

INVESTIGACIONES

LEVELS OF DISCREPANCY BETWEEN THE PROFILE OF COMPETENCES SUGGESTED BY AIOSP AND THE COUNSELORS PROFILE IN VENEZUELA

NIVELES DE DISCREPANCIA ENTRE EL PERFIL DE COMPETENCIAS SUGERIDO POR LA AIOSP Y EL PERFIL DE LOS(AS) ORIENTADORES(AS) DE VENEZUELA

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ABSTRACT

The International Association of Educational and Vocational Orientation approved in Berne (Switzerland), in 2003, the international competences for the guidance practitioners. The interest of this study consisted of determining the level of discrepancy between the profile of competences suggested by the IAIEVG and the profile of the Venezuelan counselors. The study was approached under the quantitative methodology. As conclusions a very high discrepancy (differences) is established between the studied sample, in the aspects related to the development of the career and labour advice, and a high discrepancy, related to the evaluation and community training.

Key Words: Levels of Discrepancy, Profile, Competences, Educational and Vocational Guidance.

RESUMEN

La Asociación Internacional de Orientación Educativa y Vocacional (IAIEVG, siglas en inglés) aprobó en Berna (Suiza), en el 2003, las competencias internacionales para los profesionales en orientación. El interés de este estudio consistió en determinar el nivel de discrepancia entre el perfil de competencias sugerido por la IAIEVG y el perfil de los (as) orientadores (as) venezolanos (as). El estudio se abordó bajo la metodología cuantitativa. Como conclusiones se establece una muy alta discrepancia (diferencia) entre los lineamientos propuestos y la muestra estudiada, en los aspectos relacionados con el desarrollo de la carrera y asesoramiento laboral y una discrepancia alta, relacionada con la evaluación y capacitación comunitaria.

Palabras clave: Niveles de discrepancia, Perfil, Competencias, Orientación Educativa y Vocacional.

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Introduction

The changes that are being generated in today's society, all over the field of human endeavor, especially in the economic, political and social aspects, due to the scientific and technological advances, push to resize the professional field, so that professionals in their different fields of work get the level demanded by advanced societies.

In this sense, this research seeks to contribute to the preparation of professionals in the Guidance; and the most expeditious way to help them is looking for their performance re-dimensionality, so they could meet the challenges of today's society. From this perspective, this research has as its main goal to determine the levels of discrepancy between the profile of competences suggested by the AIOSP and the counselors' profile in Venezuela. In this case, the objective is to determine how near (Low Discrepancy) or how far (High Discrepancy) these professionals are situated in respect to the international parameters established by a world and well known organization in Guidance field.

Problem Formulation

Competences in job performance are a powerful force that characterizes the contextual mobility, so they are important for the professionals of education.

The issue of competences is very well promoted at an international level. Vera (2003) states that in several parts of the world such as America, Europe and Australia, Guidance has been characterized by the development in competence formation; in consequence, it is hoped to prepare highly competent professionals in basic areas with specific knowledge. This author also points out that these same standards have been updated and gained spaces at professional standards.

One of the compelling reasons for addressing this issue is determined by the need for guidance professionals with high competences, since it may be noted the urgent need for them to have access to specialized training and be able to provide quality care and adjusted to high standards of efficiency and effectiveness. At this point Repetto (2008) notes that if counseling services are provided by professionals with a variety of skills, the question to be asked is: What then are the competencies required of these professionals and how they can be acquired to meet the challenges demanded by this global society?

In Venezuela, for Vera (2003), training based on competences and knowledge standards has not yet come to be regarded in a serious and systematic way, and besides that, Montero and Malpica (2002) consider that the competence approach is relevant as a means or a response to the need of constantly improving the quality of human resource training and performance.

Moreover, in Malpica's view (2001), in Venezuelan case, guided practice diverges from the actual professional scope in the theoretical, practical and institutional aspects; the author adds that it is necessary to have some general guidelines which regulate the professional activity and ethics in order to protect matters related to professional practice.

Given these situations, it is necessary that guidance professionals develop competences more in tune with our times, and be able to operate in the new scenarios required by today's society.

In general, this research aims to answer the following questions:

- What is the level of discrepancy between the AIOSP competency profile of and the profile of counselors or Guidance practitioners in Venezuela?
- What are the levels of discrepancies in every competence required?

Research aim: To determine the level of discrepancy between the competence profile of counselors suggested by the International Association of Educational and Vocational Orientation (IAEVG, in English), and the Venezuelan counsellors profile.

Specific aims: To identify the roles of counselors in Venezuela related to the competence profile suggested by the IAEVG (AIOSP).

To determine the differences between the core and specialized competences profile suggested by IAEVG (AIOSP) and the Venezuelan counselors' competence profile.

