

THE ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. *Background, purpose.* School psychology has grown tremendously in recent years and has become a profession known all around the globe. Understanding the characteristics, training, roles and responsibilities of school psychologists is increasingly important as the profession continues to develop in many countries. The purpose of this study was to further explore findings on preparation of school psychologists and their roles and functions in 43 countries using a meta-analysis performed on articles compiled in *The Handbook of International School Psychology* (Jimerson, Oakland, & Farrell, 2007). *Material and methods.* A meta-analysis performed on articles compiled in *The Handbook of International School Psychology* (Jimerson, Oakland, & Farrell, 2007). *Results, conclusions.* Results of the study found significant differences regarding training and specific roles/responsibilities of school psychologists internationally. Findings have practical implications for current school psychologists and training programs preparing professionals to meet the needs of diverse students.

Key words: school psychologists, training of school psychologists, international differences.

The profession of school psychology is rapidly developing globally. Once seen as a Western discipline, school psychology is now prevalent in school systems around the world. In little more than 15 years, the number of working school psychologists has grown from approximately 87,000 in 54 countries (Oakland & Cunningham, 1992) to an estimated 500,00 internationally (Oakland & Jimerson, 2007). What has contributed to this incredible development? One of the many answers is the widely perceived importance of education. Education is seen in many countries as a necessary foundation for a strong, worthwhile future. According to Wotherspoon (2004, p. 12), “educational success often depends on the

ability to create within the educational process an inclusive space that nurtures, educates, and fosters well-being among children, youth, and other participants through an environment that is secure and safe.”

Who is held accountable for creating such an environment in a school? While the entire school staff is responsible, the school psychologist plays a particularly crucial role. Generally, the school psychologist’s roles and responsibilities include conducting psychoeducational evaluations; counseling students; creating and implementing direct interventions; providing prevention programs; consulting with teachers, staff and parents; conducting staff training and in-service programs; and fulfilling administrative responsibilities (Jimerson, Graydon, Curtis, & Staskal, 2007). Particular roles may be more prominent in some countries and less in others depending on the needs of the population of students being served. This difference in degree of importance causes one to look deeper into the diversity of the profession of school psychology. To fully understand the importance and diversity of the profession, one must look within and beyond one’s own borders. After examining our society, one recognizes it is extremely diverse in culture, religion, language, race, and many other aspects. Attempts to meet the needs of diverse groups of students pose important challenges, especially for school psychologists who are unfamiliar with different cultures and languages (Farrell, Jimerson, & Oakland, 2007). It seems imperative that school psychologists look to other cultures around the globe to learn ways to better serve these diverse populations.

The purpose of the present study was to examine the preparation of school psychologists, and their roles and functions, from a global perspective. Using *t*-tests and one-way analyses of variance, data regarding 43 countries were examined to determine what, if any, differences exist in the entry level training of school psychologists and whether differences exist in the richness of their roles and functions based on these entry levels. Additionally, the study examined whether countries that have accredited school psychology programs of study differ from those that do not in regard to the number of roles and functions served by professionals in said countries. Finally, the study examined whether the number of, and specificity of, roles and functions for school psychologists differed based on geographic location around the world.

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 43 countries referenced in *The Handbook of International School Psychology* (Jimerson, Oakland, & Farrell, 2007). *The Handbook of International School Psychology* (2007) is a rich resource that gives an overview of many aspects of school psychology from the perspective of 43 countries. Topics included in the text are context, origin and history, infrastructure, preparation of school psychologists, roles, functions and responsibilities, and current issues impacting school psychology.

Procedures

After examining *The Handbook of International School Psychology* (2007), the researchers categorized information provided for each country included in the sample. Information included the entry level of training for the profession, global geographical location, accreditation standing, specific roles and functions, richness of roles and functions, and the formal title of the professional performing these functions.

Next, the degree of emphasis on each role and function listed for a particular country was determined based on information included in *The Handbook of International School Psychology* (2007). Based on the description in the *Handbook*, the researchers rated the degree of emphasis for each role and function. More specifically, a role or function described as being of high importance received a rating of five; somewhat used, or not that important, received a three; and a role or function not in use or non-existent received a one. If the degree of emphasis was unclear, the researchers consulted with a third party to obtain consensus.

Results

The first question of the study addressed the entry level training for School Psychology across 43 countries (see Table 1). Based on the information provided in the *Handbook*, three levels of training were identified, i.e., Bachelor, Master, and Specialist, with the majority of countries requiring a Master's degree for entry level into the profession.

