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A Meta-Synthesis of the American and the European Standards for the Accreditation of Counseling Training Programs

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APPROVAL PAGE

A META-SYNTHESIS OF THE AMERICAN AND THE EUROPEAN STANDARDS FOR
THE ACCREDITATION OF COUNSELING TRAINING PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how the European Standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to CACREP standards and to each other. The differences and commonalities between standards have been defined through a meta-synthesis of integrated findings from a large body of inter-related qualitative studies and reinterpretation of the synthesized data.

This qualitative meta-synthesis research was intended to contribute to the process of counseling globalization by exploring the unique cultural features and aspects of the European and the U.S. accrediting systems for counseling training programs. This research revealed 1) the commonly recognized areas that were accepted by both sides; 2) the areas that require further development in the European countries in order to successfully promote the counseling profession; 3) the areas that display unique characteristics based on cultural perceptions and historical backgrounds; and, 4) the areas that require CACREP to reconsider their standards regarding universal applicability. These specific qualities and needs of each analyzed professional counseling community were addressed with regards to the upcoming necessity to develop the unified global standards for counseling training and practice.

The findings of this research may underpin the formation of the prospective unified standards for the global counseling training. The qualitative comparison of this meta-synthesis can be used for the discussion of how the worldwide professional counseling community can be effectively consolidated in the future.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated

to my husband – Andrei Zapolsky

to my children – Anastasiya, Henry, and Sabina

to my mother – Sviatlana Sakalouskaya

I would have been unable to complete my doctoral degree and this research without your support

and sacrifices.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This qualitative meta-synthesis research was intended to analyze and compare the American and the European standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs. The necessity of such analysis was important due to globalization of both the worldwide community and the professional counseling society. The new status quo of today's world order requires the global community to begin thinking beyond the local scale, and to develop a new generation of mental health professionals able to serve as global experts. The process of globalization requires a thoughtful and balanced approach. In order to build an effective global counseling society, the specific features and needs of each local community should be both counted and considered while developing the unified global standards for counseling training and practice.

Background

Globalization has significantly increased the cross-national interactions among mental health professionals. There are many life circumstances when counselors and counseling psychologists should act beyond the borders and provide their services around the world (Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir, et al., 2009). Natural disasters and catastrophic events, violent conflicts and wars, situations of mass trauma and terrorist attacks can affect people globally and require qualified professional responses (Moodley, Gielen, & Wu, 2013). All of the aspects of the current world become increasingly integrated and the interaction between nations does as well. Marriages between people from different nations, global businesses and interactions, and other types of affairs require the worldwide community seeking counselors with global perspective and worldview. This new realm represents an opportunity to form a new generation of cross-national professionals.

Starting in the early 21st century, many leaders of universities throughout the world began to draw public attention to the need to reconsider their counseling and psychology programs (Rich, Gielen, & Takooshian, 2017; Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir, et al., 2009). The counseling educators realized the necessity to prepare mental health professionals who could work and be beneficial both locally and in worldwide settings (Hepper, Leong, & Chiao, 2008; Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir, et al., 2009). In order to initiate those transformations, the counseling educators should understand the historical processes of global counseling development and the cultural needs of each local community.

Problem Statement

This qualitative meta-synthesis was intended to contribute to the process of counseling globalization by exploring the unique cultural features and aspects of the European accrediting systems for counseling training programs. The findings of this research were intended to underpin the formation of the prospective unified standards for the global counseling training.

Related to the importance of this study to the global professional community, the International Association for Counseling (IAC), which is an International Non-Governmental Association (NGO) with United Nations consultative status (ECOSOC, WHO, UNESCO, and ILO), initiated a major global counseling project entitled the *World Mapping of the Counseling Profession* (IAC, 2020). The main purpose of that research was to gather data regarding the scale, standards, and contexts of counselling practice in each of the world's 196 countries. The project was divided into eight states to explore development of eight global regions: (1) Latin America; (2) Caribbean; (3) Africa; (4) Middle- East; (5) North America; (6) Oceania; (7) Asia; and (8) Europe. With the support of the ACA (American Counseling Association) and WHO (World Health Organization), the mapping of the Latin-America region was completed

and analyzed. Currently, the IAC is preparing to launch other segments of this project, including Europe. The intention of this study was that this qualitative meta-synthesis could contribute to the European segment of the *World Mapping of the Counseling Profession* project.

This meta-synthesis research will provide clear understanding of the current local specifics of counseling development in the U.S. and in different European countries. The qualitative comparison of this meta-synthesis can be used for the discussion of how the worldwide professional counseling community can be effectively consolidated in the future.

This qualitative research was intended to contribute to the development of and sustainability of a counseling globalization process by providing a comprehensive comparison analysis of the standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs in the chosen locations. The outcomes of this study can become a solid foundation for the further discussion of the effective ways of globalizing counseling, especially in the counseling training field.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how the European Standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to CACREP standards and to each other. The differences and commonalities between standards will be defined through a meta-synthesis of integrated findings from a large body of inter-related qualitative studies and reinterpretation of the synthesized data.

Qualitative methodology was selected to guide this research and to garner data to answer the inquired research questions. The qualitative framework allows the application of methodological tools for this study such as inductive style, comparative analysis, and the operation of the abstract and philosophical categories.

The meta-synthesis was chosen as an appropriate and effective design due to its well-structured platform to review, decode, and analyze all available information regarding standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs in the United States and Europe in a comprehensive way and to analyze that data coherently.

The criterion-based purposeful sampling selection of this meta-synthesis involved no individual participants and will refer only to site selection. The site selection is accreditation bodies and standards for counselling training programs in the United States and Europe. The following selected five site settings that met all of the established criteria will be included in the qualitative meta-synthesis: Ireland, Malta, United Kingdom, United States, and the EAC. The inclusion/exclusion process focused on the following criteria: a) recognition of counseling as a distinct area of practice; b) existence of counseling associations; c) counseling training programs are presented; d) training standards for accreditation of counseling education programs were developed.

This study has three goals:

1. To review all available information regarding standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs in the United States and Europe and to select the relevant data for the further analysis.

2. To conduct meta-synthesis of the gathered qualitative data in order to analyze, compare, and summarize information in response to the research questions.

3. Based on the evidence found in this meta-synthesis, to offer the agenda for the future research regarding the effective ways for globalization of counseling training programs.

Research Questions

This qualitative meta-synthesis research will be guided by the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do European Standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to each other?

RQ 2: How do European Standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to CACREP standards?

Assumptions to the Study

The fundamental assumption behind the selected methodology was the perception that a qualitative meta-synthesis would provide a solid platform to "focus on selecting qualitative studies on a specific body of knowledge and translating those findings into one interpretation offering a richer, more complete understanding of the phenomenon" (Erwin, Brotherson, & Summers, 2011, p. 188).

Thorne (2017) defined the foundational idea of qualitative meta-synthesis as an intention to evoke the interest and attention of qualitative scholars to a specific phenomenon by "entering them into a collective interpretive dialogue" that may generate new insights and knowledge (p. 3). The essential benefit of meta-synthesis design is in its practical application to deliberate the discussed phenomenon from different disciplinary angles, theories, and methodologies that should create a critical perspective, not limited by a single subjective point of view.

Limitations

There were several limitations of the chosen methodology: a) the absence of a methodological golden standard to conduct and report meta-synthesis in a standardized way (Mohammed, Moles, & Chen, 2016); b) difficulties in measuring the quality of each research

study included in the qualitative meta-synthesis (Erwin, Brotherson, & Summers, 2011; Thorne, Jensen, Kearney, et al., 2004); and c) any meta-synthesis study has a tendency to rapidly go out of date (Schick-Makaroff, MacDonald, Plummer, et al., 2016).

Delimitations

Methodological delimitations are restrictions that can be controlled by the researcher. This research was formed on the frame of qualitative meta-synthesis design by conducting a review, synthesis, and interpretation of qualitative data which discussed the issues of accreditation standards and systems of counseling training programs in the USA and Europe. The relevant published sources written in or translated into English language were considered for the meta-synthesis. The European segment of this research was narrowed to only the European countries where mental health counseling was recognized and distinguished as a distinct professional area and training standards for accreditation of counseling education programs were developed.

Definition of Terms

In this study, the following four general and universally acceptable explanations of terms were used as definitions:

1) American Standards refers to sets of accrediting standards for counseling training programs in the United States provided by CACREP.

2) European Standards refers to sets of accrediting standards for counseling training programs in Europe provided by the European national accrediting institutions.

3) Counseling Training Program refers to master's degree programs in counseling and its specialties that are offered by colleges and universities in the United States and Europe.

4) Accreditation System refers to all the parts involved in process of accreditation for counseling training programs such as an accreditation body, sets of national regulations regarding higher education standards, and established standards for quality control in higher education institutions.

Counseling Globalization refers to the process of integration between counseling professional communities around the world to exchange their knowledge, skills, and cultural perceptions regarding counseling practice to effectively serve clients around the globe (Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir, et al., 2009).

Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) is an accrediting body that is committed to accredit "master's and doctoral degree programs in counseling and its specialties that are offered by colleges and universities in the United States and throughout the world" (CACREP, 2019b, p. 23).

European Association for Counseling (EAC) is a professional organization that intends to unite counseling professionals in Europe and to promote sets of standards as a guidance for their professional development (Hohenshil, Amundson, & Niles, 2013; EAC, 2019; EAC, 2015).

Summary

Globalization of the worldwide community and the professional counseling society requires the development of unified global standards for training quality assurance and for competent counseling services throughout the world. To prepare for this important transition, the scholars and researchers around the globe should explore and define specific needs and requirements of each national community to consider those aspects and reflect them in the prospective unified global standards for counseling training programs.

This research was intended to contribute to this exploration process by analyzing and comparing the American and the European standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs. The findings of this study were intended to provide information about the U.S. and the European unique requirements for accreditation standards based on the specific needs of regional clients. The practical applicability of this study is that the explored differences and commonalities may be considered while developing the unified global accrediting standards for counseling training programs.

The qualitative meta-synthesis was selected as a means to answer the research questions. That approach was an appropriate and effective methodology due to its well-structural platform to review, decode, and analyze all available information regarding standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs in the United States and Europe in a comprehensive way and to analyze the data coherently.

Chapter Two of this dissertation provides a thorough literature review regarding the research subject that explains the historical predispositions for counseling globalization, current issues related to development of counseling professional identity in Europe, and how those challenges hinder the growth of higher education counseling training programs in the European countries.

Chapter Three explains the chosen methodology and fundamental assumptions behind the selected research design. The sample selection choice was discussed with explanations of selecting/eliminating strategies. The procedure of meta-synthesis data collection was also thoroughly addressed in the third chapter.

Chapter Four provides the results and summarizes the findings of this qualitative inquiry. Chapter Five describes the conclusions of the findings and how the research questions were

answered. Lastly, the insights gained, regarding the further practical implementation of the

findings, were shared.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review was conducted in several stages. The first stage was focused on the evaluation of previous research in the field of counseling globalization and on the findings. The issues and challenges of globalization and internationalization in mental health counseling have been considered attentively in this literature review.

The first step of the review was taken in recognition that the mental health counselors around the world acknowledged the necessity of and began looking for an effective and systematic approach to assist the development of the counseling community that would be competent and proficient to serve globally (Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir, et al., 2009; Moodley, Gielen, & Wu, 2013; Patel, Minas, Cohen, & Prince, 2014). In this initial stage, the literature review revealed the awareness of the professionals that the formation of such a worldwide professional community should be initiated in counseling training programs around the world. These findings redirected the literature review process to the second stage where the current state of the counseling training programs in the USA and Europe became a main focus of search and evaluation.

The available information about internationalization process of the counseling training programs was also reviewed. Additionally, the current status of American counseling programs abroad, specifically those located in Europe, was evaluated and analyzed. During this stage of the literature review process, the differences between European and American counseling training programs were noted. Because the development of any counseling training program is based on established standards of a professionally recognized and affiliated association, the literature review was extended to the core of the issue and to evaluating how European standards

for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to the American CACREP standards.

This type of search required processing multi-layered sources of information and as a result, needed new strategies for the deepening and broadening literature review. The process required conducting numerous searchers independent from each other. The meta-synthesis approach appeared to be the most effective way to continue the review of the literature in order to prepare the data for comprehensive comparative analysis. This specific manner of selection of the relevant literature became a transition to the third stage of the review. The final stage included the review of available information and literature regarding each segment of the research interest in a classified order by preparing the data for further analysis. All three of the described stages of the literature review process were thoroughly explained.

The Process of Counseling Globalization

The exploration of the current situation in the mental health professional community regarding the processes of integration and internationalization in counseling training and practice revealed the growing interest in the issues of globalization. At the same time, the significant amount of the studies conducted within the last 20 years were addressed to the issue of globalization in a general context, considering a mental health care system as a whole, without a distinct specialization in counseling. The issue of counseling globalization is particularly limited in the field of higher education counseling training. At the same time, there are several researchers who began raising questions to initiate the professional discussion.

Patel, Minas, Cohen, and Prince (2014) contributed significantly to the discussion of global mental health needs. Patel et al., the editors and co-authors of the book *Global Mental Health: Principles and Practice*, invited 54 professionals from 18 countries to share their

perceptions about the current principles and practices of global mental health. This collaborative work that includes twenty chapters of distinct articles is focused on two major needs of the worldwide mental health community: "the scientific foundations of global mental health" and "the practical methods for implementing and scaling up mental health programs" (p. xi). The authors provided a thorough overview of the history of global mental health and its current tendencies. The significant part of the discussion was dedicated to the analysis of culturally determined assumptions of mental health disorders and diagnosis.

Kirmayer and Swartz (2014) are the co-authors of a chapter in the book *Global Mental Health: Principles and Practice.* They provided insights regarding the role of culture in the globalization process. They discussed the challenges that psychiatrists encounter while applying psychiatric theory, research, and practice in diverse cultural and social contexts. The authors shared their observations and noted that most of the cross-cultural studies simplify the cultural aspect by framing the discussion within geographical borders. Kirmayer and Swartz (2014) stated that the concept of culture is much wider than a geographic location. They explained the most popular approaches to culture that have been used in the United States for the last decades and expressed their opinion regarding the relevance of those approaches to the current global mental health. The authors confronted the idea that "cultural differences are disappearing with globalization," and they discussed the complex processes that inevitably appear while "cultural hybridization" stimulates the creation of new forms of culture (p. 43).

Providing an overview of the current cross-cultural research in mental health, Kirmayer and Swartz (2014) emphasized that, in order to be effective, researchers should switch their focus from "replication of studies in samples that represent local diversity" to an active search of the effective and conceptual models that will help the global professionals explore how culture

influences psychopathology and healing (p. 57). Thus, contemporary professionals recognize the necessity to extend their services globally; however, they are not yet ready to provide such a service due to lack of knowledge about the international community and about culturally appropriate methodologies to utilize in that environment

Moodley, Gielen, and Wu (2013) offered many timely topics in their *Handbook of counseling and psychotherapy in an international context* for furthering the discussion within the professional counseling community. Moodley et al. and 73 other contributors from 35 countries shared their thoughts regarding the current global tendencies in psychology, counseling, and psychotherapy, and about different perceptions of health and illness across cultures. The book is divided into six parts where each part is dedicated to a particular region: Africa, North America, South America, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Each part presents the issues of counseling and psychotherapy in the specific culture by explaining the historical, cultural, and indigenous motives behind the discussed concerns.

The literature review revealed that the *International Handbook of Cross-Cultural Counseling: Cultural Assumptions and Practices Worldwide* edited by Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir, et al. (2009) and a second edition of the same book named *Essentials of Cross-Cultural Counseling* (Gerstein, 2011) are the only substantial works that critically, thoroughly, and deeply approached the issues of cross-cultural counseling from a worldwide perspective. These are the only books that focus on counseling as a distinct field without mixing that practice with other mental health specializations such as psychology, psychiatry, social services, etc. Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir, et al. and Gerstein (2011) provided a comprehensive analysis of the development of counseling as a profession in both global and domestic contexts. This wide-ranging historical perspective helps to clearly understand the original reasons behind the current

tendencies in the modern counseling and why the global cross-cultural counseling profession is dealing with the pressures of Westernization.

This substantial analytical work provides a solid and scientific platform for a conscious decision on the part of global professionals regarding the most appropriate and effective ways to move into the future as a worldwide counseling community. This collaborative work raises the awareness of "ethnocentric abuse" while inviting all professionals around the world to join the discussion about counseling globalization and possible ways to develop it. The *International Handbook* (Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir, et al., 2009) is a comprehensive study that provides a solid scientific foundation and can be beneficial as an evidence-based platform for this meta-synthesis study as well.

Internalizing the Counseling Training Programs

The process of globalization requires reconsideration of counseling theoretical approaches and methodologies when applied to the global community. While internalizing the counseling profession, the worldwide community should be involved in the discussion in order to create a methodology that could address the needs of all cultures around the globe. Scholars and researchers acknowledge that the new realm requires a new type of a mental health professional (Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir, et al., 2009; Moodley, Gielen, & Wu, 2013). In order to grow such specialists, the reformation of counseling training programs is required.

The literature review revealed that the psychiatric and psychology professional communities have already initiated the discussion regarding the issues of globalization in higher education training programs related to the fields. At the same time, only a few studies addressed the issues of globalization in counseling education specifically. For example, Rich, Gielen, and Takooshian (2017) opened the discussion about the necessity to internationalize the psychology

teaching approaches. A panel of 73 experts around the world contributed to the analysis of the current state of psychology education throughout the world and its effectiveness in preparing globally oriented professionals. Also, Rich, Gielen, and Takooshian (2017) considered different ways of possibly developing the future global programs.

Leong, Leach, Marsella, and Pickren (2012) also acknowledged the necessity of internalizing the psychology curriculum in the United States by providing evidence of biases, limitations, and inaccuracies of the Western approach in teaching, research, and clinical practices. The authors of this value provided a many faceted analyses of the current U.S. psychology curriculums and test their applicability and appropriateness while training global professionals. Their analysis concentrates on the U.S. mental health programs regarding its applicability to the global training programs. Their substantial work provides the solid material for further discussion of the topic. The proposed research could contribute to their work by extending the area of analysis to the counseling field.

Ægisdóttir and Gerstein (2010) discussed the challenges that apply the traditional U.S.-based multicultural competency set in international counseling work. They stated that domestic counseling training programs consider a wide spectrum of issues except counseling issues for trainees/professionals working abroad. Ægisdóttir and Gerstein (2010) highlighted that one of the significant obstacles hindering the development towards counseling globalization is the difficulty gaining accessibility to an international sample and to persuading individuals to participate in "a non-native research" (Ægisdóttir & Gerstein, 2010, p.182). Another problem that they mentioned as a significant one in the counseling globalization process is the unwillingness of the domestic professional community to discuss the topic of counseling internationalization openly. They described their experience of being rejected while applying for

ACA conferences or submitting articles for publications on international topics. The explanation provided behind those rejections was the rationale of being irrelevant to practice in the United States (Ægisdóttir & Gerstein, 2010). At the same time, Ægisdóttir and Gerstein (2010) emphasized that more and more scholars call for the necessity of acquiring competencies in international work. For this purpose, they believed training opportunities should be created, and new methodologies must be applied. They also emphasized that such methodological issues as construct, method, and item equivalence should be carefully considered while approaching validity and applicability of U.S.-based ideas to international counseling training programs. Ægisdóttir and Gerstein stated that future research is needed to explore the validity and applicability of U.S.-based multicultural counseling competencies in the settings of international counseling work. This proposed qualitative meta-synthesis research may contribute to those counseling professionals' request.

Dissertations defended within the last decade regarding the issues of counseling internationalization have been reviewed for this review. None of the dissertations were on the topic of this study; however, there is a study in related areas of international counseling education that demonstrates the necessity of further explorations. In his dissertation, Ulus (2017) explored challenges and experiences of doctoral level Turkish counseling students who are enrolled in counseling programs in the United States and Turkish counselor educators who previously trained in the U.S. and are currently practicing in Turkey. Ulus found that the international students and professionals experienced difficulty while applying U.S.-based methodologies and obtained knowledge within their country of origin. The researcher suggested checking those findings with a variety of different ethnic groups.

Freeman's (2011) dissertation also addressed the issues of globalization in counseling, with a specific focus on how Japanese counselors adapt the training they received in counseling and psychology graduate programs in the United States into their counseling practices in Japan. Freeman (2011) provided evidence from studies by Auxier, Forster, and Kuruleca (2005) and Chang, Tong, Shi, and Zeng (2005) that the development of a global international counseling profession is under the strong influence of Western models. Freeman cited a study by McGuiness, Alred, Cohen, Hunt, and Robson (2001), which stated there are some situations when the U.S.-based models can be effectively applied to the practice in other nations. At the same time, there are many cases when the models originated in the United States have limited applications due to inconsistencies with cultural norms, values, and practices (Freeman, 2011). Freeman studied the applicability of knowledge and practices obtained during counseling training programs in the United States when transported to different contexts and cultures. That researcher addressed three of the four constructs (Personal Identity/Cultural Identity Development, Japanese Cultural Elements/Changing Japanese Society, and Role of Counseling/Modifications Made) based on the main, forth, construct – Globalization. The findings of that study revealed that the applicability of the U.S.-based methodologies is limited in different cultural settings, and the researcher suggested further exploration regarding effective strategies for counseling internationalization.

Smith (2017) conducted a Delphi study for his dissertation project to explore the transnational experience of faculty in counselor education. That dissertation highlighted the studies of Mills (2014), Staeuble (2016), van de Vijver (2013) numerous differences in cross-national counseling practices and revealed potential negative impacts of spreading U.S. and European mental health practices to other countries. Smith's literature review displayed the

limitation of professional research regarding the topic transnational counseling and the lack of guidance for cross-national professional work within counselor education.

Graham's (2016) qualitative multiple case study examined three universities based on the Western, private, nonprofit model that were established during the post-Cold War transition period: the American University of Central Asia (Kyrgyz Republic), South East European University (Macedonia), and the American University in Bulgaria. That study explored the interaction of global, national, and local influences at the level of these institutions. Graham's dissertation provides insights regarding the issue of how to find a balance between global and local that results in an effective global higher education.

Obstacles for Globalization

Despite the fact that globalization is a natural and inevitable process dictated by the reality of global progress and integration, there are also factors that hinder the progression of counseling internationalization. The histories of oppression and creation of homogenous systems of knowledge force many nations to protect their identities and uniqueness by avoiding any interactions that may be considered as colonization or domination (Andreotti, 2007; Danziger, 2006; Mills, 2014; Santos, 2014; Staeuble, 2006). Gerstein, Heppner, Stockton et al. (2009) explained that the worldwide community often considers counseling globalization as hegemony of U.S. methodology and Western civilization in general. Smith (2017) assumed the nations that experienced different types of oppression in their past have a tendency to resist any outside influences because of their fear that hegemonic power can be transformed to a less visible yet still dangerous form.

Norsworthy, Heppner, Ægisdóttir et al. (2009) note that problems of counseling globalization can be two-sided. On the one hand, the U.S. professionals, as carriers of the

dominant methodology, hinder the process of internationalization by demonstrating professional superiority relative to other countries and by having a tendency to believe one's own behaviors are typical of others. On the other hand, non-U.S. professionals can be resistant to accept any of the counseling U.S. approaches (even culturally appropriate) due to fear and suspicion of colonization (Norsworthy, Heppner, Ægisdóttir, et al., 2009).

A focus of this literature review was to explore current tendencies in the globalization process of higher education in general and counseling education in particular. That aspect seems to be important for this study due to the necessity to understand the role of American higher education on the current global stage, and its goals and mission. The critics can confront the necessity of this study by questioning the topic relevance to the needs of the American counselor education field. In order to reasonably justify the importance of this research, exploring the reasons for the American scholastic presence abroad, particularly in Europe, is important.