Justification

This discrepancy analysis will identify strengths and weaknesses between the two profiles, thereby encouraging the adoption of functions hitherto unused in Venezuelan field. In other words, to open spaces taking into account social and cultural relevance, and also to delve into heat restructured patterns of the current challenges; and it would also enable us to perform some type of formative assessment, as we yield data about areas or aspects that, from the international point of view, would be strengthened or improved to handle the same quality standards that are used with practitioners from other latitudes.

Theoretical Bases

This research was approached from the constructivist view, as "The constructivist approach gives rise to the competence-based education" (Gutiérrez Nava and Castañeda Solís, 2001, p. 148), and second, the same authors point out that according to this approach working with competence means to consider the notion of performance quality, which is ultimately what is being sought as a goal in the professional performance of counselors in Venezuela.

The theoretical conception of this research is directed primarily to the performance of Guidance professionals in Venezuela, hence, taking into account the constructivist approach, this research was designed considering knowledge (declarative basic core), knowing how to do (proceedings core), knowing how to be and live (attitudinal core), which can be seen in the applied survey questions because it was structured to take into account these types of knowledge. Furthermore, the investigation was conducted, as stated in the justification, with a formative aim, with the self-assessment criterion, considering outcomes and processes, and using a survey to collect information. All these elements related to "what to evaluate (performance), Knowledge, how to evaluate (purpose), origin of assessors (self-assesment), nature of the observed subjects (results and processes), and how to evaluate (survey or written test) are the elements suggested by the constructivist approach when considering the performance of a professional." (Gutiérrez Nava and Castañeda Solís, 2001, p. 149).

In addition to constructivism, this research has another theoretical support in the design of a pedagogy based on complex thinking skills, and taking the ideas of Tobon Tobon

(2004), it is considered that any discussion about competences must overcome “the employment and economic reductionism (and consider) the following three areas of competence: the labor-business hub, the socio-cultural integration, and self-actualization” (López Herre-rías, 2004. p XV). Hence the conception of competence handled here goes beyond what work is strictly talking, and we share Vargas Zuñiga’s idea (2002) when he says that competition for jobs is one of the concepts that has evolved ceasing to be a “simple concept that describes the ability to perform certain tasks” (p. 5), (i.e.) “has evolved from a standard concept into a comprehensive concept” (p. 5). And it should be clear that from the beginning the intention is not to make Venezuelan counselors adopt the parameters suggested by the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, but simply that they serve as guide to compare our levels of expertise with international standards, and to specify in which areas we can improve, because as Boyatzis stated (quoted in Vargas Zuñiga, 2002) to analyze the contents of a task to try to establish some common denominator is something that can be very valuable, but “establish it as a national standard is an exaggeration” (p. 4).

Finally, in the search for a better understanding of the terms used in this research, we consider the definitions of both *Profile* and *Competences*, in Paez’s view (1999, p. 1): Profile: “set of attitudes, knowledge, skills and abilities that are characteristic of a professional”, and Competence as the “capacity (for a job, a profession) acquired by training (practice, study, exercise)”.

Methodology

For the characteristics of the study, it follows a quantitative research method. The study is descriptive because “it seeks to specify the important properties of persons, groups, communities and any other phenomenon under analysis” (Hernández Sampieri et al, 2004, p. 117).

Population

The population consisted of 130 counselors who attended the First Interdisciplinary Venezuelan Congress of Counselors, held in Maracaibo, Venezuela, from 19 to 23 July 2004. The sample selected at random was 56 counselors, corresponding to a 43.07 percent of the population.

Instruments and Techniques

The instrument used was the questionnaire. This instrument was the same questionnaire designed and validated by IAEVG to consider the competences of the counselors at an international scale.

Reliability

The reliability of the questionnaire was established by Cronbach’s alpha reliability in 0.87, assuming a high reliability.

Analysis Techniques

Data were processed by the SPSS V-7 software for Windows XP, and they were analyzed according to the percentual reading technique carried out on the responses frequency noted in relation to the opinion expressed by the simple surveyed, and also by comparing the arithmetic means.

Results Presentation

For the discrepancies analysis and interpretation, according to the arithmetic means which can be gotten through the instrument related to the counselors' competences, the following scale was established:

Aritmetic means-discrepancy criteria correspondence

Values (Arithmetic Means)	Discrepancy Criteria
2.50-3.00	Very High
2.00-2.49	High
1.50-1.99	Moderated
1.00-1.49	Low
0.00-0.99	Very Low

In this case, a discrepancy between 2.50 and 3.00 indicates a Very High discrepancy, and supposes a remarkable difference between the competences suggested by the IAEVG, and the competences showed by the Venezuelan counselors. On the contrary, a 0.00-0.99 discrepancy means a Very Low discrepancy, and indicates that there are no significant differences between the IAEVG criteria and what was showed by the Venezuelan counselors.