Table 1. *Entry-Level Training Requirement*

Entry Level	# of Countries	%
Bachelor	5	12.20%
Master	35	85.37%
Specialist	1	2.44%

Secondly, the study examined whether the richness of roles and functions of school psychologists varied based on the differences in entry-level training requirements. Given that Specialist-level training was required in only one country, it was eliminated from the statistical procedure. The means of roles/functions between the two remaining groups, Bachelor ($n = 5$) and Master ($n = 35$), were compared using a t -test for single mean. The result, shown in Table 2, indicated that countries requiring Bachelor entry-level training had a significantly higher average of roles/functions than those countries requiring Master-level training.

Table 2. *Comparison of Roles/Functions by Entry-Level Training*

Bachelor		Master			
<i>M</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>t</i>
6.4	5	4.6	1.727	35	-6.077*

* $p < .05$. (t -test for single mean using Bachelor mean as reference mean).

The study also examined whether countries that have accredited school psychology programs of study differ from those that do not in regard to the number of roles and functions of their respective school psychologists. As shown in Table 3, a comparison of the average number of roles/functions showed a slight difference between the two groups. Due to the small sample size (due to missing data in the *Handbook*), an independent-measure t -test was not performed.

Table 3. *Comparison of the Mean Numbers of Roles/Functions between Countries with and without Accreditation*

Accreditation	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Accredited	6.222	1.227	9
Non-accredited	5.000	1.528	6

The emphases placed on particular roles and functions of school psychologists were also examined among countries requiring Bachelor’s degree entry-level training ($n = 5$) versus Master’s degree entry-level training ($n = 35$). The means of the roles/functions emphasis between the two groups were compared using a t -test for single mean. The mean of the Bachelor’s entry level was used as the reference mean. As shown in Table 4, significant differences were found regarding some of the roles and functions.

Countries requiring Bachelor’s degree entry-level training rated consultation with a mean of 2.00 overall, while Master’s-degree countries rated this responsibility as high as 3.943 overall. Another significant difference between the roles and functions according to entry level would include testing/evaluation. Master’s-level had a higher overall mean ($M = 4.40$) than that of Bachelor’s-level ($M = 4.00$). Another significant result was the difference between the two levels in regard to counseling. Bachelor’s degree professionals had an overall mean of 3.40 while Master’s level had a rating of 2.74. Bachelor’s degree entry level also had a higher rating for prevention ($M = 3.60$), while Master’s degree rated prevention with a mean of 2.60. Finally, program development was rated significantly higher by Bachelor’s level ($M = 3.40$) than by Master’s level ($M = 2.029$).

Table 4. Mean Emphasis of Various Roles/Functions Comparing Bachelor-level Training vs. Master-level Training

Role/Function	Bachelor		Master	
	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
Intervention	3.600	3.343	1.835	-0.817
Consultation	2.000	3.943	1.627	6.774*
Program Development	3.400	2.029	1.665	-4.084*
Testing/Evaluation	4.000	4.400	1.335	1.747*
Supervision	1.800	1.743	1.518	-0.219
Counseling	3.400	2.743	1.932	-1.983*
Prevention	3.600	2.600	1.760	-3.313*
Response/Crisis Team	1.800	1.571	1.316	1.013
Research	1.800	1.914	1.680	0.347
Administration	1.200	1.257	0.936	0.356

* $p < .05$. (t -test for single mean using Bachelor mean as reference mean).

Finally, this study examined the impact of geographic location on the number of roles and functions of school psychologists as well as the emphases placed on them. The 43 countries included in the sample were categorized as one of the following: America/Australia, Europe, or Asia/Africa. The comparisons, performed using one-way analyses of variance, showed no significant differences based on geographic location for the number of roles/functions performed (see Table 5) or on the emphasis placed on each role/function (see Table 6).

Table 5. Comparison of the Mean Numbers of Roles/Functions by Geographic Location

Geographic Location	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
America/Australia	5.33	1.49	9
Europe	4.91	1.67	23
Asia/Africa	4.18	2.08	11

Note. The difference among the three means (5.33 vs. 4.91 vs. 4.18) was not significant, $F(2, 40) = 1.263, p > .05$.