Youssef (2014) provided a thorough and comprehensive analysis of cross-border higher education by reviewing (1) the types and causes of transnational education; (2) the description of cross-border education between the developed and the developing countries; (3) the benefits of transnational education; and, (4) the challenges of quality assessment of cross-cultural education. Youssef (2014) discussed Knight's thinking regarding cross-border education as "the movement of people, programs, providers, […] across national boundaries" (Knight, 2006, p. 101). The high demand for higher education and globalization processes provides favorable conditions for the development of cross-border education (Van Vught, 2004).

Youssef (2014) stated that the commercial interest is one of the contributors to the field of transnational education as well because cross-border education offers access to a wide range of students. There are two types of students who are highly interested in foreign programs: (1)

students from developing countries who have limited access to certain types of programs in their homelands but who can enroll in foreign programs offered by cross-border provider, and (2) "elite students", a specific population of learners who are children of the political and economic elites in developing countries (Youssef, 2014, p. 102). Youssef (2014) emphasized that in most cases, cross-border education providers experience extreme pressure due to the demand of heightening the quality of the academic programs offered abroad in order to avoid a risk jeopardizing the academic reputation of their institutions.

Receiving/importing countries usually have their own domestic criteria for the assessment of the quality of educational programs that may not correspond to the foreign programs (UNESCO APQN, 2006). That situation may cause a lack of clarity regarding the quality of cross-border programs. The domestic accreditations usually do not cover programs abroad, and the quality assurance mechanisms of the host countries lack the eligibility to control the efficiency of the foreign programs as well (Youssef, 2014).

Youssef (2014) also provided statistics that indicated the number of students studying outside of their home countries increased more than five times over the past thirty years and reached 4.3 million students in 2011. However, the number of international students who choose the United States as a country for their higher education experience dropped significantly in 2011 as compared to 2000 by redirecting the stream to Austria, Korea, New Zealand, Spain, the United Kingdom, and/or the Russian Federation (OECD, 2013).

Qiang (2003) contributed to the discussion of internationalization of higher education by offering a conceptual and organizational framework that included the explanation of rationales for internationalization and provided the description of approaches to internationalization of higher education. Qiang (2003) emphasized that higher education cannot be considered in a

solely national context anymore. The author listed three major reasons for the necessity of the internationalization of higher education: "interest in international security; maintenance of economic competitiveness; and fostering of human understanding across nations" (Qiang, 2003, p. 251). Qiang (2003) explained the rationales for internationalization by discussing political, economic, academic, cultural, and social reasoning behind such a necessity. The author demonstrated that the internationalization of higher education can bring numerous benefits to a country as a whole, by enhancing the country's position and role as nation in the world scene, as well as at institutional and personal levels.

Providing suggestions and strategies for effective internationalization, Qiang (2003) classified those strategies utilizing different levels of organizational structure: governance; operations; support services; academic program; research and scholarly collaboration; extra-curricular activities; and, external relations and services (domestic and offshore). The category of Academic Program appears to be the most relevant to the subject of the current research so of Qiang's findings in this regard appear to be especially relevant. While internalizing the higher education programs, Qiang (2003) suggested paying especial attention to the following aspects: "internationalized curricula, area or thematic studies, international students, teaching/learning process, cross-cultural training, faculty/staff mobility program, and link between academic programs and research, training and development assistance" (p. 258).

Meta-Synthesis Literature Review

In order to effectively and comprehensively analyze and compare the American and the European standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs, the literature review based on meta-synthesis protocol will be conducted because the evaluated literature requires thematic classification and analysis. Sandelowski and Barroso (2007*)* and Major and Savin-

Baden (2010) developed comprehensive guidance for the effective literature review while conducting a meta-synthesis research. Methodological aspects of the meta-synthesis design will be thoroughly explained in the Methodology chapter. Because meta-synthesis is "an intentional approach to synthesizing and interpreting data across qualitative studies" (Erwin, Brotherson, & Summers, 2011, p. 191), the process of reviewing literature involves a discrete procedure that assists the researcher to systemize the reviewed information.

One of the initial components for the meta-synthesis process is the determination of the scope of included studies and inclusion criteria (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007; Major & Savin-Baden, 2010). As a result, the literature review should be conducted with consideration of those components and the goals of the study. Erwin, Brotherson, and Summers (2011) suggested that criteria for inclusion and exclusion in a systematic literature review should be flexible in order to enable the researcher to stay sensitive for the unexpected findings and to be able to extend the scope of the search if needed.

In order to approach the qualitative data systematically and to enable the researcher to analyze the material comprehensively based on the meta-synthesis guidance, the literature review is presented in the following classification table:

Source #	1
Country	United Kingdom and Ireland
The source of material	peer reviewed journal
Year of publication	2011
Author(s)	McCarthy, J.
Name of the work	Counselor Preparation in England and Ireland: A Look at Six Programs

Summary and Findings	McCarthy (2011) examined counselor preparation at six selected institutions of higher education in England and Ireland from a comparative standpoint to that in the United States. This article provided a brief overview of the accreditation systems in England and Ireland however, some of the information seems to be outdated or incomplete. McCarthy stated that there are two main accreditation institutions in that region: the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and the United Kingdom and European Association for Psychotherapeutic Counselling (UKEAPC). At the same time, there are two Irish national accreditation associations that set standards for Ireland's counselors and counselor educators: Irish Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy (IACP) and National Association for Professional Counseling and Psychotherapy (NAPCP). The brief exploration of this region shows that both British and Irish associations do not differentiate counseling as a distinct professional area. The British Association for Counselling was formed in 1977; however, in September 2000, the Associating changed its name to the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy in acknowledgement and recognition that the Association represents not just counselling but psychotherapy as well.
The reason of inclusion/exclusion to analysis	Included. The study provides the information that can be used for comparative analysis.

Source #	2
Country	USA, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Italy, Romania, United Kingdom
The source of material	Authored Book supported and co-published by the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC)
Year of publication	2012
Author(s)	Schweiger, W. K., Henderson, D., McCaskill, K., Clawson, T. W., & Collins, D. R.
Name of the work	Counselor preparation: Programs, faculty, trends (13th ed.).
Summary and Findings	Schweiger et al. (2012) prepared the series of editions regarding counseling development in the U. S. In the 13th edition, the authors included a new chapter *Programs of Counselor Training Outside the United States* by recognizing that issues of counseling globalization are coming to the stage and need to be discussed. In that last edition, the authors discussed the counseling profession in Central and South America by analyzing the state of counseling education programs and their accreditation. The authors created a comparison table by using the following categories: country, state of training, number of academic programs, specialty areas, credentialing (including licensure issues), counselor preparation needs. The counselor training professionals in twenty-six countries of Central and South America were contacted and interviewed with the following four questions:

1. As best as you can, please describe the state of counselor training in your country (number of academic programs, types of specialty areas, etc.);

2. Briefly discuss some of the current issues related to credentialing of professional counselors;

3. What are some issues related to counselor licensure?

4. What regional trends and needs are there in your region as they pertain to counselor preparation? (p. 81)

Another benefit of Schweiger's et al.'s work is that the 13th edition includes data from counseling educational programs outside the United States, including the following eight European programs:

Bulgaria: Sofia University

Germany: Fachhochschule Frankfurt am Main - University of Applied Sciences

Greece: Institute of Counselling and Psychological Studies (ICPS)

Greece: University of Indianapolis Athens Campus

Greece: The American College of Greece, DEREE

Italy: Libera Università del Counseling - Free University of Counseling

Romania: University of Bucharest

United Kingdom: Academy of Play & Child Psychotherapy

The following information was addressed:

- The contact information of an academic dean and administration;

- Program uniqueness;

	- Faculty research; - Degree programs; - Faculty names and contact information; - Enrollment and admission requirements; - Graduation requirements. At the same time, the provided information can be outdated at this moment. As a plan for the 14th edition, Schweiger et al. (2012) announced the intention to extend the international chapter with a wider range of countries.
The reason of inclusion/exclusion to analysis	Included. This valuable longitudinal national study provides a deep analysis of over 100 individual graduate institutions of higher education across the United States that can be used for the comparative analysis. This work presents a sufficient depth of the analyzed material related to the current research and the potential for the further research in the future. At the same time, when the authors were contacted with regards to their planned 14th edition findings, the current researcher was notified that there are no plans for the 14th edition at this time. This information demonstrates the necessity to continue working on the study that was already initiated by other professionals and provoked the interest of other researchers. Also, the comparison table and the developed four questions used in this study appeared to be an effective and valid strategy for a comparative analysis that can be applied for the current research as well.

Source #	3
Country	Switzerland
The source of material	peer reviewed journal
Year of publication	2012
Author(s)	Thomas, R., & Henning, S.
Name of the work	Counseling in Switzerland: Past, present, and future
Summary and Findings	Thomas and Henning's (2012) study is relevant to this research. It provides the overview of counseling in Switzerland and the comparison analysis with counseling in the United States. The authors evaluated the role of professional associations and programs. Their discussion demonstrated the current evolutionary process of the Swiss counseling development.
The reason of inclusion/exclusion to analysis	Included. This article appears to be beneficial because it provides the information that can be used for comparative analysis and explains the current direction in development of the Swiss counseling standards.

Source #	4
Country	United Kingdom
The source of material	British Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy (BACP) website
Year of publication	2019

Author(s)	BACP
Name of the work	Course accreditation
Summary and Findings	The website of the BACP (BACP, 2019) provides information regarding the procedure and requirements for course accreditation in UK. The eligibility guide for accreditation of training courses is also available for analysis.
The reason of inclusion/exclusion to analysis	Included. This source is valuable due to its primary information regarding the accredited standards and regulations for counseling training programs in UK.

Source #	5
Country	Irish
The source of material	Irish Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy (IACP) website
Year of publication	2019
Author(s)	IACP
Name of the work	Course accreditation
Summary and Findings	The website of the IACP (IACP, 2019) provided information and outlined the list of current IACP accredited courses, the criteria for course accreditation, the accreditation and re-accreditation process for courses.

The reason of inclusion/exclusion to analysis	Included. This source is valuable due to its primary information regarding the accredited standards and regulations for counseling training programs in Ireland.

Source #	6
Country	United Kingdom and Irish
The source of material	Authored Book published by Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group
Year of publication	2014
Author(s)	McQuaid, C.
Name of the work	What you really need to know about counselling and psychotherapy training: An essential guide
Summary and Findings	McQuaid (2014) provided a comprehensive overview of the counseling and psychological educational system in UK and Ireland.
The reason of inclusion/exclusion to analysis	Excluded. The comparison analysis between UK and Irish counseling training programs and accreditation standards is focused more on professional accreditation rather than on training program accreditation.

Source #	7
Country	Denmark
The source of material	Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group

Year of publication	2013
Author(s)	Hansen, N. H., & Dixon, A. L.
Name of the work	Counseling and psychotherapy in Denmark: Counseling the "happiest people on Earth".
Summary and Findings	This chapter of the book provided an overview of the Danish counseling/psychology profession. The detailed overview of counselor/psychology education programs, the system of accreditation, licensure and certification processes is offered.
The reason of inclusion/exclusion to analysis	Included. This source provides a substantial information regarding the current state of Denmark counseling and counselor education.

Source #	8
Country	European Union
The source of material	European Association for Counseling
Year of publication	2015
Author(s)	European Association for Counseling
Name of the work	Training standards, accreditation, and ethical charter booklet
Summary and Findings	This booklet is a set of guidelines and standards for the European counselors which are intended "to establish counseling as a European profession" (EAC, 2015, p. 3) and to introduce qualification requirements for European helping professionals.

	The booklet provides the Charter for Ethical Practice, training standards criteria, and information about procedures for the award of the European Certificate of Counselor. The EAC began establishing the European professional community by distinguishing counseling as a distinct area of helping services. The criteria to award the European Certificate of Counselor were developed. At the same time, the booklet announced that the EAC is "currently developing criteria for the accreditation of training programs" (p. 5). Thus, at this moment, the accreditation system and criteria were not developed and cannot be included in the current study for comparison.
The reason of inclusion/exclusion to analysis	Excluded due to the fact that the accreditation system and criteria are currently not presented and cannot be included in the current study for comparison.

Source #	9
Country	France
The source of material	Peer reviewed journal
Year of publication	2007
Author(s)	Bernaud, J., Cohen, S. V., and Guichard, J.
Name of the work	Counseling Psychology in France: A Paradoxical Situation

Summary and Findings	The authors explained the paradoxical situation in France when the society is in great need of counseling professionals, but historical circumstances and linguistic confusions disallowed counseling to be developed as a distinct profession and to form a discrete professional community. There are neither counseling associations nor counseling education programs in France.
The reason of inclusion/exclusion to analysis	Included. This source provides a meaningful information that explains the underlined reasons of why counseling, as a distinct professional area, was not developed in France.

Source #	10
Country	France
The source of material	Authored book published by Routledge Taylor & Francis Group
Year of publication	2009
Author(s)	Cohen-Scali, V., Guichard, J., and Gaudron, J.-P.
Name of the work	Career counseling in France: A growing practice among diverse professional groups
Summary and Findings	In this work, the authors discussed the previous research and opinion of Bernaud, Cohen, and Guichard (2007). Cohen-Scali, Guichard, and Gaudron (2009) concurred with the previously expressed idea that France has a unique situation that provides no support for the development of counseling as a distinct professional area. At the same time, the authors

	provided a brief overview of the recent rise of professionals related to school and career counseling and explained the placement of this professional niche along other helping professions.
The reason of inclusion/exclusion to analysis	Included. This source provides meaningful information that explains the underlined reasons of why counseling, as a distinct professional area, was not developed in France.

Source #	11
Country	Italy
The source of material	Dissertation
Year of publication	2018
Author(s)	Mariotti, D.
Name of the work	Towards a new profession: Counselor professional identity in Italy: A Delphi study
Summary and Findings	This dissertation provided the current information regarding the status of counseling, as a profession, and explained the historical dynamics that influence the professional counseling identity in Italy. The value of this research is in its wide scale consideration of the discussed issue: the history of the counseling professional identity, current status, and the future prognoses have been addressed. Also, this is the only research written in English language regarding the Italian counseling professional development.

The reason of inclusion/exclusion to analysis	It was included due to its relevance to the current study.

Overview of the American Counseling Programs in Europe

The overview of American counseling programs presented in Europe revealed that only 7 of 39 American universities/colleges offer psychology related programs: American University of Bulgaria (Bulgaria), American University in Paris (France), American College of Thessaloniki (Greece), the American University of Greece (Greece), the American International University in London (United Kingdom), Franklin University (Switzerland), and Webster University (Switzerland, Austria, and Netherlands).

Of those 7 colleges, only 2 schools offer psychology programs with emphasis in counseling: the American College of Greece and Webster University (Switzerland, Austria, and Netherlands). Only one school – Webster University – offers a specifically focused program in counseling in 3 of 4 its European branches: Geneva, Vienna, and Leiden.

The American University for Leaders in London (United Kingdom) has BA and MA programs in psychology; however, that university was excluded from the list of resources, since it is unaccredited. The American College Dublin was established in 1994 by Lynn University, of Boca Raton (Florida) and along other programs, the institution offered psychology programs for U.S., domestic, and international students. However, in 2010, the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) withdrawn the accreditation for the course of psychology due to "serious concerns about its overall quality" and the program was closed (Mooney, 2010). That factor became an

additional trigger for the current exploration regarding the conceptual differences between the American and the European quality standards for training programs.

Literature Review for the Further Comparative Analysis

While reviewing the literature, the information needed for the further comparative analysis (which can be considered as a raw data of this meta-synthesis) was systemized in the classified table that can be found in Appendix A. That table was developed based on the 2016 structure of the CACREP standards document. The collected data is regarding the standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs in different European countries and the United States. The analysis of the collected data will be provided in Chapter Four. This segment of the literature review will explain the review procedure and the type of the reviewed sources.

Methodological specifics of the qualitative meta-synthesis provide a practical foundation for an effective data collection process during the literature review procedure (Paterson, Thorne, Canam, & Jillings, 2001). In other words, the literature review and the data collection process are inherently integrated with each other in meta-synthesis. In order to prepare the solid platform for the comparison, this meta-synthesis should be equipped with a sufficient amount of information. This third stage of the literature review includes the review of the available information and literature regarding accreditation standards in the United States and Europe.

CACREP

The initial step of this qualitative meta-synthesis was the literature review regarding the status of the CACREP accreditation body and its role in the development of the counseling profession in the United States and around the world. To display reasoning of why precisely the CACREP standards have been chosen for this qualitative meta-synthesis to compare it with the European standards appears to be relevant in order to initiate this research.

In this regard, the brief analytical self-reflection of King (2017), where the author explained the difference between CACREP (the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs) and MPCAC (the Master's in Psychology and Counseling Accreditation Council), appears to be relevant and important. King (2017) briefly explained the nature and the history of both accreditation institutions and provided a statistical evidence of the CACREP advantages based on the conducted content analysis of the 2016 CACREP Standards and the 2016 MPCAC Accreditation Standards. Also, King (2017) indicated that the CACREP is more respected and recognized in the professional community by providing numerous examples when such organizations as the American Counseling Association (ACA), the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC), the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE), the American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA), and the American Association of State Counseling Boards (AASCB) recognized the privilege of CACREP over MPCAC due to its credibility. King (2017) emphasizes that CACREP has "an established history as the "flagship" accrediting body indicating to professional and regulatory authorities, as well as the public, quality education, training, and preparation of graduates for state licensure or national certification in the practice of master's level counseling services" (p. 1).

The 2018 CACREP Annual Report was also reviewed to acknowledge the current achievements of the most influential accrediting institution in the counseling profession. The report stated that CACREP accredits "master's and doctoral degree programs in counseling and its specialties that are offered by colleges and universities in the United States and throughout the world" (CACREP, 2018, p. 23). As an accrediting body, CACREP is dedicated to developing and controlling standards and procedures for high quality training in the counseling profession. The 2018 Vital Statistics Survey (CACREP, 2018) stated there were CACREP accredited

counseling programs at 405 institutions at the end of 2018 representing a total of 871 CACREP

programs. A thorough literature review was conducted regarding the CACREP standards where

the most significant themes were highlighted for the further comparison and discussion (See

Appendix A).

Stanard (2013) discussed the role of CACREP on the global arena. Stanard explained

that active participation in the international platform, where CACREP consults the global

professional community regarding the necessity of accreditation, generated interest on the part of

professionals from other countries in accreditation. Despite the fact that counseling training

programs outside of the United States have always been eligible to apply for CACREP

accreditation, there are only two programs in other nations that have been accredited by

CACREP: Trinity Western University in Canada and Universidad Ibero Americana, Ciudad de

Mexico (Stanard, 2013). The issue is that the CACREP standards are developed based on the

culture and the educational system in the United States. Stanard stated that the American

framework for the standards disallows applying them in non-U.S. programs due to cultural

inappropriateness (Stanard, 2013). The recognition of this problem and constant requests from

non-U.S.- based counseling programs motivated the CACREP Board Directors to keep searching

for a solution. The result of that exploration was the development of IRCEP (the International

Registry for Counsellor Education Programs) that approached accreditation standards and

processes for international community in a culturally appropriate manner. Thus, IRCEP is

becoming the CACREP's global representative that, possibly, can develop a powerful voice in

the nearest future.

This qualitative meta-synthesis can contribute to that development process and to the

global growth of counseling as a profession by revealing more information regarding differences

in the current European accreditation systems. The data garnered from this study could help CACREP, IRCEP, and the global professional community to more clearly and effectively understand the unique features and needs of each European culture and to consider those distinctive cultural aspects in further development of the international accrediting standards for counseling training programs around the world.

European Accreditation Systems

Several challenges were encountered while conducting the European segment of the literature review. The reviewing process was intended to explore the status of counseling as a profession and counseling training accreditation systems in each European country. However, the conducted search was challenged by limited informational resources. The U.S.-based academic research databases revealed an extreme shortage of scholastic and scientific resources of European origin. As Gerstein, Hepner, Stockton et al. (2009) noted, "U.S. libraries typically do not subscribe to foreign counseling and psychology journals" (p. 56). The language barriers and the diverse terminologies from country to country complicated the search from the European databases as well. At the same time, the process of elimination was not dominantly based on the absence of the English language resources. For example, the Italian segment of this study was limited by the nonexistence of literature written in English yet still was included in the study's consideration and discussion due to its professional voice presence. The major factor for elimination decisions was that no counseling was developed in a reviewed country and, as a result, there is no an accrediting institution.

Due to the limitation of academic-base resources, the information provided on the websites of the European national professional associations became the main source of data for this segment of the literature review. The process of data collection will be explained thoroughly

in Chapter Three. This chapter will provide the information regarding the previously completed studies in the research field.

While reviewing the available information concerning counseling development as a profession in European countries, an observation was made that many countries lack recognition of counseling as a distinct area of practice. This is the case in France, Germany, Denmark, France, Greece, Netherlands, and Romania. Moreover, even if counseling is distinguished as a separate profession, it is still considering as an integral part of psychotherapy (as in the UK, Ireland, Switzerland, and Malta), without a distinct separation of counseling from other mental health providers in contrast to the recognition provided in United States. This factor revealed the terminology confusion of utilizing the words "counseling" and "psychotherapy" in the United States and different European countries. For many years now, no universal definition of "professional counseling" has been accepted (Stockton, Garbelman, Kaladow, & Terry, 2008). The way a counselor is defined will vary depending on culture. Most of the European languages have already reserved/defined the term "counseling" to express the meaning "to give advice", which usually suggests an exchange between an expert and a layman. However, that description is very far from the idea of therapy (Gerstein, Heppner, Stockton et al., 2009; Moodley, Gielen, & Wu, 2013; Stockton, Garbelman, Kaladow, & Terry, 2008).

To address the issue of the terminology confusion appears to be important in order to understand the nature of differences in counseling development between the U.S. and Europe. While the American Counseling Association was established to protect and develop its professional identity, the British Association for Counseling, founded in 1977, changed its name in September 2000 to the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. They took that step as "a formal acknowledgement that counselors and psychotherapists wished to belong to a

united profession because they had common interests" (Bimrose & Hughes, 2013, p. 186). At

the same time, in the U.S., there are five types of Mental Health professionals who can provide

psychotherapy and as a result, to call themselves psychotherapists. Those professionals are

psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors, social workers, and advanced psychiatric nurses

(Wheeler, 2014). In accordance with the above statement of the British Association for

Counseling and Psychotherapy, the terms "counseling" and "psychotherapy" were originally

distinguished from each other and, later, the recognition of "common interests" motivated the

Association to merge the professions.

As a result of such differences in terminology, the American Counseling Association and

CACREP serve the professional needs of precisely counselors while, for example, the BACP

(the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy) and the IACP (the Irish Association

for Counselling and Psychotherapy) identify counseling and psychotherapy as two distinct

mental health areas. These observations will be considered in this meta-synthesis, while the

comparison discussion of differences in accrediting training systems of the U.S. and Europe is

conducted.

Another aspect that was noted during the literature review and appears to be significant

enough to address in Chapter Four is the fact that counseling as a distinct profession is still

developing in most European countries. That state of evolvement inevitably reflects the current

status of the accrediting training system as well. The most common issue of the European

counselors is that they are competing for the professional niche that is already occupied by other

Mental Health professionals (Mariotti, 2018; Remley et al., 2010).

In many European countries, counseling as a profession may fail to develop because the

services typically provided by counselors in the U.S. are already delivered by other established

mental health providers in other countries (Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir et al., 2009). This is the case in nations such as Germany, France, Japan, Korea, and Romania and many others (Cates, 2002; Martin, 1997; Rott & Wickel, 1996; Watanabe-Muraoka, 1997; Wehrly, 1987). For example, in Romania, for many years, counseling has only existed within education, particularly in the form of psycho-pedagogical assistance provided by teachers to students (Szilagyi, 2001). Thus, the European counselors have, for quite some time now, two options: 1) clinical counseling must compete with psychology, psychiatry, and other helping professions for its place within that system; or 2) counseling may only serve a role within other mental health systems rather than as an independent profession (Stockton, Garbelman, Kaladow, & Terry, 2008).