IAEVG proposal about Guidance professionals' competences, which can be downloaded from the oficial site of the International Association at <http://www.iaevg.org>, classify the competences in Core and Specialized, and it is clarified that these were product of a world research, where countries from all the continents were surveyed, and the competences here suggested were validated, to be considered in Guidance professionals training internationally.

The International Competences for Guidance Professionals (2003) suggested are the followings:

Core Competences: Professionalism and ethic behavior; Promote knowledge and personal development; Appreciate the cultural differences; Integrate theory and practice in the professional practice; Design, implement and evaluate guidance programs and interventions; Knowing the own capacities and limitations; Appropriate communication with peers and users; Dispose updated information about education and job; Showing Social Sensitivity; Ability to work in interdisciplinary teams; and Knowing the evolved development of persons.

According to the same document, the Specialized Competences are sub divided into competences related to the Diagnosis, to the Educative Guidance, to the idea of Career Development, to the field of Counseling, to the management of Information, to the Consulting activity, to the Research development, to the Programs and Services management, to the Community Development, and to the Job Promotion in the corresponding cases. It is important to note that Guidance professionals would not have to fulfill all the Specialized Competences. It is intended that the Guidance professional knows deeply and with expertise, at least one group of the competences above mentioned.

Based on the results of the questionnaire, it is considered that the profile associated with the Core Competences of the Guidance professional in Venezuela is in line at a ninety-one percent as set by the International Association, since the levels of discrepancies between ten out of the Core Competencies are very low. Only a moderate discrepancy (1.50) in relation to the indicator Counselors' Values and Attitudes is observed.

In response to the Specialized Competences, in which differences were observed, i.e. a Very High or High discrepancy, among the standards suggested by the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance and Venezuelan counselors are the following:

1. Diagnosis competency: there was a Very High discrepancy (2.80) in the Evaluation indicator, assuming that this competence, in the Venezuelan Guidance professional is far from international standards.
2. Similarly, in the Career Development competency, was obtained a Very High discrepancy (2.8), assuming that the Venezuelan counselor does not address or lacks the skills needed to perform this activity, which refers to the development of career plans or projects of a profession or occupation.
3. Besides, in the Employment Promotion competency, in the Labor Advisory indicator, it was also noted a Very High discrepancy (2.80), indicating as well that the Venezuelan counselors does not deal or lacks of the necessary skills to place college graduates in their first job.
4. The last competence which showed a High discrepancy (2.39) between IAEVG profile and Venezuelan counselors profile is associated with Community Development competency. This is explained by the situation that for some time till now they are doing certain work-related requirements of the counselors at the community level, and this suggests that discrepancy levels are not higher.

Furthermore moderate, low or very low levels of discrepancy, i.e. in those specialized competences where there are no marked differences between the requirements of IAEVG and the Venezuelan counselors, the following competences may be included: Program and Services Management (1.50), the competence Coordination (1.30), Research (1.27), Educational Guidance (0.98) and Counseling and Consulting (0.99).

Regarding to the data analyzed in percentage form, the following results were obtained:

1. In terms of Core Competences, the Venezuelan counselors are highlighted in the competences related to communication skills with their advised people (100 percent), communication with colleagues (100 percent), and interest in updating (100 percent). The weaknesses in these competences relate to the ability to program design and evaluation (14.3 percent), and computer use (5.4 percent).

Regarding to the Specialized Competences, the following considerations can be made:

2. In the area of competences related to Evaluation, the only one that stands out positively is that one related to the appropriate use of evaluation instruments (41.1 percent). The weaknesses are related to the handling of Guidance tools, techniques and procedures (8.9 percent).
3. About Educational Guidance competency, 87.5 percent of respondents show interest in the advised people, trying to prevent the school failure (100 percent) and assist teachers with Guidance strategies (100 percent), and the main weakness is the students' motivation in international exchanges.
4. Regarding to Specialized Competences, related to Career Development, the highest percentage (76.8 percent) of respondents shows interest in legal aspects and implications for career development. The weaknesses are related to not attending career changes (100 percent), waivers and reduction of staff (100 percent), and not to establish specific needs of migrants (100 percent).
5. For the competence related to Counseling and Consulting, the highest percentage corresponds to personal problems solution (100 percent), use of individual and group counseling (100 percent), and advice for the individual life project (89.3%). The weaknesses correspond to non-consideration or execution of the distance guidance (91.1%).
6. For the competence related to Information Management, strengths lie in the occupational aspect (76.8 percent), and weaknesses lie compared to working with special populations (1.8 percent), legal knowledge (1.8 percent), education and entertainment (1.8 percent), Internet (3.6 percent).
7. Regarding to Consulting and Coordination competency, the strengths are related to creating a good professional image (100 percent), and the weakest points are related to the use of reference processes to other professionals more effectively (8.9 percent).
8. In the Specialized Competences related to Evaluation and Research, strengths are related to the research projects promotion (76.8 percent) and integrating the research results to practical activity (64.3 percent). The weak points correspond with the use of new discoveries to improve the orientation process (14.3 percent).
9. Regarding the Specialized Competences related with Service Program and Management, the strengths are related to behavioral assessment (75.0 percent), and conducting resource inventory (69.6 percent). The weaknesses are related to the evaluation of career development programs (0 percent), using results to improve programs (0 percent), management and supervision of staff (percent).
10. For the Specialized Competences related with Community Training, strengths relate to working with the community to find gaps between goals and capabilities (7.1 percent), and weaknesses relate to the relationships with key members of the community (0 per cent), working with community human resources (0 percent), working with international networks (0 percent).
11. Regarding the Specialized Competences related to the Labor Advisory, the strongest points are related to teaching strategies for special groups (5.4 percent). The weaknesses are related to the development of job opportunities (0 percent), stra-