Table 6. Mean Emphasis of Various Roles/Functions by Geographic Location

Role/Function	America/Australia		Europe		Asia/Africa		<i>F</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Intervention	3.8	1.6	3.7	1.7	2.5	1.9	2.05
Consultation	3.0	1.9	4.0	1.5	3.9	1.8	1.31
Program Development	2.3	1.9	2.2	1.6	1.7	1.5	0.43
Testing/Evaluation	4.7	0.9	4.2	1.4	4.6	1.2	0.53
Supervision	2.3	1.9	1.7	1.5	1.5	1.2	0.84
Counseling	3.0	1.9	2.8	1.9	2.8	2.0	0.04
Prevention	2.6	1.8	3.0	1.8	1.9	1.6	1.07
Response/Crisis Team	2.1	1.7	1.3	1.1	1.9	1.6	0.94
Research	2.8	2.0	1.7	1.5	1.7	1.5	1.62
Administration	1.1	0.3	1.4	1.1	1.0	0.0	0.66

Note. None of the *F*-statistics were significant, $p > .05$.

DISCUSSION

Upon examination of school psychology across 43 countries, it is evident that the profession is somewhat consistent around the globe. The results of this study indicated that the vast majority of school psychologists need at least a Master's degree to enter the field. Very few countries reported a Bachelor or Education Specialist degree as entry level into the profession (see Table 1). These results are similar to those found in the International School Psychology Survey reported by Jimerson, Graydon, Curtis, and Staskal (2007). It was noted that Italy was nearly split between Bachelor and Master/Specialist-level training. This may be due to the lack of preparation programs in Italy and many other countries. For example, countries such as Albania and Peru reported very few institutions that have specific training programs in the field of school psychology.

It was interesting that even though there were few countries with Bachelor entry level of training, these countries had a significantly higher average of roles/functions than those countries reporting Master entry level. This point seems counter-intuitive in that one would expect that a higher degree of preparation, such as a Master's degree, would be indicative of more duties and responsibilities. Contrary to the broad training of a generalized undergraduate program, however, it is likely that the longer program required for a Master's or Specialist's degree provides greater depth and more specialized training.

The perceived importance of a school psychologist's roles and functions according to entry-level training was also examined. One result of particular interest was the difference concerning the role of consultant. These results suggest that countries with a Master's degree entry level hold the role of consultant higher than those countries with entry level at the Bachelor's degree. A surprising result was the emphasis placed on counseling. One would assume that Master's degree school psychologists would place greater emphasis on the role of counseling than would Bachelor's degree personnel, given that counseling generally requires a higher level of training as well. However, the results were reversed in this study. This may reflect differences in training programs across countries, i.e., whether counseling is included in a program of study as well as the importance placed on the provision of mental health services.

The results of this study indicate that despite some variations in training and the roles and responsibilities of school psychologists, the services provided by these professionals internationally are remarkably similar. Indeed, most of the authors included in *The Handbook of International School Psychology* (Jimerson, Oakland, & Farrell, 2007) commented on the importance of school psychology services in the promotion of education and mental health of children (Farrell, Jimerson, & Oakland, 2007). Further research needs to be conducted to continue to explore the cross-cultural differences and similarities of school psychologists and the impact they make in the lives of children internationally. Such research will allow for greater success in meeting the needs of all children, including those from diverse racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

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Note. References marked by * indicate readings regarding 43 countries included in the study.

MOKYKLOS PSICHOLŪGŲ VAIDMUO IR FUNKCIJOS: VISUOTINĖ PERSPEKTYVA

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Santrauka. *Mokslinė problema, tikslas.* Pastaraisiais metais mokyklinė psichologija vystėsi labai sparčiai ir tapo visame pasaulyje plačiai žinoma profesija. Kadangi ši profesija daugelyje šalių vis dar vystosi, labai svarbu suprasti mokyklos psichologo darbo pobūdį, vaidmenis ir atsakomybę, pasirengimą šiai profesijai. Šio tyrimo tikslas – analizuoti duomenis, kaip ruošiami mokyklų psichologai, kokios jų funkcijos bei vaidmenys keturiasdešimt trijose šalyse. *Metodai.* Buvo atliekama publikacijų, pateiktų „Tarpatautinės mokyklinės psichologijos vadove“ (Jimerson, Oakland, & Farrell, 2007), meta analizė. *Rezultatai, išvados.* Tyrimo rezultatai atskleidė reikšmingus tarptautinius skirtumus, susijusius su mokyklų psichologų mokymu, jų specifiniais vaidmenimis / atsakomybe. Tyrimo rezultatai turi praktinę reikšmę šiuolaikiniams mokyklų psichologams bei mokymo programoms, kurių tikslas – paruošti profesionalus, gebančius tenkinti įvairių besimokančiųjų poreikius.

Raktiniai žodžiai: mokyklos psichologas, mokyklos psichologų rengimas, tarptautiniai skirtumai.

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