The Italian counseling professional community chose the first option - to compete and as a result, the Italian counselors overcame many challenges. In 2015, the professional association of Italian psychologists and psychotherapists took legal action to stop the growth and development of the counseling profession in Italy (AssoCounseling, 2015b). In general, as Mariotti's translation (2018, p. 25) of AltraPsicologia statement indicated, the Italian psychologists declared that "the counseling profession does not exist and that its practice represents an abuse of the psychological profession" (AltraPsicologia, 2010). As Mariotti (2018) and Remley et al. (2010) stated, the legal challenge against the counseling profession was generated in Italy because counseling there is in its earliest stages of development and lacks a strong professional identity.

The Federcounseling Italian Association declared that the only way to withstand that challenge is to define who is a counselor and his/her role (Federcounseling, 2015). The review of literature regarding the current issues of counseling globalization displays that the

international professional counselors have recognized the necessity of developing a professional identity on a global scale (Hoskins & Thompson, 2009). The major goal of the world-wide counseling community is to develop recognition of the counseling profession around the globe with a clear understanding of who those professionals are by default.

Hoskins and Thompson (2009) emphasized that "The development of an international counseling identity involves three key components: collaboration, research, and training" (p. 2). This meta-synthesis is aimed to contribute to this process by specifically focusing on one of these key components – training, and precisely, on the development of a global counseling education system. The development of a counseling professional identity is strongly linked to training programs (Hoskin & Thompson, 2009). The professional communities can establish numerous professional associations and can look for supporters and followers everywhere. However, if there is no well-recognized and trustworthy professional training program that is developed based on the reliable sets of standards, the profession, will not have no power to thrive and grow.

To enhance the position of the counseling profession on the global stage, the graduate level programs around the world should be developed. At the same time, the literature review revealed several challenges that the international counseling society currently experiences: unequal developmental stages of counseling in different countries; the absence of unified standards for counseling training programs; and, the complexity of development of the global code of ethics (Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir et al., 2009).

Unequal Developmental Stages of Counseling in European Countries

Counseling in the United States is more developed as a profession than it is in many other parts of the world (Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir et al., 2009). Over the past century, the

individuals making up the US counseling society were able to move the perspective of their profession from being an ill-defined, difficult to distinguish from other helping professions, to being one with a defined and distinguishable professional identity (Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir et al., 2009; Neukrug, 2012). The key to this success is the development of the nationally recognized graduate level counseling training. The training standards provided by Counsel for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) enhanced the reputation of counseling as a profession significantly (Stanard, 2013). That experience could be considered to be a valid undertaking by other countries where counseling is in its initial stage of development.

Some countries, such as United Kingdom, Ireland, Malta, and Switzerland have already developed graduate counseling programs and control their quality with accreditation bodies. Other countries, such as France, Italy, Romania, Greece, and Germany have no autonomous counseling discipline in higher education institutions and have some training programs that operate outside the university structure (Moodley, Gielen, & Wu, 2013; Maassen & Musselin, 2009). Also, there are no accreditation bodies to control the quality of this training.

The Absence of Unified Standards for Counseling Training Programs

Another issue revealed through the literature review was the absence of the unified standards for counseling training programs around the world (Woo, Henfield, & Choi, 2014; Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir et al., 2009; Moodley et al., 2013; Gerstein, Heppner, Stockton, et al., 2009). That situation creates obstacles to establishing a united global network of professional training around the world and to providing competent counseling services for the global community.

The demonstrative example of the first step in this direction is the reciprocal agreement between British and Irish associations for counseling and psychotherapy. Both countries developed their sets of standards for training programs and after evaluation, they recognized and accepted the quality of their neighbors' standards and accreditation schemes (BACP, 2019a). As a result, counselors from the UK are able to easily transfer their credentials and practice there, and vice versa. That model seems to be very reasonable for the practice of globalizing the counseling profession.

The European Association for Counseling has already initiated the first steps to uniting counseling professionals in Europe. The countries where counselors were unable to find support on the national level began using the EAC platform and the set of standards as a guidance for their professional development (Hohenshil, Amundson, & Niles, 2013). The EAC Strategy and Plan 2014-2020 declared that one of the goals of the association was to set up the accreditation process for training courses and training organizations (EAC, 2019) and to "develop criteria for the accreditation of training programs" (EAC, 2015, p. 5).

The Complexity of Development of the Global Code of Ethics

Creation of a global code of ethics is a complex process. The global training programs should be developed on the set of standards that, in turn, should be grounded on a professional code of ethics. A very sensitive question arises here: Based on which philosophy and worldview assumptions should this code be developed? Is the direction to be the Western one based on its leadership in the counseling professional development? Or is the Non-Western one the solution, due to its numerical advantage and prevalence?

Gerstein, Heppner, Stockton, et al. (2009) explained that worldwide community often considers counseling globalization as hegemony of U.S. methodology and Western civilization

in general. The current research is full of different terminology such as "McDonalization",

"Westernization" with quite a negative connotation behind those terms (Gerstein, Heppner,

Stockton, et al., 2009; Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir et al., 2009; Patel, Minas, Cohen, & Prince,

2014). Norsworthy, Heppner, Ægisdóttir, et al. (2009) discussed the two-sided problem of

counseling globalization, when the U.S. professionals demonstrate professional superiority

relative to other countries and when the non-U.S. professionals resist accepting any of the U.S.

counseling approaches due to fear of colonization. Those two perspectives and attitudes should

be carefully taken into account while the global counseling profession and the code of ethics are

in the development process.

To find and enact compromise is essential for the growing international community.

Also, this is an ongoing process of formation of a new global culture. This qualitative meta-

synthesis is intended to contribute to this process by initiating the first step to recognizing and to

acknowledging the existent differences between the U.S. and the European accrediting standards

for counseling training programs that inevitably reflect the cultural differences in their

foundations.

Summary

This thorough literature review was guided by the framework of the qualitative meta-

synthesis methodology. Two goals were simultaneously pursued: to review the previously

conducted research regarding counseling globalization and to initiate the process of meta-

synthesis data collection. Based on the established goals, the literature review procedure was

divided into three stages.

The first stage was determined as a means to explore the previous research findings in the

field of counseling globalization. The literature review revealed several issues and challenges of

globalization and internationalization in mental health counseling such as unequal developmental stages of counseling in different countries of Europe; the absence of unified standards for counseling training programs; and the complexity of development of the global code of ethics (Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir et al., 2009). The global counseling professional community recognizes that the new realm of the globalized society requires counseling professionals to reconsider their local standards for practice within the world-wide scale perspective. Many researchers acknowledged that this transition to counseling globalization should be initiated from counseling training programs (Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir et al., 2009; Hoskin & Thompson, 2009). The higher education institutions should be capable of preparing the new generation of counselors to serve in and for the global community.

These findings redirected the literature review process to the second stage, where the current state of the counseling training programs in the USA and Europe became the main focus of research and evaluation. The issue of internationalization of the counseling training programs was reviewed as well as the current status of American counseling programs located in Europe was evaluated and analyzed. During this stage of the literature review process, the differences between the European and the American counseling training programs were noted. As far as any counseling training program needing to be guided by professional standards, the literature review was expanded to the third stage: the revision of how European standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to the American CACREP standards.

The third stage of the literature review required new search strategies to apply. The meta-synthesis approach appeared to be the most effective way to continue review of the literature in order to prepare the data for comprehensive comparative analysis. This strategy for selection of the relevant literature included the review of available information regarding

counseling training programs and accreditation bodies in each European country. The guided criteria for the review selection were the following: 1) recognition of counseling as a distinct profession; 2) existence of higher education counseling training programs; 3) operation of accrediting standards for the programs by an accrediting institution; and, 4) availability the reviewing literature written in or translated into English language.

This segment of the literature review also became the data collection procedure and the preparation to conduct further analysis that is comprehensively supported by the selected methodology. A meta-synthesis framework allowed both a review of the literature and, at the same time, the collection, decoding, describing, comparison, and analysis of a wide range of qualitative data. The Methodology chapter is a logical expansion and continuation of the work generated in the literature review of the Chapter Two. The explanation of this process will be thoroughly provided later in the description of the Data Analysis Procedure.

The findings revealed during the conducted literature review displayed the gaps in the available research and became a foundation for the further explorations. The literature review exposed the necessity to prepare counseling professionals to serve clients around the globe. According to the researchers discussed in the review, one of the initial steps should be the development of counseling training programs based on culturally appropriate global unified standards. Approaching this complex task would benefit from a thorough exploration of the differences and commonalities of already existing standards. The findings of this inquiry can provide insights for the comprehensive development of a set of unified global standards for counseling training programs in the nearest future.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter presented the design, procedures, and analysis plan for carrying out the intent of the study. All aspects of the methodology and procedures for applying the research interventions are contained in this chapter.

Introduction

The focus of this qualitative meta-synthesis was the U.S. and the European accrediting standards for counseling training programs. This research was intended to analyze the European standards and to compare them between each other and with the CACREP standards of the United States.

There were three goals for this study:

1. To review all available information regarding standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs in the United States and Europe and to select the relevant data for further analysis.

2. To conduct a meta-synthesis of the gathered qualitative data in order to analyze, compare, and summarize information in response to the research questions.

3. Based on the evidence found in this meta-synthesis, to offer an agenda for future research regarding the effective ways for achieving the globalization of counseling training programs.

Statement of the Problem

The reviewed literature revealed that the global counseling community is approaching the point of understanding that, in order to serve the global community and to be effective, the next generation of counselors should be trained differently, extending the educational focus from a local perspective to a global one. The new realm created by the ongoing globalization process

and the current world structure requires the global community to begin thinking on a world-wide scale. To prepare for the new life demands created by the changes the citizens of world are experiencing, the global professional society should develop counseling training programs based on globally unified accrediting standards that will assure the quality of the training and the effectiveness of the prospective counselors while serving the world-wide international community. That transformation is not an overnight process. The baseline component is the ethical considerations of the unique cultural needs of each national community. In order to initiate the counseling globalization process, the specific features and requirements of each participant country should be learned and recognized.

This qualitative meta-synthesis was intended to contribute to that development process by exploring the unique cultural features and aspects of the European accrediting systems for counseling training programs. The findings of this research may underpin the formation of the prospective unified standards for global counseling training.

Research Question

This qualitative meta-synthesis research will be guided by the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do European Standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to each other?

RQ 2: How do European Standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to CACREP standards?

Research Methodology

The qualitative methodology was the most appropriate means to gather data to answer the research questions. The reason for that choice was the basic philosophy of qualitative research

that intends to "exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2014, p. 4). Use of induction, comparative analysis, and the operation of both abstract and philosophical categories were the main tools utilized for conducting and completing this study.

Patton (2015) stated that the focus of qualitative inquiry is directed toward "exploration, discovery, and inductive logic" (p. 64). In contrast to deductive approach of quantitative inquiry, which is when the hypothesis should be formed *before* data collection and should lead the entire flow of the study, the strategy of induction allows to approach the research subject without rigorous prognoses and expectations (Patton, 2015). The nature of this study was exploratory, with the purpose of exploring the subject of inquiry deeply and thoroughly. There were no pre-assumed predictions for the outcomes of this study. Only curiosity and a practical purpose were motives for this exploratory inquiry. That environment and philosophical construct naturally supported the choice of qualitative methodology for this study.

Another supporting point that explains the choice of qualitative inquiry for this study is the fact that this research was guided by clearly qualitative data. Qualitative data contains "quotations, observations, excerpts from documents, and from social media" (Patton, 2015, p. 54). This study aimed to explore, discuss, and analyze a wide range of qualitative data. That methodology allowed the classification of the data through inductive logic, personal reflections, and many-sided considerations.

Finally, reflexivity was applied as one of the instruments for data analysis that strongly linked this research with the qualitative methodology. Patton (2015) stated that reflexivity is an inevitable component of qualitative inquiry because it directs the researcher to "deep

introspection, political consciousness, cultural awareness, and ownership of one's perspective" (p. 70). All of the listed aspects are displayed in this study's comparison discussion.

Research Design

Qualitative meta-synthesis is a comparably new methodology framework that allows the analysis and interpretation of a large body of related research literature (Thomas & Berry, 2019). At the same time, qualitative meta-synthesis should be clearly distinguished from reviews of literature. While a review of literature includes an observation and a summary of current and previous research in a related area of study in order to claim justification for the further inquiry, qualitative meta-synthesis is "an analysis and interpretation of the findings from selected studies" that lead to new insights and deeper understanding of how a collective body of research can contribute to a particular area of study (Thomas & Berry, 2019, p. 23).

The methodological framing of meta-synthesis provided a well-structured platform to review, decode, and analyze all available information regarding standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs in the United States and Europe in a comprehensive way and to analyze the data coherently. Meta-synthesis was appropriate to systemize the reviewed information in this study because it is "an intentional approach to synthesizing and interpreting data across qualitative studies" (Erwin, Brotherson, & Summers, 2011, p. 191).

Finfgeld-Connett (2018) stated that the essential idea of the meta-syntheses research process is that the design is a "comprehensive standalone study" in comparison to qualitative syntheses that are mainly aimed to be adjuncts or extensions of quantitative meta-analyses (p. 6). Research synthesis is a general term used to describe the "bringing together" of a body of research on a particular topic (Ring, Ritchie, Mandava, & Jepson, 2011, p. 3).

Meta-synthesis is a specific term defined as "a method of synthesizing qualitative accounts to construct adequate interpretive explanations from multiple studies" (Barroso, Powell-Cope, 2000, p. 342). At the same time, Paterson, Thorne, Canam, and Jillings (2001) highlighted the importance of understanding that the purpose of a meta-synthesis is "not simply to report similarities" (p. 111) of some specific features that were found in the literature regarding a research phenomenon, but to dig into the research subject deeper in order to question the already formed and widely recognized perceptions and to provide a platform for new insights and perspectives. Walsh and Downe (2005) emphasized that the main goal of meta-synthesis is to "integrate results from a number of different but inter-related qualitative studies" (p. 204).

The research questions of this study were explored based on meta-synthesis methodology due to the fact that the approach is the most convenient design to collect, describe, compare, and analyze such a wide range of qualitative data. The intention was to both collect data from all of the available resources and to classify the information, and, also, to interpret it in a comprehensive and organized way. Since one of the goals of this research was to offer recommendations for future research regarding effective ways for the globalization of counseling training programs, meta-synthesis was a suitable instrument to access and to analyze the current status of the research subject. Additionally, defining particular steps of the ways in which the new generated knowledge can be practically applied was presented, fulfilling Erwin, Brotherson, and Summers's belief that qualitative meta-synthesis is aimed "to move from knowledge generation to knowledge application" (p. 188).

The European segment of this study was very limited, with the relevant information available for analysis. The language barrier was one of the challenges. At the same time, the chosen methodology provided many benefits because meta-synthesis is "focused on a deeper

understanding of meaning within a particular context" (Erwin, Brotherson, & Summers, 2011, p. 189). Most of the analyzed European materials written in English should be tested and interpreted to make sure that the compared information has identical meaning in both the United States and Europe. Sandelowski and Barroso (2007) suggested applying meta-synthesis where translation, explanation, and discovery of meaning is an essential objective because "language is viewed as a structure or artifact of culture that must itself be interpreted" (p. 17).

Additionally, the limitations of the European data for this study encouraged the continued search for alternative sources of information to gain access to the current status of the research subject. Meta-synthesis design provides a wide range of options to access the necessary information, even if the necessary data is unavailable through traditional academic sources, such as peer reviewed professional journals, books, and articles. The chosen methodology allowed for extending the data collection instruments and to seek the required information on such resources as the materials of different conferences, public discussions, and interviews with knowledgeable professionals. By synthesizing diverse types of collected data that differ by sources, quality, perspectives, and opinions, possibilities to new insights and perceptions in the research area are enhanced (Toye, Seers, Allcock, et al., 2014).

Another benefit of meta-synthesis for conducting this study is that the design allows the researcher to keep an appropriate balance between scientific objectivity during data collection and analysis and the researcher's subjectivity while analyzing and concluding the results (Lachal, Revah-Levy, Orri, & Moro, 2017).

While meta-synthesis provides a solid platform for a type of research that requires consideration of a large amount of qualitative information, its classification, and analysis

(Lachal, Revah-Levy, Orri, & Moro, 2017), this research design was also chosen as the most effective and practical for conducting and completing this study.

Sample Selection

Sampling procedure is a decision made by researchers to specify what kind of data will be sought, where it will be derived, and from whom the information will be gathered to answer the research question (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Maxwell, 2013). Miles and Huberman (1984) stated that "you are not only sampling *people*, but also *settings, events,* and *processes*" (p. 41). As far as this research involved no individual participants, this sampling section will refer to site selection. This meta-synthesis was sampling settings, or site selection. For this purpose, criterion-based purposeful sampling selection (Patton, 2015) was applied.

The criterion-based sampling selection provides a framework when all sample candidates are studied, are "implicitly (or explicitly) compared" based on established criteria with those who do not manifest the criteria (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 130). Patton (2015) emphasized that any qualitative synthesis should carefully approach the sampling criteria by deciding which parameters are sufficient and relevant to incorporate in the synthesis.

Settings: Accreditation bodies and standards for counselling training programs in the United States and Europe.

1. **The United States Segment**

    a) The CACREP accreditation agency has been chosen for comparison as the top accrediting board for master's and doctoral graduate level counseling programs in the United States and as the world recognized accreditor by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) (CACREP, 2019a);

    b) The 2016 CACREP Standards (CACREP, 2016).

2. **The European Segment**

   a) The European accreditation bodies have been selected based on the following selection

   criteria:

   i)   mental health counseling was recognized and distinguished as a distinct professional

        area;

   ii) the existence of counseling associations;

   iii) counseling training programs are presented;

   iv) training standards for accreditation of counseling education programs were

        developed.

   b) The European accreditation standards written in, or translated into, the English language

   have been selected for comparison;

Sample Size: The inclusion/exclusion process was long-lasting and complex. By following the

selection criteria, the size of sample was changed several times in order to fully align with the list

of criteria. As a final decision for inclusion, 13 settings, or site selections, (Denmark, France,

Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Romania, Switzerland, United Kingdom,

United States, and the European Association for Counseling (EAC)) were considered in this

meta-synthesis. However, at the end, only 5 site selections (Ireland, Malta, United Kingdom,

United States, and the EAC) were compared and analyzed due to their complete criteria

eligibility.

The eight settings excluded from the final stage only partially met criteria and failed to

meet the essential criteria, which is the existence of the developed accreditation standards for

counseling training programs. The full procedure of this exclusion process was addressed

thoroughly in Chapter Four. The selected five site settings met all the established criteria and will be included in the qualitative meta-synthesis.

Instrumentation

Based on the specific characteristics of a meta-synthesis design that required a thorough many-sided analysis of qualitative data, the method of instrumentation involved multiple sources of information that allowed evaluation of the subject of the study at a depth level. At the same time, the subject of this particular research involved analysis of the data with limited availability and included no human resources. Those unique circumstances for the qualitative study limited the range of instruments utilized for data collection and analysis. The literature review and requests for information (emails, calls, and personal conversations) were the only instruments implemented in this study.

Literature Review

Typically, the literature review is an initial stage procedure for any research. However, this meta-synthesis utilized the literature review as a main instrument for data collection. The aim of the meta-synthesis data collection process is intended to gather an unbiased sample of published qualitative research reports (Finfgeld-Connett, 2018). Thus, a literature review appears to be an acceptable source for meta-synthesis data collection. Finfgeld-Connett (2018) raised the question whether or not a standalone review of the literature would be sufficient to conduct meta-synthesis. That researcher came to a positive conclusion because the primary purpose of the literature review, as a data collection instrument, is to gather necessary information that is needed for rigorous synthesis.

In this study, the literature review, as a meta-synthesis instrument, applied to the following sources:

- peer-reviewed professional journals from all of the available data bases;

- non-peer-reviewed research reports;

- government documents,

- theses and dissertations;

- scholarly monographs, books, book chapters;

- websites of the professional associations and council for accreditation bodies;

- websites of the European universities;

- other available sources of the related to the topic information.

Request of Information

While the research subject is limited regarding the availability of up to date information available in a published form, the requests for the information from authorities and/or individuals related to the area of study was beneficial for meta-synthesis. The following ways to request the information were used:

- emails;

- calls;

- personal conversations.

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Validity

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The consideration of validity of this meta-synthesis was intended to assure the trustworthiness of the research findings. Validity of this meta-synthesis was enhanced by implementing unbiased data collection and sample selection, triangulation, and reflexivity.

In order to ensure that the collected data and sample selection procedures were unbiased, the criteria of selection/elimination during the search process were thoroughly justified and followed. To increase the level of validity, each relevant unit of information was considered for

this meta-synthesis, regardless of its quality. The consideration was based on its credibility, the relevance to the research subject, and on whether or not it helped saturate findings to synthesize the information across studies. Finfgeld-Connett (2018) stated that, currently, no valid methods were established to determine the precise quality of qualitative research based on a written report. Thus, to avoid the risk of missing valuable information over the mistaken assessment of the data quality, all relevant sources of information were considered.

Triangulation also contributed to validity of this meta-synthesis. Thorne (2009) and Finfgeld-Connett (2018) asserted that meta-synthesis can apply to several forms of triangulation, such as using multiple research frameworks, sampling methods, data analysis methods, and researchers. In case of this meta-synthesis, triangulation was achieved by collecting the raw data from multiple diverse sources that was originally generated by many researchers using multiple theoretical frameworks, data collection, and methods.

Validity was also ensured by the researcher's reflexivity, which entailed critically considering personal perspectives applied to data collection and analysis. The reflexivity process was intended to ensure that personal biases had no impact on the synthesizing procedure and the research findings.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent "to which research findings can be replicated" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 250). In this study, the range of reliability can be assessed by consideration of whether or not the repeated inquiry of other researchers will bring investigators to the same findings. Traditionally, reliability is considered to be problematic in any research related to human experiences and social interactions due to both dynamics and instability of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Wolcott, 2005). At the same time, the indications were that, if the

study regarding differences and commonalities of CACREP and the European accrediting standards for counseling training programs was repeated, the same or nearly similar results would occur. That level of confidence was based on the fact that the subject exploration was approached through static sources such as articles, documents, studies, and other written forms of data, rather than by utilizing human resources (interviews of individuals, questionnaires regarding the subject issue, etc.) where the opinions and assumptions of a sample group could change over time and between repeated studies. Any replicated study would approach the same data and would yield the same results.

The only challenging aspect for reliability of this meta-synthesis was the circumstance that the evaluated subject was quite dynamic, and changes can quickly occur within a short period of time. Even within the timeframe of conducting this study, some of the raw data segments were changed significantly. For example, the raw data was collected during the entirety of 2019. However, at the beginning of 2020, when the process of data analysis was initiated, the European Association for Counseling declared about upcoming changes in their accrediting standards for counseling training programs. Those changes influenced the specific segment of the current findings of this meta-synthesis and as a result, the outcomes were reconsidered and updated.

Thus, while considering the research findings on the specific timeframe when this meta-synthesis was conducted, this study was assessed with a high range of reliability.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Meta-synthesis is a structured method that is aimed to synthesize and interpret data across qualitative studies (Erwin, Brotherson, & Summers, 2011). This methodological framing began gaining popularity within last two decades and as a result, the theoretical base of the

methodology is still developing. To further the framing process, there are currently several

researchers (Noblit & Hare, 1988; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007; Finfgeld-Connett, 2018) who

offered their visions on a theoretical frame to conduct and organize a meta-synthesis process.

The theoretical framework offered by Major and Savin-Baden (2010) was the most practical to

apply for this research because it was developed as a useful guide specifically for social science

researchers.

