italy (3.17)	Romania (3.69) Portugal (3.71)	
6. Do not yell and do not lose their composure during lessons (F=38.672 p= 0.000)	Cyprus (2.70) Portugal (2.88)	Portugal (2.88) Italy (3.01)	Romania (3.41)
16. Motivate students to study (F=27.446, p=0.000)	Cyprus (2.82) Italy (2.94)	Portugal (3.18)	Romania (3.42)
17. Create a calm relational climate in the classroom (F=39.219, p=0.000)	Cyprus (2.66)	Italy (2.99) Portugal (3.18)	Portugal (3.18) Romania (3.29)
19. Try to put themselves the students' place (F=32.019, p=0.000) (empathetic attitude)	Cyprus (2.05)	Portugal (2.26) Italy (2.44)	Italy (2.44) Romania (2.48)
20. Foster debates of different viewpoints and	Cyprus (2.8) Italy (2.97)	Italy (2.97) Portugal (3.12)	Romania (3.49)

collaboration in the classroom (F=35.716 , p=0.000)			
21. Prove to be people available to relate with students' families (F=65.116 , p=0.000)	Cyprus (3.03) Portugal (3.15)	Portugal (3.15) Romania (3.23)	Italy (3.55)
5. Meet their commitments (F=54.426, p=0.000)	Cyprus (3.49)	Italy (3.73)	Portugal (4.08) Romania (4.13)

2. Factor Analysis

2.1 Teachers' Questionnaire (separate for each country)

Factor Analysis (separate for each country) revealed no common factors between countries in the teachers' questionnaire, except from two common factors between Portugal and Italy. Table 3 shows the number of factors extracted for each country and the percent of the total variance explained, as well as the common factors between Portugal and Italy.

Table 3: Factor analysis (separate for each country) for the Teachers' Questionnaire

Factor Analysis in each country	Common factors
Romania: Extraction of Twelve factors with eigenvalues over 1.00 (Varimax Rotation Procedure), 70% of the total variance explained Portugal: Twelve factors, 68.48% of the total variance explained Italy: Ten factors, 64% of the total variance explained Cyprus: Eight factors, 54.4% of the total variance explained	Between Portugal and Italy: Factor A: Tolerance & Acceptance St. 6 – Accept students viewpoints St. 23 – Calm climate St. 24 – Make interlocutors feel comfortable Factor B: Equality St. 11 – Sensitivity towards learning difficulties St. 12 - Promote students' talents and autonomy

2.2 Student's Questionnaire (separate for each country)

Factor Analysis (separate for each country) revealed similar factors between countries.

Specifically, similarities among all countries are found in Factor 1, which includes statements that refer to Support and Motivation of students. Similarities are also found among Portugal and Cyprus in Factor 2 and 3. Factor 2 includes statements that refer to teachers' consistency in teaching and administration, whereas factor 3 refers to Student-teacher relationship during teaching. Table 4 shows the common factors between countries.

Table 4: Factor analysis (separate for each country) in the Students' Questionnaire: Similarities among countries

Common factors	
Factor 1 (F1): Support and Motivation of students	Romania: F1: St.10, 15, 16, 17, 24 ($\alpha=0.77$) Portugal: F1: St. 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, 27 ($\alpha=0.88$) Italy: F1: St. 10, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, 27 ($\alpha=0.86$) Cyprus: F1: St. 10, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 ($\alpha=0.88$)
Factor 2 (F2): Teachers' consistency in teaching and administration	Portugal: F2: St. 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 14, 22 ($\alpha=0.80$) Cyprus: F2: St. 3, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 22 ($\alpha=0.85$)
Factor 3 (F3): Student-teacher relationship during teaching	Portugal: F3: St. 1, 2, 3, 4 ($\alpha=0.75$) Cyprus: F3: St. 1, 2, 4 ($\alpha=0.59$)

2.3 Comparison of factors between Students' Questionnaire & Teachers' Questionnaire (for all countries together)

Factor analysis of principal components was conducted in order to reveal underlying scales in the questionnaires. Separate analyses were performed for all items included in the teachers' questionnaires for all countries together and for all items in the students' questionnaires for all countries together.

For teachers' questionnaire, an extraction of SEVEN factors was made with eigenvalues over 1.00 (Varimax Rotation Procedure). Moreover, 49.41% of the total variance is attributable to these 7 factors. Acceptable levels of internal consistency were indicated by Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.51 to 0.82 for these 7 factors.

Statements 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 24, 23, 20, 18, 17 have high factor loadings on the first factor. This factor refers to attitudes of respect and consistency towards students and colleagues. Factor 2 loads on statements 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 21 and 22. This factor has to do with teaching skills. The next four items (St. 14, 28, 29, 30) have high factor loadings on factor 3, which refers to transparent assessment. The next three items (St. 31, 32, 33) have high factor loadings on factor 4, which refers to collaboration with colleagues. Factor 5 loads on the next six items (St. 1, 2, 3, 4, 13, 16), namely sensitivity in students' differences during teaching. Statements 5, 6 and 7 have high factor loadings on Factor 6 that refers to sensitivity in students' viewpoints and crisis. Finally, Factor 7 loads on four items (St. 19, 25, 26 and 27). This factor refers to constructive relations with students.

For students' questionnaire (part A of each item), an extraction of THREE factors was made with eigenvalues over 1.00. Moreover, 42.11% of the total variance is attributable to the three factors. Acceptable levels of internal consistency were indicated by Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.72 to 0.88 for these three factors. Factor 1 of the students' questionnaire loads on thirteen items (St. 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26 and 27) and refers to teachers' support to students. Statements 5, 8, 9, 12, 21, 22 and 23 have high factor loadings on the second factor that has to do with teaching skills. The third factor loads on seven items (St. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 11) and refers to teachers' sensitivity in students' differences during teaching.

Discussion

The interpretation of this comparative study is based on research on perceived and experienced pedagogy - teachers' perceptions about their teaching and students' experiences, in light of important aspects of citizenship education, such as empathy and collaboration, inclusion and participation. The investigation of the gap between teachers' perceived and experienced curriculum is an important issue as teachers' awareness of how students experience their teaching and presence in general is a factor that influences their effectiveness and can guide teachers' training programmes.

An important result of this study is that the gap between teachers' and students' perceptions is the main similarity between all countries. This result shows that there is a gap between the perceived and the experienced curriculum. Students' common factors in all countries indicate that students accept that their teachers are skilful in teaching and administration, as well as supportive to students' learning. Students are less satisfied with teachers' empathetic attitudes: i.e., to put themselves in students' place.

Of course, a limitation of this study is that its results cannot be generalised for each country, i.e. Romania, since the sample was not representative of the population of each country. However, they can indicate that all countries need to take into account more seriously, and elaborate on students' thoughts and voices.

Education for active citizenship at schools requires a holistic, integrated and cross-disciplinary approach that promotes school to community and links the school with the wider community. Teacher education and training should include the promotion of active citizenship as a cross-disciplinary endeavour.

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