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Exploring educators' learning in an international nurse educator education programme: a qualitative longitudinal study

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FINE Europe Conference
Theme: Future of Nurse Educator Education
Barcelona March 2024



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Funding: ERASMUS +

Background: Key points

- ERASMUS project was developed to address two main issues: (1) a persistent lack of qualified nurse educators (Gazza, 2019) and (2), a heterogeneity in nurse educators' education within and across European countries (Campos Silva et al., 2021).
- Awareness that, internationally, requirements for formal nurse educator education differ significantly (Jackson et al., 2009; Campos Silva et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2023).
- This heterogeneity is also true for continuous professional development (CPD) which is obligatory in some countries, whilst in others it remains at a recommendation level (Smith et al., 2023, Mikkonen et al., 2021).
- Core competencies of educators include pedagogical and research competencies, skills in international networking, leadership and management, knowledge in clinical skills and of cultural and social factors (WHO, 2016, McAllister & Flynn, 2016).
- Internationalization: learning from each other is beneficial and allows addressing global, cultural and social factors (Koskimäki et al., 2021).
- Similar to the Bologna declaration from 1999, project set out as a first step thinking towards harmonizing educator education across Europe.

Intervention: Empowering Nurse Educators in the Changing World Project (ENEW)

Erasmus + project: Empowering Nurse Educator in the Changing World Project consisted of 30 ECTS (ECTS = European Credit Transfer & Accumulation System)

ENEW consisted of **five** modules delivered over nine month:

- Empowering Learning Environments in Nursing Education (ELENE, 10 ECTS, week-long on campus)
- Global Health Issues (5 ECTS)
- Future Issues in Nursing Education (5 ECTS)
- Evidence-Based Teaching (5 ECTS, week-long international student exchange)
- Ethics and Nursing Educators' Work (5 ECTS)

Course delivery of modules: blended learning format, teaching and learning made use of e-learning platform (Digi Campus, Finland).

Aim & Design:

Aim:

The aim of this exploratory, longitudinal qualitative study was to examine and describe the European “Empowering Nurse Educators in the Changing World” (ENEW, 30 ECTS) programme participants’ experiences over time.

Design:

- Qualitative longitudinal design to capture change over time
- Individual semi-structured interviews at **three different time points**: after delivery of (1) ELENE, (2) Global Health & Futures in Nursing Education, and (3) Evidence-based teaching & Ethics in Nursing Education.
- Online interviews (over ZOOM) were conducted between October 2021 to June 2022 by SK & MC, lasted between 30 to 90 minutes
- Interviewers did not interview participants from their own home country.
- Data: **8 participants** resulting in **23 interviews**, one participant was lost to follow-up at time point 3.

Participants & Data Analysis

Participants:

- 42 participants were eligible, **8** participants reflecting all ERASMUS grant nationalities agreed to participate
- Teaching experiences ranged from beginner to expert (new – 10 years)
- 7 participants were female, 1 was male, pseudonyms used are mostly gender neutral (privacy & anonymity)

Data Analysis:

- Inductive & iterative cycle
- Interviews were transcribed verbatim, anonymized & checked for accuracy & uploaded into NVivo 14 (Lumivera, 2020)
- **Thematic Analysis** guided by Braun & Clarke (2022)
- SK & MC led analysis team starting off with independently analysing three interviews before coming together reflecting, discussing and agreeing on codes, regular meetings with the whole research team (access to data via secure project Moodle site)
- Iterative cycle of independent analysis and discussions continued throughout the analysis
- Development of codes & codebook over time
- Epistemological stance: **social constructivism**