Major and Savin-Baden (2010) suggest dividing a meta-synthesis process into discrete

steps, or phases:

1. Formulate a clear research problem and question;

2. Conduct a comprehensive search of the literature;

3. Conduct careful appraisal of research studies for possible inclusion;

4. Select and conduct meta-synthesis techniques to integrate and analyze qualitative research
    findings;

5. Present synthesis of findings across studies;

6. Reflect on the process.

Such a structured procedure enables the researcher to effectively and comprehensively

organize the synthesis of a large body of qualitative data. Moreover, while working with a

sizeable amount of information that should be compared, the clear structure is an additional

benefit for both the researcher, to stay organized, and the reader to have material provided in a

comprehensive form. Major and Savin-Baden (2010) offered a useful methodological instrument

to synthesize qualitative studies conducted by other researchers and to come up with new

insights through an interpretative process. Thus, due to its methodological advantages, the

instrument developed by Major and Savin-Baden (2010) was applied to this qualitative meta-synthesis.

I. Formulate A Clear Research Problem and Question

Considering the provided steps for a meta-synthesis process, the first two phases suggested by Major and Savin-Baden (2010) were overlapped and interchanged in this study. The area of this research was defined first. However, the formulation of a clear research problem and question was concluded only after a comprehensive search of the literature was conducted that revealed the gaps in this specific area of study.

II. Conduct a Comprehensive Search of the Literature

Typically, a literature review is the initial step for a research project. However, this meta-synthesis utilized the literature review as a main instrument for data collection. The aim of the meta-synthesis data collection process is to gather an unbiased sample of published qualitative research reports (Finfgeld-Connett, 2018).

III. Conduct Careful Appraisal of Research Studies for Possible Inclusion

To assess the feasibility of conducting a qualitative meta-synthesis to compare the American and the European standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs, a wide-ranging and comprehensive exploratory search of the English language research literature was conducted by using terms such as European counseling education, accreditation system, council for accreditation of counseling education, counseling training in Europe, global counseling education, and so forth. That search was conducted in 2019 using the following databases:

- EBSCOhost databases: Academic Search Complete, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Education Source, Professional Development Collection, ERIC, and Education Source;

- ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (PQDT) database;

- EBSCOhost eBooks Collection.

One of the initial components for the meta-synthesis process is the determination of the scope of included studies and inclusion criteria (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007; Major & Savin-Baden, 2010). As a result, the literature review should be conducted with consideration of that aspect and the goals of the study. Erwin, Brotherson, and Summers (2011) suggested that criteria for inclusion and exclusion of a systematic literature review should be flexible in order to enable the researcher to stay sensitive to the unexpected findings and to be able to extend the scope of the search, if needed.

The initial approach to the meta-synthesis literature review, intended to analyze and compare the American and the European standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs, consisted of the review of the following sources of information:

1. The relevant studies (articles, reviews, dissertations, analysis, any types of researcher, etc.) that discussed the issues of accreditation standards and/or systems of counseling training programs in the USA and Europe;

2. The information provided on the official websites of the professional counseling and/or psychology associations of both regions;

3. The published sets of the American and the European standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs;

4. The summaries, reviews, and/or video records of the relevant professional conferences regarding the study's topic;

5. Any other available sources that provided professional opinion and perspective regarding the issues of the American and the European standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs.

The following aspects were considered for the inclusion criteria:

1. All relevant published sources written in, or translated into, the English language;

2. The European segment of this research was narrowed by the specified list of European countries for the comparison and analysis. That list was formed by the following aspects:

- mental health counseling was recognized and distinguished as a distinct professional area;

- the existence of counseling associations;

- counseling training programs are presented;

- training standards for accreditation of counseling education programs were developed.

IV.   **Select and Conduct Meta-Synthesis Techniques to Integrate and Analyze Qualitative Research Findings**

In order to approach the qualitative data systematically and to enable the comprehensive analysis of the material based on the meta-synthesis guidance, specific themes (or categories) were outlined, in order to create classifications for further comparisons within sampling settings. The data analysis procedure was divided into two steps:

- Determination and classification of themes within the European and the American data segments;

- Comparison of the European data within the European settings and formation of the unified European theme classification;

- Comparison of the European and CACREP theme classifications.

The thorough explanation of the data analysis procedures is provided in Chapter Four.

V.   Present Synthesis of Findings Across Studies

The collected data regarding the standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs was systemized in this form. That table was filled out as the literature review progressed. The classification allowed a comparison analysis to be conducted based on the formed categories, or codes.

The data collection process that was conducted based on the requested information (emails, calls, and/or personal conversations), had no specified instruments, such as template or questionnaires because it was unique and dependent on the requested information, person, circumstances.

VI.   Reflect on the Process

The final step of this meta-synthesis was the reflection process regarding data analysis, its interpretation, and new explorations that arose from the research findings. Major and Savin-Baden (2010) emphasized that self-reflection is an inevitable part of meta-synthesis, both during the final stage of the research and throughout each step of the meta-synthesis process.

 The unique format of meta-synthesis offers a proper balance between the following three components: "an objective framework, which includes the selection, inclusion, and appraisal of studies; a rigorously scientific approach to data analysis; and the necessary contribution of the researcher's subjectivity in the construction of the final work" (Lachal, Revah-Levy, Orri, & Moro, 2017, p. 8). The researcher's subjective perspective was a distinctive feature of this qualitative methodology that facilitated original insights and, as a result, provided unique contributions to the research subject.

Ethical Considerations

Qualitative meta-synthesis differs from other traditional qualitative inquiries that usually require a close interaction with a sample population, or human resources, and as a result, demand careful consideration of all possible risks for individuals' confidentiality, harm, and/or mistreatment during the research process. Due to the fact that the main object of this meta-synthesis was data that is publicly available, the issues of confidentiality are of no concern and there was no need for the study to undergo a formal ethical review for approval (NLU, 2020).

Methodological Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Methodological assumptions

Qualitative meta-synthesis is a relatively new methodology that is currently gaining in popularity with researchers and scholars.

In reflections regarding the foundational idea of qualitative meta-synthesis, Thorne (2017) stated the main assumption behind the genesis of the qualitative meta-synthesis is that the method evokes the interest and attention of qualitative scholars to a specific phenomenon by "entering them into a collective interpretive dialogue" that may generate new insights and knowledge (p. 3). In this study, that emerging method provided an opportunity to consider the discussed phenomenon from different disciplinary angles, theories, and methodologies that had the potential to create a critical perspective, unlimited by a single subjective point of view.

Limitations

The chosen research methodology had several limitations that could have potentially impacted the results. One of the limitations of qualitative meta-synthesis as a methodological approach is the fact that, despite the growing interest in this research design, there is still no gold standard for conducting this type of research and for reporting meta-synthesis in a

standardized way **(**Mohammed, Moles, & Chen, 2016). As a result, the lack of clarity begets

debates and controversies in the research community. Thorne (2017) expressed her concern

that the absence of a clear theoretical foundation for qualitative meta-synthesis research

brought the current generation of qualitative researchers to "a number of problematic

assumptions and misconceptions" (p. 5) regarding meta-synthesis design which, in turn, led to

a faulty logic that can put this effective methodology and its trustworthiness at risk.

Another limitation of meta-synthesis that is often debated by researchers is the

acknowledgement of the difficulties in measuring the quality of each research study included in

the qualitative meta-synthesis (Erwin, Brotherson, & Summers, 2011; Thorne, Jensen,

Kearney, et al., 2004). There is a lack of agreement regarding the criteria for quality judgment

that makes meta-synthesis an object for endless debates regarding its validity and reliability

(Erwin, Brotherson, & Summers, 2011; Thorne, 2017; Lachal, Revah-Levy, Orri, & Moro,

2017).

Finally, several researchers noted that any type of meta-synthesis research has a

tendency to rapidly go out of date (Schick-Makaroff, MacDonald, Plummer, et al., 2016;

Finfgeld-Connett, 2018). From that point of view, a limitation of this meta-synthesis was in its

time limited value. The status of accreditation systems in counseling training programs around

Europe is changing constantly, due to the development of counseling as a profession and

training programs as a reflection of those changes. As a result, this research seems to be on

point identifying the phenomenon in a specific time frame. However, the significance of this

study was limited by time since the subject of this meta-synthesis was dynamic and

changeable.

Delimitations

Methodological delimitations of this research are sets of boundaries that can be arranged and controlled in order to be able to complete this study. This study was conducted on the frame of qualitative meta-synthesis design by conducting a review, creating a process of synthesis, and through the interpretation of qualitative data that discussed the issues of accreditation standards and systems of counseling training programs in the USA and Europe.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to thoroughly explain the methodology selected to garner data intended to answer the two research questions. The presentation of a research design, sample selection, applied instrumentation, data collection and analysis procedure detailed the specific way in which this research was conducted. Qualitative meta-synthesis methodology was used to explore how European standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to the CACREP standards and to each other.

Meta-synthesis design delivers a well-structured platform to review, decode, and analyze a large pool of data regarding standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs in the United States and Europe in a comprehensive way and to analyze that data coherently. Meta-synthesis is aimed "not simply to report similarities" (Paterson, Thorne, Canam, & Jillings, 2001, p. 111) of some specific features that were found in the literature regarding a research phenomenon, but to explore the research subject intensely. In order to manipulate a wide range of qualitative data effectively, specific criteria for a sample selection were determined and applied.

The criterion-based sampling selection process was intended to choose target settings to specify the area of the research inquiry. The settings of this meta-synthesis are accreditation bodies and standards for counseling training programs in the United States and Europe. The sample size was determined by 5 site selections: Ireland, Malta, United Kingdom, United States, and the European Association for Counseling.

The process of data collection and analysis was thoroughly described by explaining the selected instrumentation such as a literature review and requests for information. The methodological strategy for conducting meta-synthesis conduction offered by Major and Savin-Baden (2010) was selected to lead the data collection and analysis process. Also, the procedure of theming classification was provided and explained.

Chapter Three also addressed the issues of validity and reliability of this meta-synthesis study by reflecting and assessing both the study's trustworthiness and the quality. Ethical considerations were explained as well.

The purpose of Chapter Four is to provide the results of this research and to validate that the selected methodology of qualitative meta-synthesis described in Chapter Three was appropriately applied and followed. The next chapter comprehensively explains the procedure of data analysis that were followed through the detailed description of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Chapter Four presents the findings of the meta-synthesis study based on the procedures detailed in Chapter Three. This chapter includes a brief introduction to the study by providing a restatement of the research problem, the methodology, and the research question. The descriptive data, data analysis procedure, and the results are also thoroughly discussed.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the commonalities and differences between the European and the CACREP accrediting standards for counseling training programs. The qualitative meta-synthesis methodology was selected to explore the following research questions:

 RQ 1: How do European Standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to each other?

RQ 2: How do European Standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to CACREP standards?

That research approach was the most appropriate and effective methodology to review, decode, compare, and analyze a large pool of qualitative data (Finfgeld-Connett, 2018).

This study was conducted, with the intention of contributing to the process of counseling globalization by exploring, analyzing, and comparing the unique cultural features and aspects of the European and the CACREP accrediting systems for counseling training programs. The findings of this research may underpin the formation of the prospective unified standards for global counseling training.

Descriptive Data

The sampling procedure of this meta-synthesis is referred to as sampling settings, or site selection. In this study, criterion-based purposeful sampling selection was applied.

That procedure provided a framework to determine the sampling criteria and to justify the parameters that were sufficient and relevant to incorporate the chosen selections in the synthesis.

Settings: Accreditation bodies and standards for counseling training programs in the United States and Europe.

The United States Segment

a) The CACREP accreditation agency was chosen for comparison as the top accrediting board for master's and doctoral graduate level counseling programs in the United States and as the world recognized accreditor by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) (CACREP, 2019a);

b) The 2016 CACREP Standards (CACREP, 2016).

The European Segment

a) The European accreditation bodies were selected based on the following criteria:

    i. mental health counseling was recognized and distinguished as a distinct professional area;

    ii. the existence of counseling associations;

    iii. counseling training programs are presented;

    iv. training standards for accreditation of counseling education programs were developed.

b) The European accreditation standards written in, or translated into, the English language were selected for comparison;

Sample Size: The inclusion/exclusion process was long-lasting and complex. By following the selection criteria, the size of the sample was changed several times in order to fully align with the list of criteria. As a final decision for inclusion, 13 settings, or site selections, (Denmark, France,

Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Romania, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, and the European Association for Counseling (EAC)) were considered for this meta-synthesis. However, only 5 site selections (Ireland, Malta, United Kingdom, United States, and the EAC) were compared and analyzed due to their complete criteria eligibility.

The eight settings excluded from the final stage only partially met criteria and failed to meet the essential criteria, which is the existence of the developed accreditation standards for counseling training programs. At the same time, the excluded settings were initially considered due to existence of counseling training programs and/or counseling professional associations there. The following tables depict the reasons for both the exclusions of and interests in each of the eight settings.

Denmark

Counseling Professional Association	There are no counseling professional associations in Denmark. The Danish Psychological Association [Dansk Psykolog Forening] is the main professional association in Denmark. The Psykoterapeut Foreningen (PF [Psychotherapeutic Association]) is a professional organization of psychotherapists and the only "professional Danish group promoting the development of the profession of counseling as a separate discipline from psychology" (Dixon & Hansen, 2010, p. 40).
Counseling Professional Identity	Denmark makes no distinction for counseling as a separate area of mental health service. The terms "psychology" and "counseling" are used interchangeably in Denmark (Hansen & Dixon, 2013). Hansen and Dixon (2013) stated that in Denmark, "a degree in psychology is equivalent to a degree in counseling within the United States" (p. 271).

	There is licensure for counselors/psychologists in Denmark; however, there is no mandate to obtain a license in order to use the title of counselor/psychologist and to work (Hansen & Dixon, 2013). The Danish Supervisory Board of Psychological Practice is the only body that can grant the licensure (Psykolognævnet [Danish Board of Psychological Practice], n.d.a). If a professional graduated from a university with a master's degree in psychology, the Danish Board of Psychological Practice can authorize the use of the title "psychologist" (psykolog) in Denmark (Psykolognævnet [Danish Board of Psychological Practice], n.d.a).
Counseling Training Programs	There are four main counseling/psychology training programs offered by universities in Denmark: Copenhagen University, Århus University, Ålborg University and Odense/South Danish University) (Hansen & Dixon, 2013). All four programs were accredited by the Danish Accreditation Institution. The programs that are qualified to be labelled as "counselling" could be the following: master's programs in psychology given at universities, professional bachelor programs for social workers (literally, the translation of the Danish name/title "social worker" would be "social counsellor") given at "university colleges," and a number of private programs for psychotherapists given at private institutions.
Accreditation Institutions	The Danish Accreditation Institution [Danmarks Akkrediteringsinstitution] is an independent body that accredits institutions within the higher education system regardless of its professional specialization. The Danish Accreditation Institution (DAI) provides no accreditations for specific programs but for an

	academic institution. This institutional accreditation offers an assurance that institutions are capable of doing their own quality assurance (QA) of all their programs. Thus, the specific standards of counseling programs should be developed by an institution (The information was provided by the DAI through the email correspondence).
Accreditation Standards	There are no specific criteria for counseling training programs. The training should be approved by the authority of the counseling/psychology programs. However, there are general institutional standards for the institutional accreditation that can be found on the official website of the DAI (DAI, 2013).

Summary:

There is no distinct profession of professional counseling in Denmark. That fact was manifested by the absence of a counseling professional association. The terms "counseling" and "psychology" are used interchangeably, which blurs the borders of the counseling professional identity. At the same time, there are several graduate level counseling/psychology programs; however, there are no specific standardized criteria to accredit counseling/psychology training programs. Accreditation is awarded to academic institutions.

Due to the fact that Denmark, as a considering sample site, failed to meet criteria for a meta-synthesis sample selection, it was excluded from the further comparison and analysis. At the same time, there are indicated features that manifest the signs of potency for development of counseling as a profession in this country.

France

Counseling Professional Association	There are no counseling professional associations in France. The Association of the School and Career-Counseling Psychologists of France (ACOP-F, Association des Conseillers d'Orientation-Psychologues de France) is the only organization that unites career-counseling psychologists in one professional community (Pouyaud & Guichard, 2013).
Counseling Professional Identity	Cohen-Scali, Guichard, and Gaudron (2009) stated that "counselors in France do not consider themselves to be members of a true specific profession sharing the same professional identity" (p. 330). The community of the professionals who provide counseling is very diverse and "do not form a homogeneous unit" (Cohen-Scali et al., 2009, p. 330).
Counseling Training Programs	There are no university programs in France that offer master's degree in counseling (Cohen-Scali, Guichard, & Gaudron, 2009). The school and career counselors are the only professionals who receive specialized counseling training. The only professional program that recognizes the field of career counseling and prepares school and career counseling psychologists (or COP, Conseillers d'Orientation-Psychologues) was organized by the National Institute for Studies on Work and Vocational Guidance (INETOP, Institut National d'Etudes sur le Travail et l'Orientation Professionnelle) (Pouyaud & Guichard, 2013).
Accreditation Institutions	There is no specialized accreditation body for training programs that prepare this type of professional.

Accreditation Standards	There are no counseling training standards.

Summary:

In France, the counseling profession is not presented as an identified distinct area of mental health service. The only reason to assess this site regarding the criteria applicability for a sample selection was the fact that the training programs for school counselors and career counselors are presented. However, a deeper analysis revealed no accrediting standards for those programs as well as no current tendencies toward formation and enhancement of the counseling professional identity. This site was excluded from a sample selection due to failure to meet the justified criteria.

Germany

Counseling Professional Association	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Beratung (DGfB) [The German Association for Counseling] is a professional association that unites German counseling professionals and enhances the status of counseling as an independent profession. The DGfB developed standards that guide professionals in their practice and in the process of earning the counseling certification (DGfB, n.d.).
Counseling Professional Identity	Counseling is not considered to be a distinct profession in Germany.
Counseling Training Programs	There are no bachelor's programs in counseling. There are a few master's programs; however, that training is provided only by private institutes, rather than the formal higher education system. The counseling programs are

	considered to be a post-educational continuing training that usually lasts around two years. Those private schools are connected to professional associations and are guided regarding their sets of standards. However, those standards lack comparability to those used in the USA (Dr. D. Rohr, personal communication, October 10, 2019). The graduate level programs: The Master of Arts in Counseling at Friedensau Adventist University is state-recognized and accredited by standards of the German Association for Counseling (DGfB) (Friedensau Adventist University, n.d.).
Accreditation Institutions	There are no independent accreditation institutions for counseling training programs in Germany.
Accreditation Standards	Because counseling is not considered to be a distinct profession and an academic discipline, there is no legal regulation of the qualifications, training and professional status of career guidance practitioners and counsellors in Germany. Each training provider defines its own requirements. (Euro Guidance, n.d.).

Summary:

The counseling professional identity is still being developed in Germany. The signs of positive progress are the foundation of the German Association for Counseling (DGfB) and the existence of the graduate level counseling training programs. At the same time, the accrediting system to control the quality of that training has yet to be developed. Nevertheless, the active collaboration of the DGfB with the European Association for Counseling regarding the

promotion of the counseling profession in Germany demonstrates the intention to enhance their professional position and identity. This site was excluded from the sample selection due to its failure to fit the selection criteria.

Greece

Counseling Professional Association	There are several counseling professional associations: • the Greek Society of Counseling and Guidance (established in 1985); • the Panhellenic Association of Counseling and Guidance; • the Greek Society of Vocational Guidance Counselors; • the Greek Association for Counseling (established in 1994 and became a member of the European Association for Counseling); At the same time, "there is no official credentialing agency for counselors or counseling psychologists in Greece" (Malikiosi-Loizos & Giovazolias, 2013, p. 218).
Counseling Professional Identity	The counseling profession is actively developing in Greece; however, there is no official recognition of counseling as a distinct area of practice yet.
Counseling Training Programs	The graduate programs in counseling and counseling psychology are delivered by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens in collaboration with the Democritus University of Thrace. Those programs were established in 2012 (Christodoulidi & Malikiosi-Loizos, 2019; Malikiosi-Loizos & Ivey, 2012). Several foreign graduate programs in counseling are also offered. The two existing and officially recognized graduate counseling programs lead to a master's degree.

	Also, there are several private and public educational institutions that offer counseling and psychotherapy programs that lead to a practitioner's certificate. However, "this certificate is not officially recognized by the state" (Malikiosi-Loizos & Giovazolias, 2013, p. 218). For example, the School of Pedagogical and Technological Education offers a 1-year program of specialization in counseling and guidance (Malikiosi-Loizos & Giovazolias, 2013).
Accreditation Institutions	Currently, there are no accreditation bodies that regulate and control counseling training programs in Greece.
Accreditation Standards	There are no developed accreditation training standards.

Summary:

Despite the fact that counseling has no official recognition as a distinct profession yet, this specific area of mental health practice is actively developing in Greece. The existence of numerous professional associations and counseling training programs displays a positive tendency toward further development. However, the absence of accreditation institutions and training standards disallowed inclusion of this setting in the study sample.

At the same time, the active cooperation of the Greek counselors with the European Association for Counseling manifests that the Greek counseling professional community recognizes the importance of the standardization of the counseling training.

Italy

Counseling Professional Association	There are numerous counseling professional associations in Italy. Some of them that agreed to co-join under the umbrella organization – Federcounseling Association are: • Associazione Italiana di Counseling [Italian Counseling Association] (AICo), • Associazione Nazionale Counselor Relazionali [National Association of Relational Counselors] (ANCoRe), • Associazione Professionale Counselling [Counseling Professional Association] (AProCo), • AssoCounseling, • FAIP Counseling, • REICO, • Società Italiana Counselor e Operatore Olistico [Italian Society of Olistic Counselor and Operator (SICOOL) (Federcounseling, n.d.a).
Counseling Professional Identity	The counseling profession is still developing in Italy. The Italian counselors have to protect their professional identity along with other mental health providers. The goal of the Federcounseling organization is to achieve legal and official recognition for counseling (Marriotti, 2018). There is no licensure requirement for counselors in Italy. However, following the professional initiative to promote voluntary self-regulation to qualify the unregulated professional activity, Law n° 4/2013 was approved by the Italian Parliament that allows counselors "to obtain a certificate of quality and

	professional proficiency from a professional association" (Marriotti, 2018, p. 31).
Counseling Training Programs	In accordance with the information provided on the website of AssoCounseling, there are 96 counseling private schools that offer professional courses to train counselors (AssoCounseling, n.d.b). At the same time, there are no counseling graduate programs.
Accreditation Institutions	In January 2016, several counseling schools initiated the establishment of the ASCO Associazone Scuole di Counseling (Association of Counseling Schools, n.d.), the association that developed a shared curriculum and unifies counseling training standards (Mariotti, 2018).
Accreditation Standards	Currently, there are no training standards that could be compared with those of CACREP (Mariotti, 2018; Remley, 2013). At the same time, AssoCounseling stated that the group of counseling associations united under the umbrella association Federcounseling and the European Association for Counseling collaboratively developed the training standards for counseling schools (AssoCounseling, n.d.; Marriotti, 2018).

Summary:

The Italian way of counseling development displays an unusual pattern that was atypical from other countries. The decision making process regarding the selection of Italy to the study sample was especially challenging because, despite the fact that counseling is still lacks legal recognition in Italy as a distinct area of practice, and no documents available are written in English, the Italian professional counselors bravely compete for their distinct professional niche

with other mental health professionals and demonstrate a clear intention to obtain a legal

professional status in the nearest future (Mariotti, 2018). Also, regardless of the absence of

graduate level counseling programs, there are numerous non-graduate training programs. In

addition, the AssoCounseling association developed a shared curriculum and unified counseling

training standards to enhance and control the quality of the offered education (Mariotti, 2018).

All of those factors display the intensive progress of the Italian counseling society toward the

development of a strong professional identity. The close collaboration with the European

Association for Counseling strengthens that assumption. Nevertheless, the current status lacks fit

with the justified criteria for inclusion in this study.