tegies for job search (0 percent), consulting with policymakers (0 percent), offering suggestions for finding Jobs (0 percent), and Internet use for job search (0 percent).

Discussion of Results

Regarding the profile of competences between the standards suggested by the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance and the profile of Venezuelan counselors, some proposals can be made.

Even though we do not share some of the competences suggested by the Association, it has to be recognized that it means an attempt to unify criteria that would enhance and elevate the quality of the Guidance profession training, because in general, it considers all the minimum aspects that may be required to provide, from the professional point of view, a quality guidance.

As it can be seen in the results presentation, which reflects that in relation to core competences, there is a relative correspondence and similarity in the accomplishment of 91 percent of the competencies suggested by the Association and the profile of Venezuelan professionals, which indicates that in reference to competences for the professional practice, in the Venezuelan case, they fit favorably to international requirements, failing only to improve matters related to the Social Sensitivity (Attitudes and Values), which is understandable given that the social aspect had not been considered an important topic in the Guidance practitioner formation. At this point it is worth noting the need for attention to the cultural diversity, considering that in Venezuela there is an indigenous population that was forgotten, and even still, is neglected from the governmental attention plans. In this regard it is also worth emphasizing the need for the Guidance to address the issue of multiculturalism, in the sense, as Malik Liévano (2003) says, to foster “interaction, negotiation and enrichment of cultures” (p. 1).

Similarly, considering the presentation of the results, the greatest differences or discrepancies between the profile suggested by the International Association and Venezuelan Counselors refer to the use of the Evaluation, with the skills required for Career Development, with matters relating to the promotion of employment and with regard to Community Development.

Regarding to the Specific Competences, it was established that the competences that are present in a favorable light in the Venezuelan counselors are: the performance of the role of Educational Guidance, and one hundred percent of practitioners try to solve personal problems and life projects of their users.

It also works efficiently in relation to the activity of Consulting and Coordination.

Research activities are encouraged, and at a medium level (only 64.3 percent) the integration between theory and practice is searched.

Those competences to be strengthened relate to the qualitative techniques work, international exchange of students, working more in guidance based on the use of new communication technologies, processes of care reference to other professionals, the use of research contributions to a better relationship Guidance-Community, and the strengthening and development of Work Guidance.

In relation to Work Guidance, in our country, this has not actually been considered in their proper perspective, since the counselor role at the college level has been limited to the role of the student's income, and in some cases, to considering the continuation and permanence in the university; but it has not been yet considered the possibility that the role of Guidance deals with the location in the labor market of graduates, as Munoz Lopez (2002) overlooks it when he states that the Guidance also must address the "transition/insertion into the world of work" (p. 2).

Conclusions

1. With regard to the functions performed by counselors, it can be regarded that those related to Counseling and Consulting, Educational Guidance, Research, and Guidance Staff, are met efficiently.
2. With respect to Core Competencies suggested by the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 91 per cent of them are present in the profile of Guidance professionals in Venezuela.
3. The strengths of Guidance professionals in Venezuela, in relation to the Specialized Competences, are basically referred to the function performed in Educational Guidance, with their intervention to try to solve personal conflicts of users, and developing their life projects, working with the Consulting approach, and it is attempted in a 64.3 of the respondents, the integration between theory and practice in Guidance. It is also shown an incipient interest (7.1 percent of respondents) to get involved in Community Guidance work.
4. Those competences to be strengthened relate to the qualitative techniques work, international exchange of students, working more in guidance based on the use of new communication technologies, processes of care reference to other professionals, the use of research contributions to a better relationship Guidance-Community, and the strengthening and development of Work Guidance.

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