Examples of Codebook Development over Time

| Name | Description | Files | References |
|---|--|-------|------------|
| Deepening my own knowledge on teaching | Data relating to how participants own knowledge on teaching is getting better, is being enhanced etc | 4 | 5 |
| Implementing the <u>things</u> I am learning | Data relating to how participants have implemented into their teaching practice stuff they are learning on the NNE programme | 9 | 11 |
| Learning how to motivate students using digital resources | Data related to how the participants can use digital resources to motivate their students' learning | 1 | 1 |
| Learning new technologies for teaching | Data relating to the learning of new technologies that aid teaching | 4 | 5 |



| | | | |
|-------------------|---|---|----|
| change phase 2 | changes from phase 1 to phase 2 in experiences and perceptions | 0 | 0 |
| challenges | describes challenges but for both units because this is often overlapping in discussions | 1 | 2 |
| Group composition | Data relating to challenges in group composition, this may be because of differences in education level or teaching experience or language barriers or time differences | 6 | 16 |
| time zones | relates to working with others in different time zones | 3 | 3 |

Ethics

Ethical approval: granted by the PI University (Tuku) (Ref number: 24/2021, 7.6.2021)

Process of working:

- Participants were approached for participation & written consent obtained during the on-campus ELENE week (Turku, October 2021)
- Invitation: information letter, privacy notice & explanatory video about the study
- Online interviews were set up centrally at the PI University
- Interviewers re-consented participants verbally before each interview, part of recording
- Data were securely held on a password protected server at the PI institute – challenges for checking transcripts for accuracy

Findings:

Theme 1: Participants' experiences & reflections on learning across the courses

- Phase 1: Expectations and motivation of participating in an international nurse educator programme
- Phase 2: Participants' reflections on Global Health and Futures in Nurse Education
- Phase 3: Participants' reflections on Evidence-Based Teaching and Ethics in Nurse Education

Theme 2: Participants' longitudinal reflections on programme participation, its challenges and suggestions for the future

- Challenges
- Suggestions for changes and future courses
- Reflections on the international dimensions of the programme

Theme 1: Participants' experiences & reflections on learning across the courses

Phase 1: Expectations and motivation of participating in an international nurse educator programme

- ***Learning about the New Nurse Educator programme and motivation for participation (ELENE)***
- ***ELENE and implementing new learning***

Phase 2: Participants' reflections on Global Health and Issues in Future Nurse Education

- ***Global Health Issues***
- ***Issues in Future Nurse Education***

Phase 3: Participants' reflections on Evidence-Based Teaching and Ethics in Nurse Educators' Work

- ***Evidence-Based Teaching***
- ***Ethics and Nurse Educators' Work (Ethics)***

Example: ELENE & Implementation

One week residential course focused on new technologies and digital pedagogy that lends itself to early implementations once participants were back home.

- Charlotte 2*: Yes! First of all, I'm now more confident using PowerPoint. I try the quizzes, I try Mentimeter, and I feel good, that's another thing, because I have learned now - I feel good if I'm using it.
- Jo 1: For example, already after coming from education activity in Turku, I have applied new elements to my teaching process, and my students are satisfied.
- Julie 1: Immediately, the things that I learn and can implement, I've taken immediately, you know. This last module we had was, all about digitalization and things like that. So, we are seeing "Okay, how can we involve students more like, using, you know, quizzes and their phones, to interact. Things like that we're taking on immediately, and they have been very beneficial.

Whilst the examples are relating to ELENE, rethinking, for example, curriculum content to include new knowledge/ topics from across the programme courses was not uncommon across the sample.

* Indicates the interview phase.

Example: Issues in Future Nurse Education

Topic focused on how nurse education was organised and regulated in participating countries and participants worked in groups which allowed for similarities and difference to emerge.

- Rob 2: I think an interesting learning moments was about the different health care systems especially ... [] Because I think we are like western European country, we don't look at eastern Europe. [] I think it's so interesting how they... how the system works there because I had no clue about anything there so that was quite interesting and actually Slovaks have like quite similar problem in nursing like we do in our country.
- Sam 2: The interesting part was how much nursing and teaching nursing is developing all the time. [] First, we started at simulation and now we are learning robotics and all these things. The future in nursing education seems like a very interesting part. I'm going to graduate as a nursing educator now and if you think you are graduating, you are never ready, you have to all the time, have to study new things and that's in both nursing and in nursing education.