Netherlands

Counseling Professional Association	Algemene Beroepsvereniging voor Counselling (ABvC) [Professional Association for Counseling] is a professional organization that unites the Dutch counselors and enhances the image of the counseling profession in the Netherlands by establishing and providing accreditation procedure/standards for its membership. There are currently 420 members of AbvC (AbvC, n.d.).
Counseling Professional Identity	The counseling profession was not recognized as a distinct area of practice and is still developing its identity.
Counseling Training Programs	CROHO – Centraal Register Opleidingen Hoger Onderwijs [Central Register of Higher Education Programs] lists all accredited programs in Netherlands. Currently, there are only two counseling programs that have been accredited by NVAO:

	• one master program for organizational coach at the Hague University of Applied Sciences; • one bachelor counseling program at the NTI University of Applied Sciences.
Accreditation Institutions	There are two accreditation bodies in Netherlands: CPION [Central for Initial Education in the Netherlands] is an independent organization that tests, certifies, and records post-initial and continuing education courses (CPION, n.d.). NVAO [Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders] is a quality assurance agency that safeguards the quality of higher education in the Netherlands and Flanders. It accredits existing and new programs and assesses the quality assurance of higher education institutions (NVAO, n.d.). Both of these accrediting bodies provide instructions for the accreditation procedures for higher education institutions without any specific focus on a distinct area of specialization.
Accreditation Standards	When the information regarding specific sets of accreditation standards for counseling training programs was requested, the NVAO stated that counseling is not a registered profession in the Netherlands and the counseling training programs require no specific regulations to be accredited. The evaluation of the document titled *Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands 2018* that provides the information regarding the accreditation procedure for higher education institutions and programs revealed that *Assessment Framework* (NVAO,

	2018) offers a detailed procedure to prepare a higher education institution or a program for accreditation. However, this procedure is unified and standardized for all disciplines and areas of specializations. There are no specific criteria/standards that are needed for a training institution to be awarded with accreditation of counseling training programs.

Summary:

The Netherlands proceed with their own unique way of counseling professional development. Despite the fact that the counseling profession is not a registered profession that is recognized by authorities in the Netherlands, the counseling professional community has initiated steps to strengthen its position by founding the professional association, developing training programs, and controlling these programs with the quality assurance agency. However, due to the absence of accreditation criteria/standards, specifically for counseling training programs, this setting will be excluded from the site sample.

The active cooperation of the Dutch counseling professional society with the European Association for Counseling may be an indication of the intention to strengthen the existent national general standardized training standards with regulations that specifically focused on the counseling development.

Romania

Counseling Professional Association	ACROM [Asociaţia Consilierilor Români], the Romanian Counselors Association, is a professional counseling organization. The organization was founded in 2010 and it is intended "to represent and support all Romanian counselors" (ACROM, n. d.).

Counseling Professional Identity	The counseling professional identity is developing in a very unique way in Romania. There is no recognition of counseling as a distinct profession. The title "counselor" is not protected and is often used interchangeably with other mental health professions (Szilagyi & Nedelcu, 2013). At the same time, the counseling training programs are developing.
Counseling Training Programs	The first university that offered the career counseling master's program in Romania is the University Politehnica of Bucharest. This program was developed in 2003 in cooperation with the National Boards for Certified Counselors (Szilagyi & Nedelcu, 2013). Despite the fact that there is no recognition of counseling as a distinct profession, the amount of graduate level counseling programs is constantly growing. Today, there are several master's programs in school counseling and career counseling offered by other universities around the country.
Accreditation Institutions	The professional accreditation system for counseling is still not developed (Szilagyi & Nedelcu, 2013).
Accreditation Standards	There are no developed accrediting standards.

Summary:

The Romanian counselors continue to develop their professional identity by establishing a counseling professional association and by increasing an amount of graduate counseling training programs. At the same time, the status of counseling was not yet legally accepted and recognized. The accrediting system and standards are still undeveloped. At this time, many

Romanian counselors apply to the EAC standards and regulations to enhance their professional credentials and to standardize their counseling training programs.

Switzerland

Counseling Professional Association	The Swiss Association for Counseling (referred to as Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Beratung (SGfB) in Swiss German) is an organization that was charged by the government to organize and conduct the professional examination in psychological and counseling studies (SGfB, 2019).
Counseling Professional Identity	The counseling professional identity is still developing, but the efforts of the SGfB are recognizable. The term "counseling" is used interchangeably with "psychology" and "psychotherapy." There is no licensure for counselors.
Counseling Training Programs	There are 32 institutions that obtained the SGfB certification for its counseling programs (SGfB, 2019).
Accreditation Institutions	The SGfB takes the role of an accreditation body and provides certification for institutions with counseling programs. The certification procedure requires the application process where certain aspects of training programs will be considered for organizational membership decision. That membership allows the awarded institution to earn the SGfB certification for a training course.
Accreditation Standards	The application form of the SGfB certification requires the information about a certifying training course; however, there are no specific and clear criteria for assessment of the requested parameters. The certification system is still being developed.

Summary:

Switzerland is a setting that is very close to meeting the criteria for inclusion in this meta-synthesis sample. The status of counseling profession was already noticeably developed. The SGfB contributes significantly to enhance the professional identity and to develop counseling training programs based on professional regulations. The only factor that fails to fit the criteria is the absence of a well-developed set of standards for counseling training programs. However, the SGfB appears to be approaching this essential step because the procedure of accreditation already exists.

As can be seen on the provided tables, the listed but excluded setting candidates failed to meet the main selection criterion – "existence of accrediting standards for counseling training programs". Also, the information regarding these settings is unavailable in English. Despite those factors, the presentation of the collected and generated data is important due to its value for the future researchers in the field of counseling globalization. Also, this data illustrates the significance of the work that the European Association for Counseling initiated to promote the counseling profession in each European country and to support counseling training development across Europe.

Six out of eight excluded settings are the members of the European Association for Counseling (EAC) that is dedicated to developing counseling as a profession throughout Europe. The EAC is a unifying link to all European counseling communities that are unable to obtain legal support from their national governments and to strengthen their counseling professional identity. The EAC offers the set of accrediting standards for counseling training programs to enhance the quality of that training across Europe and to strengthen the position of counseling profession in each of the European countries.

The provided information illustrates the time slice of the current professional development of the counseling profession in different European countries. The counseling profession, as described in the excluded settings, is in a variety of different developmental stages. Each country has its own unique way of enacting counseling development. All of the eight settings manifest a varying degree of intention to develop and promote the counseling profession. However, the absence of such essential components as accrediting standards and institutions to control the quality of training hinders fast progress towards achieving their goals.

The following table displays the level of counseling professional development in each of the discussed, yet excluded country, by indicating the existence or absence of essential attributes of the counseling profession:

Attributes of counseling professional development	Denmark	France	Germany	Greece	Italy	Netherlands	Romania	Switzerland
Professional Identity								
Professional Association(s)			√	√	√	√	√	√
Graduate Level Training	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Accreditation Institution(s)	√				√	√		√
Accreditation Standards for Counseling Training Programs	*				developing	*		developing
* - The standardized training regulations are applied but the standards are not specifically developed for counseling training programs								

At the same time, the EAC set of standards can become a solid professional platform for the European counseling communities that are willing to promote their profession. Also, the EAC accrediting training standards are the first step toward counseling globalization process by offering the unified training guidelines for counselors across Europe.

Due to the fact that the main purpose of the Professional Training Standards and Accreditation Committee (PTSAC) of the EAC is "to acknowledge, respect, and address the tremendous differences that exist within the countries in Europe" (EAC, 2016, p. 4), the EAC and the PTSAC were selected for inclusion in the sample settings of this study. The provided information regarding the eight excluded settings demonstrates the role of the EAC in development of counseling profession across Europe and explains the reasoning for selecting the EAC set of standards for the meta-synthesis comparison and analysis.

The Selected Sample

The selected five site settings met all the established criteria and were included in the qualitative meta-synthesis sample selection. However, a minor exception was made regarding criteria selections. The European countries, where counseling training and accreditation standards were developed, as of yet, manifested no clear status of counseling professional identity, due to confusion with language/terminology. The issue of terminology confusion is still a subject of discussion when addressing cultural differences regarding the term "counseling" throughout the European countries. This factor was acknowledged by the researcher of this study while considering the application of the criterion regarding counseling being recognized and distinguished as a distinct professional area.

The following tables display the fit of the selected settings to the justified criteria.

Ireland

Counseling Professional Association	The Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) is a national organization that is aimed to set, maintain and develop standards in the practice of counseling and psychotherapy. The IACP represents over 4,200 members and is considered to be the largest Counselling and Psychotherapy Association in Ireland (IACP, 2019).
Counseling Professional Identity	The Irish professionals and public community make no distinction between terms "counseling" and "psychotherapy" and use these terms interchangeably (O'Morain, et al., 2012); There are no licensure regulations for professional psychologists, counselors, and psychotherapists; there are certification bodies that control the quality of practice (Ellis, Creaner, Hutman, & Timulak, 2015; O'Morain, et al., 2012);
Counseling Training Programs	The IACP website provides the list of currently accredited courses. At the beginning of 2020, the following statistics are: Bachelor level counseling programs: 18 Master level counseling programs: 3 Diploma in Counseling and Psychotherapy: 7 (IACP, 2020). The information regarding counseling programs that were not IACP accredited is unavailable.
Accreditation Institutions	The Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) plays the role of an accrediting body to develop, maintain, and control the quality of counseling training programs in Ireland.

	The IACP and the British Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy (BACP) have a reciprocal agreement to recognize each other's counselor and psychotherapist accreditation schemes (BACP, 2019; IACP, 2019).
Accreditation Standards	The IACP provides the Criteria for Counseling/Psychotherapy Courses seeking IACP course accreditation (IACP, 2018)

Malta

Counseling Professional Association	The Malta Association for the Counselling Profession (MACP) is a professional association incorporating professionals who offer counselling services (MACP, 2011).
Counseling Professional Identity	The counseling profession is legally recognized and distinguished in Malta and regulated by law. The Council for the Counselling Profession (CCP) provides licensure to exercise the counselling profession (MACP, 2015).
Counseling Training Programs	The University of Malta is the only higher education institution in Malta that provides MA in Counseling. That program was developed as a golden standard of the counseling profession in Malta and is considered as the minimum qualification for the counseling profession (MACP, 2015).
Accreditation Institutions	Council for the Counselling Profession (CCP) is a professional organization that regulates counseling as a profession in Malta by the Counselling Profession Act 2015 (Act V of 2015) (Ministry for Justice, Culture, and Local Government, n.d.).

Accreditation Standards	Counseling is regulated by law in Malta. The Counselling Profession Act 2015 (Act V of 2015) is the primary guidance and a set of standards for the counseling profession and training programs in Malta. Subsidiary Legislation 327.330 of By-laws for the master's degree in counseling is the document that provides standards for the Master level counseling training programs.

United Kingdom

Counseling Professional Association	**British Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy (BACP)** In accordance with the information provided on the BACP website, BACP is recognized as the leading accreditation body for training courses in counseling and psychotherapy around the UK (BACP, 2019a). The British Association for Counseling was established in the 1970's. However, their name was changed to the British Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy in September 2000 due to the recognition of "the need to represent psychotherapy as well as counseling" (BACP, 2019a; Bimrose & Hughes, 2013, p. 186).
Counseling Professional Identity	The counseling professional community has a long-standing history and a well-developed structure. There are over 49,000 members of BACP (BACP, 2019a). At the same time, with regards to terminology, the BACP makes no differentiation between counseling and psychotherapy practitioners by using both terms interchangeably.

Counseling Training Programs	United Kingdom is comprised of four constituent countries: England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. There are over 80 master's counseling programs in United Kingdom. In most cases, the counseling programs are joined with psychology/psychotherapy programs.
Accreditation Institutions	The BACP is recognized as "the leading accreditation body for training courses in counselling and psychotherapy" (BACP, n.d.). One of the purposes of the BACP is to set up counseling training standards and to control a high quality of professional training courses.
Accreditation Standards	The BACP offers a well-developed course accreditation procedure that includes a set of standards and criteria. The BACP and the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) have a reciprocal agreement to recognize each other's counselor and psychotherapist accreditation schemes (BACP, 2019a).

United States

Counseling Professional Association	There are numerous professional organizations that support counselors across the United States. The American Counseling Association is the world's largest association exclusively representing professional counselors in various practice settings. The ACA is dedicated to the growth and enhancement of the counseling profession (ACA, n.d.).
Counseling Professional Identity	Counseling in the United States is more developed as a profession than in many other parts of the world (Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir, et al., 2009). There are over 66,000 National Certified Counselors (NCCs) in more than 40

	countries (NBCC, 2019) and 120,000 Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs) (Neukrug, 2017).
Counseling Training Programs	In accordance with the 2018 CACREP Annual Report (CACREP, 2019b), there are currently 871 CACREP accredited counseling programs: 789 master's and 82 doctoral counseling programs. There are 78 counseling programs that are currently in process of being reviewed for CACREP accreditation (CACREP, 2019b).
Accreditation Institutions	CACREP is an accreditation agency and the top accrediting board for master's and doctoral graduate level counseling programs in the United States and throughout the world. CACREP is recognized as an accreditor by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) (CACREP, 2019a). The Masters in Psychology and Counseling Accreditation Council (MPCAC) is an independent accreditation agency that accredits master's counseling and psychology programs. (MPCAC, 2019).
Accreditation Standards	There are two main sets of accreditation standards for counseling training programs in the United States: CACREP and MPCAC.

The CACREP accreditation institution and the 2016 CACREP accrediting standards were selected for this meta-synthesis comparison with the European accrediting standards due to its wide recognition as the golden standard for counseling training programs. Based on the conducted literature review, which revealed that CACREP has "an established history as the "flagship"" and is more respected and recognized in the professional community, the CACREP accreditation body and standards were selected over MPCAC for comparison (King, 2017, p.1).

The EAC

The European Association for Counseling and the EAC standards for accreditation of counseling training courses were selected for this meta-synthesis sample due to the influential role that this organization plays in promoting and developing counseling as a profession across Europe. Many European counseling societies that, as yet, have insufficiently developed accrediting institutions and sets of standards, apply to the EAC standards as guidance to promote their profession and to assure a high quality of training. Thus, the EAC setting appears to be essential to present in this meta-synthesis comparison.

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Data Analysis Procedures

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In order to approach the qualitative data systematically and to enable the comprehensive analysis of the material based on the meta-synthesis guidance, specific themes (or categories) were outlined, in order to create classifications for further comparisons within sampling settings. At the initial stage of the data collection process, each European professional association and council for accreditations was noted as having its own unique way, structure, and conception for organizing a set of accreditation standards that made arranging a unified classification form for the comparison difficult. Therefore, the themes were classified based on the 2016 CACREP standards document structure:

Specialty Areas
The CACREP Master's-Level Training Accreditation Requirements
The Learning Environment Standards
The Institution
The Academic Unit
Faculty and Staff

Professional Counseling Identity Standards
The Foundation of the Program
The Counseling Curriculum
Professional Practice Standards
Practicum
Internship
Supervision
Evaluation Standards in the Program
Program Evaluation
Evaluation of Students
Evaluation of Faculty
Term of Accreditation

Because the European standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs were analyzed in comparison to the American CACREP standards, the CACREP standards document structure was a starting point for comparison. However, during data collection, some discrepancies appeared. They occurred when the only one-way theme classification, based on the CACREP standards, failed to gather the unique data of the European standards to compare the U.S. data within the European segment, which was based on the European accreditation systems.

The meta-synthesis raised two research questions to explore:

RQ 1: How do European Standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to each other?

RQ 2: How do European Standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to CACREP standards?

Based on those queries, the theme classification was reconsidered and revised, so that the analysis procedure allowed for the assessment of all unique features of the European research segment and to assure that the meta-synthesis compared the equivalently comparable categories. For that purpose, the themes common for the European sample settings were classified first and then compared within their classification and the European sampling.

The Master's-Level Training Accreditation Requirements
Eligibility criteria for accreditation
Admission Requirements
Course Staff
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When the common European themes were identified, the data analysis process moved to its second stage: the unified European theme classification was compared to the theme classification based on the 2016 CACREP standards document structure.

The following tables present the data within the determined categories (themes) of the selected settings.

Ireland

The Master's-Level Training Accreditation Requirements	
Eligibility criteria for accreditation	• Course providers must have professional indemnity insurance coverage for themselves and their students (Criteria 1.6., IACP, 2018); • All Courses must have written Policies and Procedures in place, with particular emphasis on a Duty of Care towards students and their clients, in the event of their course "Ceasing to Trade." (Criteria 1.11., IACP, 2018); • Training courses should be a minimum of two years full or part-time duration and consist of not less than 450 hours of class contact time (Criteria 1.2., IACP, 2018); • The course should have an external examiner with no current association with the institute, course, staff, or trainees. Also, the examiner should be independent and unbiased (Criteria 1.7., IACP, 2018).
Admission Requirements	• At intake, a minimum of 12 students is required to be admitted in any one course cohort (Criteria 2.1., IACP, 2018);

	• At intake, not more than 30 students may be admitted in any one course cohort with a ratio of 1 Core Staff Member to 10 students (Criteria 2.2., IACP, 2018);
	• Prospective applicants should be provided with detailed and accurate information about the course, including its structure, aims, staffing, content, assessment requirements, fees (including any 'extras' e.g. supervision/ personal therapy fees) and conditions of participation (e.g. time commitments) (Criteria 2.5., IACP, 2018);
	• A panel of three, with at least two core staff members plus one other appropriately qualified person should be directly involved in the selection process. The interview should be conducted by two members of this selection panel (Criteria 2.9., IACP, 2018);
	• The admission procedures should include the instruments to assess evidence of the following: a. Self-awareness, maturity, and stability; b. Ability to make use of and reflect upon life experience; c. Capacity to cope with the emotional demands of the course; d. Capacity to cope with the academic demands of the course; e. Experience in personal development/group work, counseling/psychotherapy skills and theory; f. Potential to form a client/counselor/psychotherapist relationship;

	g. Ability to self-evaluate and give and receive constructive feedback; h. Potential for further development of the above; i. Awareness of the nature of prejudice and oppression (Criteria 2.3., IACP, 2018); • Selectors should seek evidence that an applicant's primary need is not for personal therapy or emotional support (Criteria 2.8., IACP, 2018); • Evidence for required attributes as listed above should be clearly defined (Criteria 2.4., IACP, 2018).
Course Staff	• Core Trainers must be Accredited Members of IACP and appropriately qualified to teach and supervise the main elements of the course (Criteria 3.6., IACP, 2018). • Core Trainers must possess and adhere to the following: a. Substantial experience of supervised counseling / psychotherapy for at least five years after accreditation, and currently practicing; b. Understand the principles of adult education, how adults learn and have trained as trainers; c. At least 4 years' experience in counselling / psychotherapy training;

	d. Attend regular external supervision and external consultation on training work; e. Have had Personal Therapy; f. Commit to ongoing personal and professional development (Criteria 3.6., IACP, 2018). • The staff must consist of at least two core staff members for the duration of the training of any course cohort (up to a maximum of 20 students). Both core staff members must have at least 60% contact time with students and have central involvement in their assessment. A third core staff member is required for any additional students up to the maximum of 30 students. (Criteria 3.3., IACP, 2018); • Core staff must be familiar with and agree to work within the current version of the IACP's Code of Ethics and Practice (Criteria 3.8., IACP, 2018).
Professional Counseling Identity Standards	
The Core Curriculum	• Courses should provide a clear statement of the course rationale, philosophy and design, including methods, which is consistent with the actual structure of the course and closely related to the counselling/psychotherapy work for which the students are training (Criteria 4.1., IACP, 2018); • All courses should provide a detailed study of at least one major model of counselling and/or psychotherapy with an introduction to

| | other models for comparison, contrast and critical analysis (Criteria 4.2., IACP, 2018);

• There should be a balance between theory and practice and between all elements of the course (Criteria 4.4., IACP, 2018).

The IACP set of standards provided no clear structure of the counseling curriculum. The IACP Course Accreditation Criteria manual (2018) suggested that the course content should cover the following areas:

1. Work on self

• Courses should provide regular and systematic approaches to self-awareness work, individually and in a group, which are congruent with the course rationale and which ensure that each student examines and explores his/her personal process (Criteria 5.1., IACP, 2018);

• All students must have completed a minimum of 25 hours of Personal Therapy before the commencement of working with clients (Criteria 5.5., IACP, 2018);

2. Work with clients

Students must have opportunities to work with individual clients in a mode consistent with the course rationale, philosophy and design, and with the primary work for which they are being trained (Criteria 6.1., IACP, 2018). |

The Program Duration	Accreditation will be provided to training courses that are a minimum of two years full or part-time duration and are of not less than 450 hours of class contact time (Criteria 1.2., IACP, 2018).
Professional Practice Standards	
Personal Therapy (Personal Development)	• Courses should provide regular and systematic approaches to self-awareness work, individually and in a group. This work should be congruent with the course rationale. Students should examine and explore their personal process (Criteria 5.1., IACP, 2018); • Students must maintain monitoring records of their self-development and submit a report showing evidence of personal growth (Criteria 5.3., IACP, 2018); • Each student should undertake a minimum of 50 hours of Personal Therapy and to ensure that this is pursued during the training period (Criteria 5.4., IACP, 2018);
Practice	• The minimum acceptable number of client hours under supervision is 100 (120 from 1st September 2020) (Criteria 6.5., IACP, 2018); • In order to be admitted to practice, students must: a) Be individually assessed for their readiness to take clients; b) Have completed a minimum of 25 hours of Personal Therapy; c) Have engaged in Supervision;

	d) Have successfully completed Garda Vetting (Criteria 6.3., IACP, 2018); • The training organization is responsible for ensuring that students have access to appropriate sources of client referral Criteria 6.2., IACP, 2018); • It is inappropriate for students in training to gain their client counselling/psychotherapy experience through private or independent practice Criteria 6.4., IACP, 2018); • Client Work refers to specific one-to-one counseling/psychotherapy relationships with clients over 18 years of age (Criteria 6.6., IACP, 2018). • The course must monitor students' ability to establish and maintain ongoing therapeutic relationships (Criteria 6.10., IACP, 2018).
Supervision	• Supervision must be undertaken in accordance with current IACP requirements (Criteria 7.1., IACP, 2018); • Supervisors are required to meet the current IACP requirements and: a) Supervisory experience at least 5 years; b) Have had personal therapy, either individual or group; c) Have an accredited theoretical background; d) Have a commitment to ongoing professional development (Criteria 7.7., IACP, 2018).

	• Supervisors providing external supervision or internal group supervision must be accredited as supervisors with IACP, IAHIP or BACP (Criteria 7.2., IACP, 2018); • A mix of group and individual supervision is required (Criteria 7.8., IACP, 2018); • Groups must meet for a minimum of 2 hours per month over two academic years. Minimum attendance is set at 80%. Group Supervisor's Report must be completed post every progression cycle. (Criteria 7.9., IACP, 2018); • External one-to-one supervision must be no less than 1 hour's presenting time to 5 hours client work, subject to an overall minimum of 1 hour of presenting time per month per student (Criteria 7.10., IACP, 2018);
Evaluation Standards in the Program	
Course Evaluation	The IACP will continue to monitor courses after accreditation (IACP, 2018, p.11).
Evaluation of Students	• Courses must provide a progressive monitoring and assessment of skills development (Criteria 9.1.iii., IACP, 2018); • A course must adopt a mode of assessment which is congruent with the philosophy and rationale of the course, with the appropriate combination of all staff, supervisors, peer and self-assessment (Criteria 12.1., IACP, 2018);

	• All assessment criteria must be in line with academic standards, be clear and specific, and made available to students (Criteria 12.5., IACP, 2018).
Term of Accreditation	
Term of Accreditation	The IACP accreditation is awarded for six years.

Malta

The Master's-Level Training Accreditation Requirements	
Eligibility criteria for accreditation	At this moment, a master's degree program in Counseling issued by the University of Malta is the only graduate counseling training program that was accredited by the Council of the Counseling Profession in Malta (The Laws of Malta, 2015, CAP. 538, §2). No eligibility criteria for possible accreditation of other candidates/institutions were found.
Admission Requirements	• The applicant should possess a bachelor's degree with at least Second-Class Honors or Category II in one of the human or social sciences. The candidate should have a minimum of one-year experience working directly in a formal human or psychological setting (The Laws of Malta, 2015, S.L.327.330, §3, p. 2). • The applicant should demonstrate the necessary aptitude and disposition to follow the course with profit (The Laws of Malta, 2015, S.L.327.330, §3.2, p. 2).

	• Professional aptitude and disposition should be measured by personality testing and an extended personal interview (The Laws of Malta, 2015, S.L.327.330, §3.3, p. 2). • The interviewing commission appointed by the Board of Studies should be composed of at least three members (The Laws of Malta, 2015, S.L.327.330, §3.7, p. 2). • Applicants who obtain less than 60% for the professional aptitude and the disposition criterion should not be admitted into the course (The Laws of Malta, 2015, S.L.327.330, §3, p. 2).
Course Staff	Supervisor should be a person in possession of a full warrant that is trained in the area of supervising counselors not less than 30 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) or equivalent as recognized by the competent authority in a European Member State or by the CCP and the National Commission of Further and Higher Education (The Laws of Malta, 2015, CAP. 538, §2, p. 1). Other Staff positions are not explained on the ACT V of 2015.
Professional Counseling Identity Standards	
The Core Curriculum	• The program of study should be published by the Board of Studies after approval by Senate not less than eight months prior to the commencement of the course (The Laws of Malta, 2015, S.L.327.330, §5.4, p. 2). • The program curriculum should include the following components: theory, number of hours of training, personal development, and

	exercise in counseling. The components should have between 90 and 120 ECTS (The Laws of Malta, 2015, CAP. 538, §2, p. 2). • Students shall be required to submit an individual dissertation of approximately 20,000 words in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Board of Studies (The Laws of Malta, 2015, S.L.327.330, §7.1, p. 3).
The Program Duration	• The course shall extend over four semesters of full-time studies or the equivalent in part-time studies (The Laws of Malta, 2015, S.L.327.330, §4, p. 2). • The program of study should comprise study-units to which a total of 120 credits are assigned, of which 90 credits areas are assigned to be taught as study-units and 30 credits are assigned to a dissertation study-unit (The Laws of Malta, 2015, S.L.327.330, §5, p. 2).
Professional Practice Standards	
Personal Therapy (Personal Development)	Throughout the course, students are required to complete 20 hours of personal counselling with a counsellor of their choice from an approved list (The Laws of Malta, 2015, S.L.327.330, §5.4, p. 2).
Practice	Not explained on the ACT V of 2015
Supervision	• Each student shall be assigned a supervisor who shall provide guidance and advice on a regular basis during the period of study (The Laws of Malta, 2015, S.L.327.330, §7.2, p. 3). • Students shall be required to have regular contact with their supervisor (The Laws of Malta, 2015, S.L.327.330, §8, p. 3).

Evaluation Standards in the Program	
Course Evaluation	Not explained on the ACT V of 2015.
Evaluation of Students	• Supervisors should submit to the Board of Studies progress reports of each student under their supervision at the end of each semester (The Laws of Malta, 2015, S.L.327.330, §8.2, p. 3). • The assessment of each taught study-unit should be completed by the end of the semester in which the teaching of the study unit held (The Laws of Malta, 2015, S.L.327.330, §6, p. 2). • Students who fail the assessment of not more than four taught study-units should be given the opportunity to re-sit the failed assessments during the September supplementary examination session (The Laws of Malta, 2015, S.L.327.330, §6.2, p. 2). • Students who fail to pass the supervised practicum should not have the right to a supplementary assessment in the same academic year but should be required to redo the practicum during an additional year of studies (The Laws of Malta, 2015, S.L.327.330, §6.5, p. 3). • Supervisors shall submit to the Board of Studies progress reports for each student under their supervision at the end of each semester of studies (The Laws of Malta, 2015, S.L.327.330, §8.2, p. 3).

Term of Accreditation	
Term of Accreditation	Not explained on the ACT V of 2015.

United Kingdom

The Master's-Level Training Accreditation Requirements	
Eligibility criteria for accreditation	The course seeking accreditation must: • Ensure the course provider has current organizational member of BACP (Criteria A1, BACP, 2019c); • Provide an in-depth training in counseling/psychotherapy to practitioner level (Criteria A2, BACP, 2019c); • Consist of least 400 hours of face-to-face training (classroom-based learning) (Criteria A2, BACP, 2019c); • Require students to complete a practice placement of least 100 hours client work as an integral part of the course (Criteria A3, BACP, 2019c); • Require the client work to be supervised to BACP course accreditation standard as a minimum; • Require the majority of its staff team to be accredited with BACP/equivalent standard with another body (Criteria A5, BACP, 2019c);

	• Require all course staff to be members of a counseling/psychotherapy professional body that has a complaints procedure (Criteria A5, BACP, 2019c);
	
	• It must be demonstrated that the training provider is submitting a specific course for accreditation, rather than a network of courses (Criteria A7, BACP, 2019c);
	
	• The course must provide appropriate accommodation and teaching and learning resources, library facilities, and other learning support facilities for students, plus access to appropriate recording equipment (Criteria B2.4., BACP, 2019d);
	
	• The course must submit evidence to demonstrate the accountability of the training provider for the course. This will include published policy and procedures on:
	
	   a. admission
	
	   b. fees
	
	   c. placements
	
	   d. assessments
	
	   e. appeals
	
	   f. complaints
	
	   g. quality assurance and enhancement (Criteria A8, BACP, 2019c);

Admission Requirements	The course applicants should be assessed with regard to the following aspects or the potential for developing them: a) Self-awareness, maturity, and stability;

	b) Ability to make use of and reflect upon the life experience; c) Capacity to cope with the emotional demands of the course; d) Ability to cope with the intellectual and academic requirement e) Ability to form a helping relationship; f) Ability to be self-critical and use both positive and negative feedback g) Awareness of the nature of prejudice and oppression; h) Awareness of issues of difference and equality; i) Ability to recognize the need for personal and professional support; j) Competence in, or the aptitude to develop generic professional skills, including literacy, numeracy, information technology, administrative skills, self-management skills, communication and interpersonal skills (Criteria B1.3, BACP, 2019c); The applicants must be provided with explanations of how the assessment will be conducted.
Course Staff	• The course must provide evidence of its staffing structure that clearly demonstrates lines of responsibility (Criteria A9, BACP, 2019c). • All course staff must be members of an appropriate professional body with a complaints procedure to which they are subject (Criteria A5, BACP, 2019c). • The course must have at least two core members of staff who have substantive involvement in admission, assessment, course

	management and decision making, in addition to teaching (Criteria A4, BACP, 2019c); • The majority of the course staff team should be accredited with BACP or equivalent standard with another body (Criteria A6, BACP, 2019c); • All course staff must be appropriately qualified and demonstrate competence between them to cover all elements of the course (Criteria B2.1., BACP, 2019c).
	Professional Counseling Identity Standards
The Core Curriculum	The BACP distinguishes four subject areas that should determine the core curriculum for the training program: 1. The professional role and responsibility of the therapist; 2. Understanding the client; 3. The therapeutic process; • The social, professional and organizational context for therapy (Criteria B9.1, BACP, 2019c). These subject areas are not intended to be delivered as separate units or modules within a sequential format. Instructors may teach the content of the subject areas in the order that best suits them and their students (BACP, 2019a).
The Program Duration	There must be a minimum of 400 hours of direct teaching or instruction time. (Criteria A2, BACP, 2019c);

Professional Practice Standards	
Personal Therapy (Personal Development)	The BACP Accreditation Scheme: no direct requirement for students' personal therapy (personal development) is stated. At the same time, Criteria B2.8 states, "Ensure that the students have the opportunity to benefit from a regular process of self-exploration, self-examination and reflection in a confidential setting in order to develop an understanding of themselves", which may be referred to as students' personal therapy (BACP, 2019c, p.3).
Practice	• Students must undertake a minimum of 100 hours of supervised practice exclusive of missed sessions (Criteria A3, BACP, 2019c); • The placement must be integrated into the course rather than being completely separate, optional or adjunct to the course (Criteria A3, BACP, 2019c); • The work must be undertaken with real clients (i.e. not role play and not with life partners, family members or fellow students), but must not be private practice (Criteria A3, BACP, 2019c); • All placement work must be congruent with the course, i.e. have the same theoretical and client orientation (Criteria A3, BACP, 2019c);
Supervision	• The course must inform students about different methods of supervision and prepare them for the effective use of supervision as a professional requirement throughout their working life (Criteria B4.11., BACP, 2019d);

	- The course must ensure that students have regular and sufficient supervision in line with the requirements of the Ethical Framework. A mix of individual and group supervision is strongly recommended (Criteria B4.12., BACP, 2019d). - The supervision must be at least fortnightly in frequency, not fall below an overall amount of 1.5 hours per month and require at least one hours' presentation per for eight hours client work (Criteria B4.13., BACP, 2019d); - The course must have specific criteria for the selection of supervisors (Criteria B4.15., BACP, 2019d);
Evaluation Standards in the Program	
Course Evaluation	- The course must provide on-going opportunities for students and staff to meet as a whole community to reflect on all aspects of the course (Criteria B8.1., BACP, 2019d); - The course must give students regular opportunities to evaluate their training experiences and give feedback on the course (Criteria B8.2., BACP, 2019d); - The course must demonstrate that it provides opportunities for feedback from persons external to the course (an external examiner, course consultant, and/or complaints mediator) (Criteria B8.4., BACP, 2019d);

	• The course is required to demonstrate how it reviews and amends the training program in regard of professional development (Criteria B8.6., BACP, 2019d);
Evaluation of Students	• The course must have clear published learning outcomes for the training program (Criteria B6.1., BACP, 2019d); • The course must have clear and published criteria across all elements of the practitioner training for student assessment, which are consistent with its aims and standards (Criteria B6.2., BACP, 2019d); • The course must demonstrate that it has an assessment process which includes regular on-going constructive feedback through which students are helped to identify and build upon their strengths and which takes a developmental approach to their difficulties (Criteria B6.5., BACP, 2019d); • The annual assessment process must be monitored by an external examiner who must be appropriately qualified and have no current association with the training provider or the course, or any personal or social relationship with any of the course staff or students (Criteria B6.11., BACP, 2019d). • The course should provide evidence that students are assessed against clear and specific criteria as being competent to practice with real clients (Criteria B6.9., BACP, 2019d).

Term of Accreditation	
Term of Accreditation	The BACP accreditation is awarded for five years.

The EAC

The Master's-Level Training Accreditation Requirements	
Eligibility criteria for accreditation	A Counseling Training Organization must: • Become a registered General Member of the EAC; • Be constituted according to the laws of the country in which it is located; • Possess transparent and accountable administrative and financial structures; • Be concerned with or have an interest in practice and development of counseling as defined by the EAC; • Endorse the aims, objectives, and regulations of the EAC (EAC, n.d.). Also, in support of the application, the following documentations should be provided: • Date of constitution; • The Institute's financial and legal structure; • Protocol for the AGM/Constitutional meeting; • Institute's latest version of Statues and/or Operating Regulations; • The Institute's Code of Ethics;

	• The Institute's Training Standards;
	• Details of training courses held or recommended;
	• Description of Accreditation Procedures;
	• Average number of students attached to the Institute (EAC, n.d.). All training courses must be accredited individually. The status of a General Organization Training does not allow the Institute to promote their courses as accredited courses until they have been individually submitted and scrutinized by the PTSAC and accreditation is notified and awarded (EAC, n.d.).
Admission Requirements	Not explained on the PTSAC.
Course Staff	Not explained on the PTSAC.
Professional Counseling Identity Standards	
The Core Curriculum	The Course should provide a balance of theory, experience, supervision, counseling skills and commitment of professional development (CPD) by students. The theoretical core should include: • Clear understanding of core theoretical models of counseling; • Theories of personality; • Theories of change or client movement; • Models of human development; • Understanding of psychological dysfunction; • Understanding of ethics and professional practice;

	• The history of counseling and a study of at least two other counseling approaches; • Study of cultural differences and awareness processes (EAC, 2015, Criteria 6.2).
The Program Duration	The program is normally completed in a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 6 years duration. The process includes: • 450 hours of course work including personal development, theory, and skills; • A minimum of 50 hours of personal therapy consistent with the model of practice; • 100 hours of supervised counseling practice during training; • An extra 450 hours under supervision after qualification while working towards professional accreditation (EAC, 2015, Criteria 5.2).
Professional Practice Standards	

Personal Therapy (Personal Development)	Personal development should include the following components:
	
	 1) Facilitate awareness of personal issues;
	
	 2) Facilitate ongoing growth in
	
	    a) Intellectual understanding and knowledge
	
	    b) Emotional maturity
	
	    c) Acceptance of self and others
	
	 3) Experience being in the client role with a formalized professional counseling relationship

	4) Facilitate the development of a global perspective of self in relation to the world (EAC, 2015, Criteria 6.5). A minimum of 50 hours of personal therapy consistent with the model of practice is required (EAC, 2015, Criteria 5.2.2).
Practice	100 hours of supervised counseling practice during training. Training programs must ensure that trainee counselors pursue their supervised practice in an appropriate environment and in a formalized contracted counseling arrangement (EAC, 2015, Criteria 6.4).
Supervision	The EAC recognizes that in some countries, practitioners will experience difficulties to have supervision from an accredited or professional counselor. Due to this situation, the supervision from a qualified professional in an allied field with an understanding of counseling as defined by EAC is required (EAC, 2015, Criteria 7.1).
Evaluation Standards in the Program	
Course Evaluation	Not explained on the PTSAC.
Evaluation of Students	Not explained on the PTSAC.
Term of Accreditation	
Term of Accreditation	The EAC accreditation is awarded for five years.

United States

Specialty Areas	Clinical Mental Health Counseling School Counseling College Counseling and Students Affairs Career Counseling Addiction Counseling Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling
The CACREP Master's-Level Training Accreditation Requirements	
The Learning Environment Standards	
The Institution	• should clearly identify the academic unit as part of the institution's graduate degree offerings; • should accurately describe the academic unit, the core counselor education program faculty, and each program and specialty area offered; • should support the counseling program financially; • should have adequate research and scholarly resources available; • should provide support for faculty and an adequate instructional environment; • should provide information for students about available services for personal counseling (CACREP, 2016, Section 1).

The Academic Unit	- should require a minimum of 60 semester credit hours or 90 quarter credit hours; - should attract, enroll, and retain a diverse group of students and faculty; - should have an admission process that considers cultural context, aptitude, potential for success, and career goals; - should provide students with orientation and a handbook that includes a mission statement, information about professional organizations, expectation of students, information about remediation and dismissal; - should have a ratio of full-time equivalent (FTE) students to FTE faculty no more than 12:1 (CACREP, 2016, Section 1).
Faculty and Staff	- have earned doctoral degrees in counselor education, preferably from a CACREP-accredited program, or have related doctoral degrees; - should be involved in appropriate professional and scholarly activities; - should determine program curricula and establish operational policies and procedures for the program; - should have relevant experience in the area they are teaching; - should be identified as the practicum and internship coordinator for the academic unit and /or program (CACREP, 2016, Section 1).
Professional Counseling Identity Standards	
The Foundation of the Program	The counselor education program has a publicly available mission statement and program objectives;

	• Students should actively participate in professional counseling related activities (e.g., professional organizations, workshops, and seminars) (CACREP, 2016, Section 2).
The Counseling Curriculum	I. Syllabi should be available for review by all enrolled or prospective students and should include: a. content areas, b. knowledge and skill outcomes, c. methods of instruction, d. required text(s) and/or reading(s), e. student performance evaluation criteria and procedures, f. a disability accommodation policy and procedure statement. II. Current counseling-related research is infused in the curriculum. III. Eight common core curricular experiences should be covered in the program: 1. Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice 2. Social and Cultural Diversity 3. Human Growth and Development 4. Career Development 5. Counseling and Helping Relationships 6. Group Counseling and Group Work 7. Assessment and Testing

	8. Research and Program Evaluation (CACREP, 2016, Section 2).
Professional Practice Standards	
Practicum	1. Students must complete supervised counseling practicum experiences that total a minimum of 100 clock hours over a full academic term that is a minimum of 10 weeks. 2. Practicum students must complete at least 40 clock hours of direct service with actual clients that contributes to the development of counseling skills. 3. Practicum students should have weekly interaction with supervisors that averages one hour per week of individual and/or triadic supervision throughout the practicum. 4. Practicum students participate in an average of 1.5 hours per week of group supervision on a regular schedule throughout the practicum (CACREP, 2016, Section 3).
Internship	1. Students must complete 600 clock hours of supervised counseling internship in roles and settings with clients relevant to their specialty area. 2. Internship students should complete at least 240 clock hours of direct service. 3. Internship students have weekly interaction with supervisors, averaging one hour per week of individual and/or triadic supervision throughout the internship.

	4. Internship students should participate in an average of 1.5 hours per week of group supervision on a regular schedule throughout the internship (CACREP, 2016, Section 3).
Supervision	1. Counselor education program faculty members serving as individual/triadic or group practicum/internship supervisors for students in entry-level programs should have (1) relevant experience, (2) professional credentials, and (3) counseling supervision training and experience.
	2. Site supervisors should have (1) a minimum of a master's degree, preferably in counseling, or a related profession; (2) relevant certifications and/or licenses; (3) a minimum of two years of pertinent professional experience in the specialty area in which the student is enrolled; (4) knowledge of the program's expectations, requirements, and evaluation procedures for students; and, (5) relevant training in counseling supervision (CACREP, 2016, Section 2).
Evaluation Standards in the Program	
Program Evaluation	Should include an assessment of: • program objectives and whether or not the program is meeting its objectives; • a summary of the program evaluation results; • subsequent program modifications; • the number of graduates for the past academic year; • pass rates on credentialing examinations;

	- completion rates; - job placement rates (CACREP, 2016, Section 4).
Evaluation of Students	The assessment process includes the following: - identification of key performance indicators of student learning in each of the eight core areas and in each student's respective specialty area(s); - measurement of student learning conducted via multiple measures and over multiple points in time; - review or analysis of data (CACREP, 2016, Section 4).
Evaluation of Faculty	Students should have regular, systematic opportunities to formally evaluate counselor education program faculty as well as practicum and internship supervisors (CACREP, 2016, Section 4).
Term of Accreditation	
Term of Accreditation	A full CACREP accreditation cycle is eight years. A program may be accredited for either the full eight-year cycle or receive accreditation for two years of the full cycle, necessitating further reporting on specified program elements. Once a program has been approved for the full cycle, prior to the accreditation expiration date, a program must submit an application and self-study for reaccreditation and go through a full accreditation review for another cycle of accreditation (CACREP, 2019).

The Results

The analysis and comparison of the European sets of standards for accreditation of counseling training programs revealed that these sets are different with regards to their structure and organization. The differences in certain thematic aspects were also noted. At the same time, there are some commonalities that shape the unique European features that distinguish the European sets of standards from the CACREP standards.

Comparison within the European Segment

Dissimilarities in counseling professional development in the European countries were demonstratively reflected in the quality and structure of their counseling training programs and accreditation systems. Most of the European countries are still developing counseling as a distinct profession and lack well-functioning accrediting bodies that control the quality of the counseling professional training. The only European countries that have already developed this professional niche to the point of establishing such essential attributes as professional associations, graduate level training programs, accrediting institutions, and sets of accreditation standards are Ireland, Malta, and United Kingdom. The countries that are interested in promoting the counseling profession, yet are still developing counseling as a distinct area of practice, apply the EAC guidelines and standards as a supporting professional source for their professional growth and as a means of quality assurance.

The structures of the compared sets of standards vary from country to country.

Malta

The Maltese set of standards is not formed as a distinct unit of accrediting standards for counseling training programs. It is a part of the Laws of Malta that includes the Counselling Profession Act V of 2015 (Chapter 538) with a description of the standards along with other

regulations for counseling practice. The defined themes were presented in the Counselling Professional Act, without a specifically listed order.

United Kingdom

The BACP standards are presented in the document named *Accreditation of Training Courses* which is divided into two parts. The Part A provides eligibility criteria for entry to the scheme. The Part B explains the course delivery criteria.

Ireland

The IACP standards are outlined in the document *Criteria for Counseling/Psychotherapy Courses seeking IACP Course Accreditation* that consists two parts. Part One explains requirements for course accreditation. Part Two provides the regulation for the accreditation process. The IACP set of standards appears to be very organized and comprehensive in its structure.

The EAC

The EAC is still working on the development of a well-structured unified set of standards. The main challenge to making progress is the complicated task of finding a balance on the level of standards (high or low) due to the inability to apply the high ranked standards to the countries where counseling is in the initial stage of development. Also, the EAC pays significant attention regarding applicability of their standards across different European cultures. That approach also may postpone the EAC from releasing a more advanced and better structured set of regulations.

The current version of the EAC Training Standards is presented as Chapters Five, Six, and Seven in the Professional Training Standards and Accreditation Committee (PTSAC) booklet by highlighting the main aspects of counseling training regulations.

The Comparison of Themes (Categories)

The Master's-Level Training Accreditation Requirements

Eligibility criteria for accreditation

While comparing the eligibility criteria for accreditation within the European Segment of this meta-synthesis, the feature that was displayed as common for three of the compared settings (IACP, BACP, and EAC) is the requirement to become a member of a counseling professional organization. The Maltese standards do not list this regulation as a mandatory condition for the accreditation application. Also, the Laws of Malta highlight no specific requirements to be eligible to apply for accreditation. However, those laws may reflect the unique situation of Malta where the University of Malta is the only graduate counseling training program accredited by CCP and is considered to be the golden standard for counseling professional training in that country.

The IACP, the BACP, and the EAC standards require a certain duration of an applied program for accreditation. Also, all of the three settings emphasize the importance of providing an appropriate accommodation for students, staff, and the studying process and to demonstrate the accountability of administrative and financial structures.

The unique role of the EAC (to provide the entire European community with the unified standards that would reflect the cultural needs and the national legal regulations of each participant country while building the high-level standards for counseling training programs) was reflected in the PTSAC, as well by requesting the applicants be constituted in accordance with the laws of the country in which a training institution is located.

Admission Requirements

The EAC standards do not highlight any admission requirements for training programs. At the same time, the IACP, the BACP, and the Maltese sets of standards provide a thorough list of criteria for students' admission decisions. The requirements of the BACP and the IACP are almost identical by requesting the student's assessment in regard of his/her maturity level, stability, and self-awareness. The ability to cope with emotional demands and intellectual and academic requirements of the course should be assessed. The instruments that can assist in such an assessment are not explained in the standards. The only provided clarification is the requirement to conduct a thorough, deep interview in presence of at least three admission commission members. However, there is a lack of clarity regarding how those commission members will be able to assess the aspects listed above.

The IACP set of standards provides a unique admission criterion that was lacking in other sets of comparable standards. Criterion 2.8 requires the admission selectors to seek evidence that an applicant's primary need for admission is not for personal therapy or emotional support. At the same time, the way to assess that evidence was not explained in the IACP set of standards.

The Maltese set of standards also emphasizes the importance of assessing professional abilities and personal characteristics; however, in comparison to IACP and BACP, the Counseling Profession Act V (2015) suggests assessing professional aptitude and disposition by conducting personality testing and through an extended personal interview with at least three admission commission members. Act V states that if the applicant scored less than 60% for the professional aptitude and disposition criteria, he/she should not be admitted into the course.

Course Staff

The compared settings presented unequal attention regarding the requirement for the course staff. The EAC set of standards does not specifically address the course staff requirements that may be dictated by the diverse circumstances and different capabilities of the countries with undeveloped counseling professional identity.

The Maltese set of standards addressed only requirements for a supervisor position by stressing that a supervisor should be an individual specifically trained to provide counseling supervision or a professional with an equivalent professional training.

The BACP and the IACP provide a list of criteria for the course staff to be eligible to accredit the program. Both sets of standards require providing a clear explanation of each staff position and lines responsibilities. All of the faculty staff are required to be a member of a professional association. All course staff must be appropriately qualified and competent. The IACP extends the requirements even further by requesting faculty staff to have at least 4 years' experience in counseling and psychotherapy and at least five years for supervisors. In addition, the IACP require all faculty staff to provide evidence of having participated in personal therapy.