Looking beyond one's own country's boundaries fostered reflections and comparisons on nurse education in a given country. This also resulted in the insight that continuous professional education is a necessity, not just for nurses, but also for educators.

Theme 2: Participants' reflections on programme participation, its challenges and suggestions for the future



Example: Challenges of participating in an international educator education programme

Group work & language:

- Julie 1: You speak. So, yes, I was consciously trying to say “no” to them. And, but sometimes I was outnumbered, they said “we decided you’re going to go” and I was like ‘oh, how many times I’m gonna tell you “no”?’
- Jo 1: I would like to great thank my classmates, and this study group, because they were very patient about me. Because I know my English language and my language skills is not that good as them. And for example, I expect and would be, would like to have better language skills during this study programme.
- Sam 2: I have learned a lot on this course. I do take all 30 ECTS, so I think if I had taken only one piece of it, it wouldn’t be maybe so intense than it's now. I am very pleased that I chose the whole thing, I think I have learned a lot and I think because I have also forgot a little in English, I haven’t used English so much, I think it is also getting better all the time.

Group work resulted in participants needing to leave their language comfort zone. It required patience and understanding but was, in the end, rewarding.

Example: Suggestions for changes

Suggested changes:

Timing:

- Alex 2: Personally, I would benefit from longer gap between the modules because it's very rapid and it kind of feels like we just finished and now we should go for another one.
 - The programme was delivered over a nine month period and extending it to a year to alleviate time pressures at work & studying was common suggestion.
 - There were also suggestions to keep the same study day (weekday) across the programme, use the block system and more residential weeks.

Leadership:

- Alex 3: I think the important part is that, again, we don't want only to enhance our knowledge, but we want to build our leadership because that will impact on our teaching.
- Julie 2: I would get more leaders nursing leaders in this course, you know, to inspire us [] because that's how we learn that's how we get inspired and that's what we really need sometimes.
 - Leadership was not just discussed in relation to nurse educators' CPD needs, but also as an important component in the undergraduate nursing curriculum.

Example: International dimension of the programme

- Rob 3: First, I want to say that the most important thing for me was that there have been so many different countries participating because I have a wider view on things. That's the first, the other thing is, I have learned so many useful things through the study units and through the conversations with the other students. It's what's really inspiring, actually, and I have learned so many things which I can use for teaching.
- Ali 3: Well, maybe the most important thing. Because it opens your mind it helps you really to realize how to learn from very different perspectives and different people and what you can also offer but in certain way respectful way and of course I got lot of friends from course and great experiences and I think if it couldn't be international it couldn't be the same.
- Julie 3: And the fun of this is actually learning from others.

The international dimension was viewed as exclusively positive, despite the language challenges. Learning in an international group opened up their minds and fostered seeing things from different perspectives which, in turn, helped participants to reflect on their own practices back home.

The views expressed by these excerpts are evident across all participants.

Summary

- Longitudinal nature of the study allowed us to look at the participants' experiences and reflections on their learning in specific courses but also looking at their longitudinal views reflecting participants overall experiences of the programme.
- Despite some challenges, overall, the programme was viewed positively by participants.
- The programme created opportunities for networking across country boundaries and thus opportunities in addressing current issues as they relate (1) to a persistent lack of qualified nurse educators (Gazza, 2019), (2) the diversity in nurse educators' education within and across European countries (Campos Silva et al., 2021).
- Harmonizing the education of nurse educators is the next logical step following on from the Bologna declaration in 1999 harmonizing higher education across Europe and thus ensuring high quality nurse educator education.
- This in, in turn, impacts on the delivery of safe, evidence-based and person-centered healthcare.
- I want to close with Julie's comment:

And the fun of this is actually learning from others.

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