Professional Counseling Identity Standards

The Core Curriculum

Each of the compared sets of standards within the European segment has its own unique approach and vision for the core curriculum requirements.

Maltese regulations require the program curriculum to include five components: theory, number of hours of training, personal development, and exercise in counseling that would cover from 90 to 120 European Credits. At the same time, specifically, the fifth of the

listed four components is missing and should be clarified. Also, no information was provided regarding the suggested/recommended courses to address and meet the listed components.

The BACP distinguishes four subject areas that should define the core curriculum: 1) the professional role and responsibility of the therapist; 2) understanding the client; 3) the therapeutic process; and 4) the social, professional, organizational context for therapy. The BACP set of standards explains that all of the four areas could be addressed by instructors through different courses. At the same time, the specific recommendations for the core curriculum courses are not provided.

The IACP set of standards provides no clear structure for the program curriculum. The only recommendation made is to address two main areas while building the program curriculum and courses: work on self and work with clients.

The EAC set of standards require training programs to develop their core curriculum, which must include a balance between theory, experience, supervision, counseling skills, and commitment to professional development. In addition, the EAC provides a clear recommendation regarding the theoretical courses that should be included in the core curriculum by listing eight of them.

Despite the manifested differences in the core curriculum vision for the counseling training programs, all of the four compared settings agreed regarding the necessity of including personal development and personal therapy in the core curriculum as an essential element of the training process. Also, all four sets of standards require the submission of an individual dissertation as a part of fulfillment of the course curriculum.

The Program Duration

The EAC, IACP, BACP, and the Maltese sets of standards require a certain duration for the accredited counseling training programs:

- The BACP requires the programs to provide a minimum of 400 hours of direct teaching or instruction time.

- The EACP requires a minimum of 450 hours and not less than two years of full duration of the program.

- The Maltese sets of standards require total of 120 credits (where 90 credits are assigned for study units and 30 credits – for dissertation) that should be extended over four semesters, which equals approximately to two years.

- The EAC requires 450 hours of course work including personal development, theory, and skills. However, in comparison to the IACP and the Maltese sets of standards that suggest the program completion within two years, the EAC regulations for the program duration require a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 6 years of training duration.

Professional Practice Standards

Personal Therapy (Personal Development)

All of the four comparable settings emphasize the importance of including personal development, and specifically, personal therapy in the core curriculum.

The Maltese Counseling Profession Act V states that students are required to complete 20 hours of personal counseling with a counselor of their choice from the approved list.

The EAC and the IACP require students to undertake a minimum of 50 hours of personal therapy. Moreover, the IACP requires that students maintain the monitoring records

of their self-development and submit a report showing evidence of personal growth. However, there is no criteria for that assessing evidence in the IACP set of standards. At the same time, the EAC set of standards contains no requirement for recording and providing the evidence of personal development work. However, it explains the reasoning behind the personal development and therapy requirements.

The EAC states that this component of the counseling training program will facilitate the awareness of personal issues, enhance growth in emotional maturity and assist in the acceptance of self and others. Also, the EAC believes that the experience of being in the role of a client contributes to the students' professional development.

The BACP does not specifically state the requirement of the students' personal therapy during the counseling training program; however, the Criteria B2.8 of the standards suggest the practice of self-exploration, self-examination, and reflection in a confidential setting to develop an understanding of themselves may be referred to as the student's personal therapy.

Practice

Despite the fact that the Maltese Counseling Profession Act V discusses the roles and responsibilities of supervisors in counseling training program an assumption is made that the practicum part should take place, yet the practice conditions and circumstances are unaddressed nor discussed in this set of standards.

All of the other three comparable settings require a minimum 100 hours of supervised counseling practice (120 hours in Ireland beginning September 2020). All three sets of standards require ensuring that supervised practice occurs in an appropriate environment and in a formalized, contracted counseling arrangement.

Regarding differences, the BACP standards require the integration of the practicum placement into the course rather than being completely separate, optional, or adjunct to the course, which means that the work in the practicum settings should be congruent with the course (to have the same theoretical and/or client orientation).

The specific requirement of the IACP standards is the demand to assess the students regarding their readiness before entering the counseling practice. In order to be eligible to start practicum, the students should also complete at least 25 hours of personal therapy. In addition, the students' counseling practices are disallowed in private settings and cannot be provided to any clients younger than 18 years old.

Supervision

The Maltese set of standards lacks information regarding regulations for the supervision procedure in counseling training process. The Counselling Profession Act V (2015) is limited in this aspect by only stating that each student should be assigned to a supervisor and the supervision contact should be on a regular basis, without specifying what that timeframe should be.

The IACP and the BACP sets of standards provide more thorough information with regards to supervision. The specific criteria for the qualified supervisors and the selection of supervisor professional are addressed in those standards. Both of the sets require a mix of individual and group supervision that should be no less than one hour of supervision in correspondence with eight hours of client work.

There are some unique aspects in the IACP standards that are not presented in other comparable ones. The IACP regulation requires supervisors to have at least five years of supervisory experience, to have an accredited theoretical background, and to be involved in

either individual or group personal therapy. Also, external one-to-one supervision must be no less than one hour's presenting time for every five hours of client work.

The EAC set of standards contains no information regarding the supervision requirements but brings the recognition that in many European countries, counseling professionals may experience difficulty finding appropriate supervision due to insufficient development of the counseling field. As a solution, the EAC set of standards suggest seeking the required supervision form a qualified professional in an allied field.

Evaluation Standards in the Program

Course Evaluation

Neither the EAC nor the Maltese sets of standards addressed course evaluation standards. The IACP addressed briefly addressed that topic by discussing the necessity to continue monitoring courses after earning the requested accreditation.

The BACP set of standards extended the information regarding this area by requiring the program developers to provide on-going opportunities for students and staff to meet as a whole community to reflect on all aspects of the course: to give their feedback on the course and to review/amend the training program regarding professional development. In addition, the BACP set of standards requires the provision of external individuals with opportunities to offer their feedback to the course (such as an external examiner, course consultant, and/or complaints mediator).

Evaluation of Students

The EAC set of standards does not address the evaluation standards of students in the PTSAC booklet.

> The BACP and IACP standards are similar with regard to the topic of student progress evaluations. Both sets of standards require the provision of clear criteria across all elements of counseling training for students' assessment. The evaluation process should include regular, on-going feedback from instructors. The annual assessment process must be monitored by an external examiner who must appropriately qualify for that evaluation process and who has no current association with an institution.
>
> The Maltese set of standards requires a thorough assessment after each study-unit. Students who fail the assessment of not more than four study-units should be given an opportunity to re-do the failed assessments during the September supplementary examination session. Students who fail to pass the supervised practicum have no right to a supplementary assessment in the same academic year.
>
> **Term of Accreditation**
>
> The IACP accreditation is awarded for six years.
>
> The BACP and the EAC accreditation terms are five years.
>
> The Maltese standards for counseling training programs do not address the issue of the accreditation terms and there are no clear regulations for re-application process.

Summarizing the provided comparison within the European segment of the research, the following table displays each primary theme in correspondence of whether or not a certain sample setting exemplifies it:

Primary Theme	Ireland	United Kingdom	Malta	The EAC
The Master's-Level Training Accreditation Requirements				
Eligibility criteria for accreditation	√	√		√
Admission Requirements	√	√	√	
Course Staff	√	√	√	
Professional Counseling Identity Standards				
The Core Curriculum	√	√	√	√
The Program Duration	2 yrs. 450 hrs.	400hrs	4 semesters 120 credits	3-6 yrs. 450 hrs.
Professional Practice Standards				
Personal Therapy (Personal Development)	50 hrs.	50 hrs.	20 hrs.	50 hrs.
Practice	100 hrs.*	100 hrs.	Unclear	100 hrs.
Supervision	√	√	√	√
Evaluation Standards in the Program				
Course Evaluation	√	√		
Evaluation of Students	√	√	√	
Term of Accreditation	6 yrs.	5 yrs.	Unclear	5 yrs.
* 120 hours beginning September 1, 2020 (Criteria 6.5., IACP, 2018)				

While the sample selection settings were compared within the European segment of this

meta-synthesis, the next step was the comparison of the generalized European data with the U.S.

data based on the 2016 CACREP standards document structure.

Specialty Areas

The 2016 CACREP standards define the specialty areas of counseling practice and provide a specialized content for each area: Clinical Mental Health Counseling; School Counseling; College Counseling and Students Affairs; Career Counseling; Addiction Counseling; Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling; and Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling.

Due to the initial developmental stage of counseling as a profession, the European sets of standards address no specialty areas in their standards.

The CACREP Master's-Level Training Accreditation Requirements

The Learning Environment Standards

The Institution

The theme *Institution* presented in the U.S, data segment appears to be similar with regard to the content of the theme *Eligibility Criteria for Accreditation.* While the CACREP standards address the institution facility regarding its ability to provide the program, students, and staff with all necessary resources to succeed in training and to achieve the program objectives, the European sets of standards simply justify the minimum level of norms for institutional settings which result in the institution unit being unable to provide a high quality training.

The Academic Unit

The category *The Academic Unit* provides the regulations for the admission process and academic unit environment that closely reflects the category *Admission Requirements* in the European segment of data.

The 2016 CACREP standards, similarly to the EACP, the BACP, and the Maltese sets of standards, require assessing the program applicants regarding aptitude for graduate-level study and potential success in forming effective counseling relationships. Similarly, there are no suggestions regarding appropriate and effective assessment tools. In addition, the CACREP standards require the evaluation of the applicants' respect for cultural differences that may be corresponded to the IACP and the BACP's request to explore the candidates' awareness of the nature of prejudice and oppression.

At the same time, the CACREP set of standards requires no assessment of the maturity level and stability of a program candidate, as well as seeking any evidence that an applicant's motivation for admission is not for personal therapy or emotional support as suggested in the IACP. In contrast, the CACREP standards emphasize that the program should make efforts to attract, enroll, and retain a diverse group of students and to create and support an inclusive learning community.

Faculty and Staff

The U.S. theme segment *Faculty and Staff* is relevant to the context of the theme *Course Staff* in the European segment. Comparing the two, the U.S. and the European standards have many commonalities regarding the course faculty and staff.

Similar to the European accrediting bodies, the CACREP institution requires the program faculty to be identified with the counseling profession through sustained membership in professional counseling organizations. Also, in requirements of the CACREP standards, the faculty should be qualified professionals; all of the core counselor education faculty must be doctoral level professionals, preferably from a CACREP-accredited program. In comparison, the European regulations require that the core faculty should have a certain amount of

professional experience (the IACP standards request faculty staff to have at least 4 years'

experience in counseling and psychotherapy and at least five years for supervisors).

However, some differences were noted as well. In contrast to the European standards

that require academic faculty to be involved in personal therapy (the IACP), the CACREP has

no such regulation. Another difference is that the CACREP set of standards delegate the

academic unit leaders with authority for: 1) coordinating the counseling program, the

practicum and internship experience; 2) influencing the program development; and, 3)

determining the program curricula. That authority for specific outcomes lacks clear

identification in the European sets of standards.

Professional Counseling Identity Standards

The Foundation of the Program

The CACREP standards address the issue of the foundation of the program in

regulations by requesting the applicant institutions to provide a publicly available mission

statement and program objectives. The program objectives should be thoroughly presented to

demonstrate the evidence of how the established objectives can support both the development

of the counseling professional identity and professional growth.

This theme (category) is not presented in the European segment of the data.

The Counseling Curriculum

The themes *The Counseling Curriculum* (the U.S. segment) and *The Core Curriculum*

(the European segment) are related with regard to the discussed subject; however, the

differences in the structure, approach, and vision are significant.

The following comparison of the CACREP standards with the European sample

settings, is divided into two parts, in order to provide a practical, comprehensive explanation.

CACREP versus IACP/BACP/Maltese Act

Due to the fact that all four European comparable settings have their own unique vision regarding requirements for the course curriculum, the comparison of the CACREP standards with the generalized European standards seems irrelevant. At the same time, despite the conceptual differences, the IACP, the BACP, and the Maltese sets of standards have a similar feature that can be contrasted to the CACREP set of standards. None of those sets of standards classify curriculum as a set of suggested courses, or classes, to achieve justified objectives. In contrast, they define learning outcomes, incorporating knowledge, and performance criteria based on what the program providers should develop in their own curriculum.

For example, the BACP set of standards defines four specific aspects: (1) the professional role and responsibility of the therapist; 2) understanding the client; 3) the therapeutic process; and 4) the social, professional, organizational context for therapy) where development of knowledge and skills is expected. However, the applicants for the program accreditation should develop their own curriculum, demonstrating the evidence that all the four domains are covered. After evaluation of the presented curriculum, the BACP will decide whether or not it is approved.

There is a similar situation in Malta where the set of standards requires the provision of evidence that such components as theory, number of hours of training, personal development, and exercise in counseling will be covered by a training institution's curriculum.

The structure of the IACP regarding curriculum is also unclear because the course content areas suggested by the IACP set of standards are quite broad: work on self and work with client. The IACP standards provide a list of expected teaching interventions to apply

while working on those two areas; however, the curriculum, with explanations of how the interventions will be implemented to the course disciplines must be developed by the program providers and presented for the IACP evaluation.

The Counseling Course Curriculum provided by the CACREP accreditation body appears to be a structured and clear outline for developing the program curriculum. The CACREP standards require curriculum development that covers the eight common core areas. Each area is also specified with detailed explanations.

CACREP versus EAC

In contrast to the IACP, the BACP, and the Maltese sets of standards, the EAC perception regarding the core curriculum appears to be similar to CACREP counseling curriculum. The following table displays the correspondence between the common core areas of counseling training programs highlighted by CACREP and EAC.

CACREP	EAC
Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice	Understanding of Ethics and Professional Practice; The History of Counseling and a Study of at Least Two Other Counseling Approaches
Social and Cultural Diversity	Study of Cultural Differences and Awareness Processes
Human Growth and Development	Theories of Personality Models of Human Development
Career Development	N/A

Counseling and Helping Relationships	Clear Understanding of a Core Theoretical Models of Counseling; Theories of Change or Client Movement
Group Counseling and Group Work	N/A
Assessment and Testing	Understanding of Psychological Dysfunction
Research and Program Evaluation	N/A

This table also reveals the areas that were not covered by the EAC set of standards, which are: career development; group counseling and group work; and, research and program evaluation.

Despite the general agreement in conception regarding the core program curriculum, the EAC curriculum standards require further development to extend the explanation of each core area as was presented by CACREP.

Finally, the feature that distinguishes all four of the European settings from CACREP, with regard to the core curriculum, is their requirement to include personal therapy (personal development) in the program. That aspect is not present in the CACREP set of standards.

Professional Practice Standards

Practicum

The theme *Practicum* in the U.S. segment corresponds to the theme *Practice* in the European segment. Both the CACREP and the European sample settings require the counseling training programs to implement practical work in course curriculum. All of the compared settings established the same number of required hours: 100 hours of supervised

practice. (The CACREP standards also specify that the practicum duration should be not less than 10 weeks). At the same time, there are several significant differences to address.

CACREP	The European Segment
The practicum sessions should be audio/video recorded. The recordings should be evaluated and discussed during supervision.	N/A
During practicum experience, in addition to the development of individual counseling skills, students must lead or co-lead a counseling or psychoeducational group.	N/A
N/A	Counseling practice is not allowed in private settings.
N/A	Counseling practice cannot be provided to the clients younger than 18 years old.
N/A	In order to be eligible to start practicum, the students should also complete at least 25 hours of personal therapy.

Internship

The theme *Internship* is not present in the European segment of the data. At the same time, after successfully completing the practicum, the CACREP standards require students to complete 600 clock hours of supervised counseling internship in roles and settings with clients

relevant to their specialty area. Internship students should complete at least 240 clock hours of direct service.

Supervision

The IACP and the BACP standards require a similar approach to the CACREP regulations regarding supervision practice: a mix of individual and a group supervision with qualified supervisor.

	CACREP	The European standards (IACP and BACP)
Number of Hours	Practicum students should participate in an average of 1½ hours per week of group supervision on a regular schedule throughout the practicum.	Practicum supervision should be not less than one hour of supervision in correspondence to the eight (BACP)/ five (IACP) hours of the client work.
Supervisor's Qualification	On-campus supervisors should have: • relevant experience; • professional credentials; • counseling supervision training and experience. Site supervisors should have: • a minimum of a master's degree, preferably in counseling, or a related profession;	The IACP regulation requires supervisors to have at least five years of supervisory experience, to have an accredited theoretical background, and to be involved in either individual or group personal therapy.

	• relevant certifications and/or licenses; • a minimum of two years of pertinent professional experience in the specialty area in which the student is enrolled; • knowledge of the program's expectations, requirements, and evaluation procedures for students; • relevant training in counseling supervision.	
Supervisor's Personal Therapy	N/A	Supervisors should be involved in either individual or group personal therapy.

Evaluation Standards in the Program

Program Evaluation

The theme *Program Evaluation* in the U.S. segment corresponds to the theme *Course Evaluation* in the European segment. The analysis of both the CACREP and the European sets of standards revealed that CACREP devoted particular attention to regulations for program evaluation. To ensure the quality of a program, the CACREP standards require a list of actions to monitor diverse aspects of that program's progress. At the same time, within the European segment, only BACP addressed this issue, without, however, a thorough explanation.

Evaluation of Students

All of the compared settings addressed the issue of students' evaluation in their sets of standards in a sufficient way. All the analyzed settings acknowledge the importance to systematically assess each student's progress throughout the program. All of the standards appear to be similar with regard to students' progress evaluations and the establishment of clear criteria across all elements of counseling training for students' assessments.

Evaluation of Faculty

The theme *Evaluation of Faculty* is not presented in the European segment of data. At the same time, the CACREP set of standards require the programs provide students with a regular opportunity to formally evaluate counselor education program faculty, as well as practicum and internship supervisors.

Term of Accreditation

The IACP accreditation is awarded for six years.

The BACP and the EAC accreditation terms are five years.

The CACREP accreditation is awarded for eight years.

Summary

This research was conducted to explore the commonalities and differences between the European and the CACREP accrediting standards for counseling training programs. The research procedure was directed by the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do European Standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to each other?

RQ 2: How do European Standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to CACREP standards?

In order to explore these research questions, the qualitative meta-synthesis methodology was selected as the most appropriate and effective approach to review, decode, compare, and analyze a large pool of qualitative data.

In this chapter, the descriptive data, data analysis procedure, and the results were methodically presented and thoroughly discussed. The process of sample selection was complex and problematic due to the large amount of the analyzed information: 13 settings were evaluated and considered for the sample selection; however, the criterion-based sample selection procedure reduced this pool of data and the sample group to 5 site settings. As a result, the collected information regarding Ireland, Malta, United Kingdom, United States, and the EAC were compared and analyzed.

The data analysis procedure was conducted by classifying and comparing specific themes (or categories) of two segments of information: the U.S. data and the European data. The European data was compared and analyzed first. Then, the generalized findings were compared with the U.S. segment of data.

The meta-synthesis comparison and analysis led to the following results. The counseling professional identity is still developing in Europe, which is reflected by unequal development of counseling training programs and accrediting systems across the European countries. The European settings that were selected for meta-synthesis comparison had already developed the essential attributes of the counseling profession, such as professional associations, graduate level training programs, and accreditation institutions and standards for quality assurance. At the

same time, each country/setting has its own way and style to grow the field of professional development.

The comparison of accreditation standards for counseling training programs revealed that the European sets of standards appear to be different in their structure and organization. The BACP and the IACP sets of standards are presented as distinct sets of regulations that were specifically designed for accreditation purposes. The Maltese set of standards was implemented into the Counselling Profession Act V (2015), which generally regulates counseling profession in Malta, rather than being developed as a discrete unit of accrediting regulations. There is a similar situation with the EAC set of standards that provides regulations for counseling training programs in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 of its PTSAC booklet.

All of the four European sets of standards have much in common, which allowed for classification of the unified theme categories. There are some differences as well; however, they are insignificant and occur in variations within the existed categories (e.g. differences in terms, conditions, hours).

An exploration of the ways in which the European theme classification differs from the CACREP theme categories was conducted, due to unique features of the European accreditation standards and terminology determination. The essential difference is the requirement for students, faculty, and supervisors to be involved in personal therapy while participating in the program. Other existent differences between the CACREP and the European sets of standards are the result of absence of certain categories (such as specialty areas, foundation of the program, internship, evaluation of faculty) due to unequal development in the counseling profession.

Differences in perception of the core program curriculum were also detected. The BACP and the IACP sets of standards lack provision of an actual structure for the program core

curriculum. Instead, they contain specific areas for growth and objectives that should be addressed. Based on this information, the British and Irish counselors would benefit from developing their own program curriculums and submitting them for recognition and evaluation. CACREP's approach is different than that of the EAC, by offering an essential list of program courses that should address specific objectives. All of those differences were thoroughly explained and discussed in this chapter.

Limitations that emerged based on data analysis were the deficit of publicly available information regarding the European segment of data and the lack of comprehensive structure in the European sets of standards, which can potentially lead to misleading interpretation on the part of potential students.

Summarizing Chapter Four, the conducted data analysis process of this meta-synthesis revealed commonalities and several differences between the CACREP and the European sets of standards. The explored findings are a subject of discussion in Chapter Five regarding the implementation and practical applications while considering the development of the unified accrediting standards for counseling training programs around the globe. The revealed results can contribute to the process of counseling globalization that are also addressed and discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Five includes a comprehensive summary of the overall study, the findings, and a discussion of the complete conclusions. The chapter addresses the issue of how the explored findings can be practically implemented. The areas for future research based on the results and findings of this study are discussed, as well.

Introduction

This study was intended to contribute to the process of counseling globalization by exploring the commonalities and differences between the European and the CACREP accrediting standards for counseling training programs. To address this issue, the following research questions were inquired:

RQ 1: How do European Standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to each other?

RQ 2: How do European Standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to CACREP standards?

The qualitative meta-synthesis methodology was selected to explore those questions as an effective and appropriate approach to review, decode, compare, and analyze a large pool of qualitative data. The findings of this study were intended to contribute to the process of counseling globalization by exploring, analyzing, and comparing the unique cultural features and aspects of the European and the CACREP accrediting systems for counseling training programs. The outcomes of this meta-synthesis are intended to underpin the formation of the prospective unified standards for global counseling training.

This chapter discusses conclusions reached during the research inquiry and exploration. Practical implications and recommendations for the future research are also addressed.

Summary of the Study

The conducted study was undertaken for the purpose of contributing to the process of counseling globalization. Globalization of the worldwide community and the professional counseling society requires the development of unified global standards for training quality assurance and for competent counseling services throughout the world. To prepare for this important transition, the exploration and definition of specific needs and requirements of each national community, for the purpose of considering those aspects and reflecting them in the prospective unified global standards for counseling training programs, would be beneficial. This meta-synthesis, analyzing and comparing the American and the European standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs, was conducted to contribute to that exploration process, to be carried out by scholars and researchers around the globe.

The qualitative meta-synthesis was selected as a means to answer the research questions. That approach was an appropriate and effective methodology due to its well-structured platform to review, decode, and analyze all available information regarding standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs in the United States and Europe in a comprehensive way and to coherently analyze the data.

The sample selection procedure was quite complicated, but the guidance of the chosen meta-synthesis methodology and the criteria-based purposeful selection strategy revealed 5 site selections (Ireland, Malta, United Kingdom, United States, and the EAC) that were compared and analyzed due to their complete criteria eligibility.

The data analysis procedure was divided into two stages. The first was devoted to the analysis of the European segment of the research data by defining and classifying themes (categories) that are common in the European sets of standards for counseling training programs.

When the themes were identified and compared, those European common themes were compared to the CACREP standards themes in the second stage, in order to explore differences and commonalities. The findings of that two-step data analysis process are thoroughly explained in this chapter.

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

As the research procedure and data analysis process were directed by the two research questions, the discussion of the meta-synthesis findings are outlined in accordance with the inquired questions.

RQ 1: How do European Standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to each other?

A large pool of data was examined and assessed, while exploring the current status of accreditation systems and sets of standards for counseling training programs in Europe. The process of data collection was complicated by the fact that counseling as a distinct profession is still developing in the European countries. Some countries (Ireland, Malta, United Kingdom) have already developed all of the attributes of the counseling profession, such as professional associations, graduate level training programs, and accreditation institutions and accrediting standards for quality assurance of that training. At the same time, there are some European countries where counseling, as a profession, is undergoing development, yet some of the elements required for a foundation of a strong professional identity and for a formation of accreditation standards are still absent.

That situation required an additional exploration and decision-making process with regard to judgment as to whether or not some considered settings should be included in the sample selection. In order to make the final selection decision, all of the professional attributes

of each European country were explored. The countries, such as France, Spain, Austria, and Belgium, where the examination of counseling as a distinct profession revealed no traits, were easily eliminated from the selection process. However, the settings for Denmark, Netherlands, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Switzerland manifested two or more out of four required criteria. The analysis of the formation process of a counseling professional identity, training programs, and accrediting systems of those countries would be beneficial for the overall global counseling process because commonalities and unique manifestations of those developmental dynamics would be revealed. That information would be valuable, in order to gain a clearer understanding of how the counseling profession could be developed and promoted in countries where it is yet to be presented.

This meta-synthesis revealed that Italy and Switzerland are the first candidates to be included in this justified, criteria-based sample selection in the nearest future, due to their minor gap in meeting the full criteria, which is the absence of the accreditation standards for counseling training programs. Those two nations developed all of the other professional attributes. The accreditation sets of standards are in the state of development in these countries. The paths of their development are unique, and further observation and analysis would be informative. However, the specific goals of this meta-synthesis made no allowance for including the settings for Italy and Switzerland in the sample selection.

Based on the purposeful, criteria-based sample selection process, only the following four European settings met the full criteria and became subjects for comparison and analysis of this meta-synthesis: Ireland, United Kingdom, Malta, and the European Association for Counseling (EAC). The fact that only three out of forty-four European countries developed all four essential aspects of counseling profession reveals that counseling is still in its initial stages of professional

development in Europe. Even keeping in mind that United Kingdom of Great Britain consists of four constituent countries (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland), where the analyzed counseling standards are legally applied, the 3 nations out of 44 ratio indicates there is very little change to the current status quo of this profession in Europe.

At the same time, the influence of the EAC, which plays the role of a leader that provides support and guidance for all European counseling professional communities is rapidly growing. That role and its growth illustrates evidence that the European counselors require a consolidating power to help them in an inevitable process of counseling globalization. The EAC provides guidance and standards to counseling professional societies currently unable to both promote the profession on a sufficient level and to receive support from authorities in their countries. The EAC setting was especially useful for this research because it represents a hypothetical model of a prospective globalized counseling society. That unifying platform is in its initial stage of development, and its existence and growing impact demonstrates global tendencies and a logical necessity to move toward professional consolidation around the globe.

Comparison of the European Settings

The comparison analysis of the European segment of this meta-synthesis revealed that the Irish and the UK sets of standards appeared to be the most developed in Europe at this current moment. Both of these sets are well-developed and successfully serve as quality assurance of graduate counseling training programs. The Irish set of standards seems to be comprehensive and organized; that was especially noticeable due to the presence of a core curriculum.

The analysis of all four settings revealed many commonalities across the compared sets of standards that was reflected in the formation of common themes. Also, the reciprocal agreement between BACP and IACP, which recognizes and accepts the quality of their

neighbors' standards and accreditation schemes, illustrates that common factors are present and can be used to build collaboration. Some of those common traits distinguish the European standards from the CACREP standards. That issue will be addressed further on, while discussing the differences between the European and the U.S. sets of standards.

The explored differences within the European compared segment were insignificant and, mainly, were dictated by the current state of counseling professional development, or specific circumstances in each analyzed region/setting. For example, the absence of certain aspects in the EAC sets of standards, such as admission requirements, course staff description, course evaluation, and evaluation of students, seem to indicate the lack of pursuit of high level criterions; however, the EAC, in their Professional Training Standards and Accreditation Committee (PTSAC) booklet, explained their stance.

The EAC developed their standards and guidance to unite counseling professionals in Europe. The counselors in countries where they were unable to find support on the national level began using the EAC platform and the set of standards as a guidance for their professional development. At the same time, the EAC recognizes the difficulties that some of the countries may experience applying the high-level standards due to their insufficient development of the counseling profession and legal regulations. As a result, Chapter Seven of the PTSAC booklet, which is focused on counseling supervision standards, articulates the recognition of challenges that the European counselors can encounter to find the means that would fit high supervision standards. As a supporting solution for students who are unable to find supervision from an accredited or professional counselor, the PTSAC provides an alternative option of seeking supervision from "a qualified professional in an allied field with an understanding of counseling as defined by EAC" (EAC, 2015, p. 17).

Some features that differentiate the Maltese set of standards from the BACP and IACP sets of standards can also be explained by specific circumstances of the counseling training program development in Malta. Malta has three public universities (University of Malta; Malta College of Arts, Science, and Technology; and Institute of Tourism Studies) and several private and international schools. Only one school – University of Malta – offers the accredited graduate level counseling training program that is considered to be the gold standard for the counseling profession. The Maltese set of standards does not address aspects such as eligibility criteria for accreditation and term of accreditation in its standards regulation Act V (2015). That approach might be explained by the specific situation of this region. Malta is a small country with only one, well-developed counseling program, which can be sufficient to cover all the needs of its population. That is why the developers of the Maltese set of standards may be uninterested in promoting a counseling accrediting scheme to other Maltese schools that offer counseling training programs. The focus may, instead, be on the quality of the single, existent program.

Despite the listed above differences that distinguish the Maltese set of standards from other European standards and that can be logically explained based on specifics of the region, there are some dissimilarities that offered no clear explanation: the absence of regulations for counseling practice during the training program and nonappearance of standards for course evaluation. Those two parameters appear to be significant, with regards to assurances that the prospective counselors gain sufficient clinical experience and that the designed program is effective.

At the same time, the Maltese set of standards appears to be comprehensively structured regarding criteria for evaluating students in the training program by providing a detailed list of

procedures for assessing students' progress and required actions if the criteria were unmet. That aspect of their standards compares favorably with other European sets of standards.

The evaluation of the European accreditation schemes revealed that the BACP and the IACP sets of standards can currently be considered as the most developed accrediting models in Europe. The comparison of both sets revealed more commonalities than differences; however, some variances are hereby noted and addressed.

The IACP set of standards appears to be more structured, logically organized, and user friendly in comparison to the BACP set of standards. While providing a list of criteria for the course staff eligibility, both the BACP and the IACP sets of standards require the provision of a clear explanation of each staff position and lines of responsibilities. All of the faculty staff members are required to be a registered affiliate of a professional association. All course staff must be appropriately qualified and competent. The IACP extends the requirements even further by demanding faculty staff to have at least 4 years' experience in counseling and psychotherapy and at least five years for supervisors. Additionally, the IACP requires all faculty staff to provide evidence of participation in personal therapy.

Another difference between the BACP and the IACP sets of regulations this study addressed is a dissimilar concept regarding core course curriculum development. The BACP distinguishes four subject areas that should define the core curriculum: 1) the professional role and responsibility of the therapist; 2) understanding the client; 3) the therapeutic process; and 4) the social, professional, organizational context for therapy. The BACP set of standards explains that all of the four areas could be addressed by instructors through different courses. At the same time, the specific recommendations for the core curriculum courses are not provided. The IACP set of standards provides even less clear structure for the program curriculum. The

only recommendation made is to address two main areas, while building the program curriculum and courses: work on self and work with clients.

The issue of the core curriculum development will be addressed more thoroughly while comparing the European and the U.S. standards because this aspect appears to be the most diverse in its manifestation in both the European segment of comparison and the contrast between the U.S. and European regulations.

Summarizing the commonalities and differences between the European sets of standards for accreditation of counseling training programs, the prevalence of commonalities is apparent. At the same time, the minor dissimilarities are mainly based on the developmental differences within the counseling profession, or in response to regional specific regulations. The EAC prearranged the goals to promote the counseling profession and to provide guidance for quality training assurance across Europe. As a result, the EAC set of standards faces the challenge of achieving both the development of high-level criteria standards and promoting counseling in the countries where the legal platform still lacks readiness for that level of standards.

RQ 2: How do European Standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs compare to CACREP standards?

This meta-synthesis collected and analyzed a large amount of data by focusing on both the external characteristics of the compared settings and also on intrinsic factors and historical contexts that led to the formation of those characteristics. While comparing the European and the U.S. sets of standards, the underlined reasons for differences in developing the counseling profession of both regions are acknowledged.

At present, counseling is more developed as a profession in the United States than it is in many other parts of the world (Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir et al., 2009). Over the past

century, the U.S. counseling society went through a major transformation, going from a lack of clarity regarding professional identification to being a well-recognized, distinguishable profession (Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir et al., 2009; Neukrug, 2012). The key of that success was the development of nationally recognized graduate level counseling training. The training standards provided by the Counsel for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) significantly enhanced the reputation of counseling as a profession (Stanard, 2013). That is the value of analyzing and comparing that successful endeavor with the European experience, as a means to understand strategies that could be applied for progressing development of counseling profession in Europe.

The conducted meta-synthesis revealed 1) the commonly recognized areas that were accepted by both sides; 2) the areas that require further development in the European countries in order to successfully promote the counseling profession; 3) the areas that display unique characteristics based on cultural perceptions and historical backgrounds; and, 4) the areas that require CACREP to reconsider their standards regarding universal applicability.

Commonly Recognized Areas

Both the CACREP and the European sets of standards recognize the importance of justifying standards for such core areas as the learning setting environment, faculty and staff qualifications, counseling curriculum, practicum and supervision regulations, and guidelines for evaluation of students. The listed aspects were presented and explained in standards of both regions. At the same time, several areas for further development were revealed.

The Area of Development

The comparison analysis exposed that, due to the developmental level of the counseling profession in the U.S., the CACREP set of standards favorably differs by its structure, content logical order, comprehensiveness, and extended focus areas.

The structure of the CACREP set of standards is clearly organized and its contents are logically and concisely outlined. None of the European sets of standards demonstrate that type of comprehensive structure at this moment, except for those of the IACP, which appear to be reader friendly and more organized in its logical flow of the contents than other European sets of standards.

One of the noticeable differences of the CACREP standards from the European ones is the detailed extension of standard regulations with regards to each counseling specialty area (Clinical Mental Health Counseling; School Counseling; College Counseling and Students Affairs; Career Counseling; Addiction Counseling; Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling; and Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling). That detailed specificity can be explained by recognition of both the more advanced development of counseling as a profession in the U.S. and, also, by the necessity to present individual requirements for each listed specialization.

The significant discrepancy between the sets of the two regions is in the area of standard regulations regarding practical experience. Both the U.S. and the European sets require supervised practicum of not less than 100 hours. At the same time, the CACREP standards emphasize the importance: 1) to prolong these 100 hours within at least a 10-week time frame; 2) to record the practicum sessions for supervision and evaluation; and, 3) to include the development of group counseling skills in practicum experience as well. None of those aspects were required by the European sets of standards. Moreover, the European regulations identify

some restrictions for practicum that are excluded in the U.S. guidelines: prohibiting students from conducting counseling practicum in private settings and working with any clients younger than 18 years old. At the same time, the European regulations require students to complete at least 25 hours of personal therapy in order to be eligible to start practicum; that requirement is excluded in the CACREP standards.

Regarding clinical field experience, the absence of requirements for the internship in the European standards seems to be a significant distinction between the two sets of guidelines. After the successful completion of practicum, the CACREP standards require students to complete 600 clock hours of supervised counseling internship in roles and settings with clients relevant to their specialty area. Internship students should complete at least 240 clock hours of direct service. This component is, as yet, lacking in the European counseling training.

Another aspect for further development that was revealed during comparison analysis of the two sets of standards is that CACREP devoted particular attention to regulations for program evaluation. To ensure the quality of a program, CACREP requires a list of actions to monitor diverse aspects of the program's progress. Concomitantly, within the European segment, only BACP addressed this issue, without providing a thorough explanation. The standard regulations for evaluation of faculty that are comprehensively addressed in the CACREP standards are unaddressed in all of the European sets of guidance.

The Unique Features

Along with commonalities between the two standard regulations and some areas for growth, due to a different level of development of the counseling profession in Europe, certain aspects were revealed that displayed unique features of both compared settings.

All of the compared European settings unanimously agreed that personal therapy is an essential component of the training process and included it in their sets of standards. The belief behind the decision is that the prospective counselors benefit from familiarity with the clients' experiences and being in the role of a client contributes to the students' professional development. The students are only allowed to start their practicum if they completed at least 25 hours of their personal training. Based on that criteria, the standard regulations require both students and faculty members, who are involved in the training process, to be involved in personal therapy. None of those regulations are presented in the U.S. standards.

Another specific aspect of the explained features is the standard regulations for quality assurance of this personal development work. The IACP set of standards require students to maintain the monitoring records of their self-development and to submit a report showing evidence of personal growth. Also, the training programs are required to contain a process to evaluate the quality of that personal growth experience. However, the criteria that will assess the evidence of the quality is not addressed in the IACP set of standards. Those unique features appear to be a hallmark of the European counseling training that favorably distinguish it from the U.S. training by providing a valuable component for the professional development of both students (prospective counselors) and the entire training community.

Another aspect that was revealed in this meta-synthesis as a manifestation of unique features of the standard regulations of both sectors is a specific vision and approach concerning the core curriculum requirements. Three out of four European settings (IACP, BACP, and Maltese Act) do not classify curriculum as a set of suggested courses, or classes, to achieve justified objectives as the CACREP does, which requires the development of the curriculum to address eight common core areas. In contrast, the European sets of regulations define learning

outcomes, incorporating knowledge, and performance criteria that the program providers will use as guidance while developing their own curriculum.

At the same time, the EAC perception regarding the core curriculum appears to be similar to the CACREP counseling curriculum, despite the fact that the former still requires further development. Due to the fact that the EAC is dedicated to building a solid, unified platform for the diverse European counseling community, the selected way to approach their training curriculum development may indicate the EAC's recognition that the U.S. vision of a curriculum structure appears to be more practical and comprehensive than their own approach.

Reconsideration of the CACREP Standards

Despite the fact that CACREP is widely recognized as a mainstream developer of the accrediting regulations for counseling training programs, the findings of this meta-synthesis revealed areas that require CACREP to reconsider some of the existent assumptions. If CACRAP is intended to be a global leader in developing a global counseling profession, the perspectives and requirements of the global professional community need to be taken into consideration, along with the national standpoints. The fact that all of the European sample settings require the students' and faculty's involvement in personal therapy, while the CACREP does not recognize this aspect as a necessary element of counseling training, requires additional exploration. The CACREP accrediting institution should be aware of this existent difference while reflecting on the rational for exclusion of the personal therapy criteria and on culturally appropriate implications of the CACREP standards around the globe. While CACREP is preparing for the standards' revisions in 2023, the findings of this meta-synthesis can be addressed and considered regarding the appropriateness and feasibility of including personal therapy in the U.S. counseling training programs.

Implications

The literature review conducted prior to conducting the meta-synthesis of data revealed that the global counseling community acknowledges the necessity to prepare a new generation of counselors who can effectively serve the global community. To be operative, the next generation of counselors should be trained differently, extending the educational focus from a local perspective to a diverse, global one. To be relevant with the times and in tune with new realities, the global professional society would benefit from the development of counseling training programs based on globally unified accrediting standards that will assure the quality of the training and the effectiveness of the prospective counselors while serving the world-wide international community. In order to most effectively initiate the counseling globalization process, the specific features and requirements of each participant country should be recognized and learned, in order to engender necessary changes.

This qualitative meta-synthesis was intended to contribute to that development process by exploring the commonalities and differences between the European and the CACREP accrediting standards for counseling training programs, for the purpose of revealing the unique cultural features and aspects that should underpin the formation of the prospective unified standards for global counseling training. The work of such organizations as the European Association for Counseling and the International Association for Counseling have already initiated the process of counseling globalization. Their endeavors are a demonstrative example of the progression towards that goal.

The EAC manifests their intention to become a unified European platform for the counseling professionals around Europe, which is a meaningful step toward globalization. At the same time, the specific focus of this meta-synthesis exposed developmental challenges of that

complicated process. The wide scale comparison of this research revealed the issues that can be considered, while developing further strategies for the prospective global training accreditation system, and specifically, for the unified counseling training accrediting standards.

The value of this research is in its broad scale consideration of the research topic. By conducting a comprehensive comparison of the CACREP standards, the European regulations, and the EAC guidance, the opportunity to observe and analyze three conceptual perspectives and developmental frames was provided. The CACREP set of standards displayed a product of evolutionary development of the counseling profession in the U.S., which has withstood the test of time. The CACREP standards continue the development process and are undergoing upcoming changes in 2023. The experience of the CACREP evolution is undoubtedly valuable to consider with regard to effectiveness, practical applicability, and benefits for continuous development of the counseling profession. The European sets of standards demonstrated a colorful palette of differences regarding ways of growing the counseling profession, methods to approach development of counseling training programs, and strategies to design their accrediting standard regulations. The analysis of the European segment was thought-provoking in respect to dynamic changes within different developmental stages. The EAC set of standards exhibited an initial approach to form the global, unified guidance to unite the counseling professionals and to regulate their training and practice. The analysis of this particular segment was specifically appreciated due to its testing model for the prospective foundation of a global counseling community.

As a vivid reflection of those processes, the conducted comparison of the three conceptual perspectives, and two regional settings (the U.S. and the European), displayed a wide comprehensive dynamic picture that offers specific information about commonalities and

differences, cultural perspectives and developmental distinctions. The inclusive analysis and observations can provide numerous insights for the prospective founders of the global counseling community and, specifically, for creators of the global accrediting standards for counseling training programs. The obtained results of this meta-synthesis can be effectively implemented into this integrated process of counseling globalization.

Recommendations for the Future Research

Several gaps and issues that would be worthwhile exploring further were revealed as a result of conducting this study:

1. The further observation of the development of the accrediting standards for counseling training programs in Switzerland and Italy:

The data collection and sample selection process revealed that the Swiss and Italian counselors are dynamically developing the counseling profession in their countries. The justified sample selection criteria did not allow the inclusion of those two countries in the sample of this meta-synthesis due to the absence of only one criterium: the existence of accreditation standards for counseling training programs. At the same time, the development of those standards is in process and their initial structure and content are being formed. Due to the fact that the current status and the developmental level of their sets of standards cannot be compared with the structure and content of those that were included in the study sample, their settings were defined as developing, thus were excluded. Nevertheless, the progress the counselors in Switzerland and Italy are making toward further development and formation is noticeable. The recognition of such a dynamic motivates curiosity to continue observing and analyzing both the development of the standards sets and the unique pathways of accreditation systems in those two countries in the

further research that may continue the work initiated in this meta-synthesis intended to contribute to the process of counseling globalization.

2. The absence of requirements for personal therapy during training process in the CACREP standards:

Exploring this topic is important, thus it can become the subject of a phenomenological qualitative study. While the global professional community initiates the process of integration, finding consensus in existing differences is an essential step. This meta-synthesis revealed that the European counseling professional community and its accrediting bodies unanimously agreed that all participating members of the training program (students, faculty, and supervisors) must be involved in personal therapy. At the same time, the CACREP standards have no such requirement; however, this practice existed in the past, yet is no longer the case. Exploring the reasoning behind the U.S. professional community's decision to eliminate that practice and to discuss the ways for the European and the U.S. perspectives to find a compromise during the upcoming process of global integration would be beneficial to both.

3. Development of a comprehensive admission evaluation tool to assess professional aptitude of the counseling training candidates:

The European sets of standards require an assessment of each candidate's professional aptitude during the admission process to the counseling training program. A quantitative or mixed methods research would be beneficial for evaluating and/or developing an effective set of assessment tools specifically for this type of admissions evaluation.

4. The necessity to evaluate the training candidates regarding their maturity level, self-awareness, and stability:

The requirement of the European sets of standards to evaluate the training candidates regarding their maturity level, self-awareness, and stability provoked reflections regarding the necessity of such an evaluation. Concepts such as maturity and self-awareness can be a part of the learning process and a result of professional experience that cannot be obtained anywhere else except through intense and supervised training. A qualitative exploration could be beneficial to clearly understanding those concepts and to reflecting the necessity to restrict the candidates' selection into a program based on these criteria. What is currently unclear is how categories such as maturity and self-awareness can be ethically assessed with confident results.

5. The rationale behind the admission requirement to seek evidence that the candidate's primary need for entering a particular program is not for gaining personal therapy or emotional support:

A qualitative phenomenological research is recommended for the purpose of exploring the feasibility and rationale of the IACP admission requirements to seek evidence that a candidate's primary need while applying to the counseling training program is not for personal therapy or emotional support. The proposed research on this topic may be a thoughtful platform to identify new insights regarding the role of a counselor and his/her personal identity as an individual.

All of the recommendations for further research may assist in more clearly and deeply understanding the cultural and conceptual differences between the U.S. and the European counseling professional communities. Further studies may contribute to the already initiated process of counseling globalization and will support global professionals to be engaged in the development and implementation of that process with awareness, effectiveness, and respect for each other.

Recommendations for Future Practice

This meta-synthesis displayed a segment of a certain stage of development of the counseling profession in Europe, specifically, counseling training programs. The information that was revealed from both the comparison analysis of the research sample and, also, from the sample selection process itself provides valuable knowledge regarding the dynamics of counseling development in different countries, the pitfalls of that process, and positive results from certain effective steps. That vision of the current trends and tendencies in counseling development in Europe could be implemented by European counseling professional communities that seek effective strategies and certain directions to enhance the position of the counseling profession in their region. The findings of this meta-synthesis provide a bigger picture in a dynamic line of progress and can be used for the developmental of strategic decisions.

Additionally, organizations such as the European Association for Counseling and the International Association for Counseling that work toward the development of unified standards and guidance for diverse professional communities around the world may be interested in considering, and, perhaps, implementing the findings of this research in their practice. The conducted comparison of this meta-synthesis revealed certain areas for further enhancement that the EAC can address while developing their new set of standards for counseling training program. The consideration of the revealed weaknesses and implementation of the findings to their future practice will undoubtedly strengthen the position of the EAC as a unifying leader of the counseling community in Europe.

CACREP can also effectively partner in developing global standards by sharing its long-term experience and the current successful achievements. Constant monitoring of the CACREP standards regarding their applicability to both the national diverse community and also, to the

global culturally diverse society will benefit the further development of CACREP as a mainstream leader in the counseling accrediting field. Also, this conscious developmental process will encourage the global professional community to consider the CACREP accomplishments as a reliable source for cross borrowing that can help other countries to progress counseling profession development more effectively and faster.

Finally, the existing and prospective mental health counselors around the globe can use this meta-synthesis practically, as a quick guidance to review the current status of the counseling profession in Europe. Those individuals who are interested in counseling training and consider Europe as a possible location for their graduate experience might want to monitor the progress of the EAC regarding the development of unified professional guidance and accrediting training standards.

Final Thoughts

This qualitative meta-synthesis research was intended to contribute to the process of counseling globalization by exploring the unique cultural features and aspects of the European and the U.S. accrediting systems for counseling training programs. This research explored the specific qualities and needs of each analyzed professional counseling community with regards to the upcoming necessity to develop the unified global standards for counseling training and practice.

The findings of this research may underpin the formation of the prospective unified standards for the global counseling training. The qualitative comparison of this meta-synthesis can be used for the discussion of how the worldwide professional counseling community can be effectively consolidated in the future.

This qualitative research can be utilized to contribute to the development of and sustainability of a counseling globalization process by providing a comprehensive comparison analysis of the standards for the accreditation of counseling training programs in the chosen locations. The outcomes of this study can become a solid foundation for the further discussion of the effective ways of globalizing counseling, especially in the counseling training field.

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