

Basics of Pedagogy for Faculty of Economics PhD Students

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Abstract

The article describes the motives of the Department of Engineering Education of Technical University of Košice (DEE TUKE) to carry out a pilot course “Basics of Pedagogy for Faculty of Economics PhD Students”, whose aim was to convey the basic principles of the work of a university teacher. There were issues of Pedeutology, Psychology, Rhetoric and Didactics of economic subjects discussed. The paper reflects the questions of the course implementation, its structure in form and content, as well as evaluation by the participants of five departments of Faculty of Economics, Technical University of Košice, its management and instructors/lecturers of the course.

Keywords:

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University teachers
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Quality of University education

Schlüsselwörter:

Bildungsforschung (Beispiel)
Alternative Unterrichtsformen (Beispiel)
Unterrichtsmaterialien (Beispiel)

1 Introduction

A PhD is the highest level of academic degree in Slovakia and can be done either full-time or part-time. There is a study part as well as a scientific-research part and full time students also have teaching activities. Full-time PhD students also have duties connected with the performance of pedagogical activities according to the valid Act 131/2002 §54 (11). This Act defines the obligation to carry out pedagogical activity or other professional activity related to pedagogical activity for a maximum of four hours per week averaged over the academic year in which the teaching takes place. Thus, full time PhD students carry out teaching activities that can influence the quality of university education at a particular university.

2 Theoretical background

Full-time PhD students hold a special position at the university. While they are registered as university students, they are perceived as university teachers by students.

According to Berliner (in Čejková, 2017), a beginner teacher is one who has been teaching for fewer than five years at university. Full-time PhD students are beginner teachers in this sense. According to Huberman (in

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Čejková, 2017), PhD students need to focus on two areas at once – dealing with the academic environment as well as teaching at the beginning of their career as university teachers.

There are several reasons for doing a doctoral degree. This issue has been the subject of expert discussions at many conferences. Lukáčová (2017) from Prešov University has carried out a qualitative analysis of the answers of full-time PhD students. These results confirmed both internal and external (autonomous and non-autonomous) motivation. Internal motivation represents the natural interest in the field, the joy of scouting and pedagogical work. External autonomous motivation promotes self-realization and personal growth. External non-autonomous motivation means, among other things, the challenge of becoming a good teacher or the support of a supervisor. (Lukacova, 2017, p. 17). The most common reason for doing a PhD is the interest in scientific research. This has also been confirmed by the results of research of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (Labancová, 2017). Doing a doctoral degree enables students to continue exploring and enhancing knowledge in the area in which they want to become experts. However, it is questionable whether their knowledge from previous degrees is sufficient as the basis for their teaching activities. It has to be asked if it is appropriate to teach intuitively or imitate their former teachers. Or if it is appropriate if they learn how to teach based on their own mistakes?

There are no universities which prepare future university teachers in Slovakia. There was no pedagogical, psychological and methodological training officially required until the early 1980s. Professional university qualifications were sufficient to teach at a university. Educational training was a precondition for all university teachers at a certain time. Presently, the pedagogical-psychological preparation of university teachers is an internal matter at every university. This education has been carried out at the Technical University of Košice (TUKE) since 1989 as a Pedagogical Course for University Teachers. It is currently under international standards IGIP (International Society for Engineering Pedagogy). Full-time PhD students have not been included in this yet. However, the Department of Engineering Education (DEE) does not consider it appropriate to view the pedagogical activities of full-time PhD students only as a condition for obtaining a PhD. That is why DEE has introduced a pilot course for PhD students, given its history of providing training to teachers at TUKE. This decision has also been supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Slovak Republic (MŠVVaŠ SR).

In the Vocational Study Long-term Plan for Educational, Research, Development and Other Creative Activities for Universities 2016-2020 Part B.1 - Quality of University Education, the Ministry's special emphasis is on creating support for university teachers in the teaching process (paragraph 18, p. 4). The Ministry is also focused on doctoral degrees in view of the necessity to adopt measures leading to the standardization of the position of PhD students. Emphasis has also been placed on the rights and obligations of PhD students within the institution (paragraph 26, p. 6), including the teaching duties of full-time PhD students.

Experts from abroad are also interested in the pedagogical preparation of university teachers. Research from Florida A&M University (Robinson & Hope, 2013) aimed to determine the level of perceived need to include the preparation of students, future university teachers, in undergraduate education. The respondents were 200 full-time university teachers. The results indicated that university teachers perceived the need to develop pedagogical courses at the undergraduate level as preparation for possible work in the field of teaching at the university. Around 78% of university teachers who participated in the research had not attended such a course during their undergraduate degree and 62% of respondents had not attended a similar course after post-graduate degrees. Only 35 respondents made comments and 18 were selected for inclusion. The answers to the question of introducing the course as part of graduation were divided into three. 6 university teachers said "yes" without reservations, 7 said "yes with exception" and 5 were against. The exceptions in the second group were also concerned with the emphasis on the diversity of scientific disciplines taught at university. "Yes with exception" was conditioned by the fact that the courses do not deal with pedagogical theory but directly with practice. It was also a condition that the courses should not be run through pedagogical faculties. The reason for this statement was that the faculties of education are too school-oriented and their approach to pedagogy is general, rather than on the specificity of science disciplines. Respondents based their negative attitudes towards pedagogical courses on the fact that these courses are actually absent. Respondents also insist that the position of a university teacher is primarily based on scientific work, not teaching.

There have also been interesting findings from the Institute of Educational Sciences at the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University (Čejková, 2017). The question of readiness to teach was examined in a sample of 19 beginner teachers. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with university teachers and subsequently analysed. The researchers concluded that the majority of respondents stated the need to educate beginner teachers in the field of pedagogy. The negative effects of the lack of pedagogical preparation

were also identified by university teachers. Beginner teachers identified two basic educational needs. The first is to learn how to teach in an interactive way, and the second is to learn how to prepare for teaching effectively. Beginner teachers have proposed including the course in the doctoral degree with subsequent support from mentors and exchange of teaching experience.

KIP has also relied on the previous work of the Department of Education at the Faculty of Economics and Public Administration at the University of Economics in Bratislava (EUBA) (Šlosár, 2012) in creating the course.

3 Course structure and content

DEE endeavours to contribute to the TUKE effort to rank among the “universities in which science and research are brought together” (Šima, Pabian as cited in Čejková, 2017, p. 161). The pilot intensive course "Basics of Pedagogy for PhD Students at the Faculty of Economics" took place before the beginning of the academic year 2019/2020.

The aim of the course was to outline the basic principles of the work of a university teacher in 30 lessons, over five working days. The course was open to PhD students in all years. The course was attended by 25 PhD students from five departments at the Faculty of Economics TUKE as well as three beginner lecturers. The course was led by four lecturers in the fields of pedeutology, psychology, rhetoric and didactics of economic subjects.

A demand-based analysis of the future course participants as well as the head of each EKF department was prepared before the pilot course was created. There were specific requirements for the content of the course formulated by the trainees. All the requirements were analysed by the course creators and incorporated into the course content with regard to the staff, time and space possibilities of the department. Before the full-time part of the course began, each enrolled course participant was required to do some written preparation for the teaching unit (seminar/exercise). In addition, any written preparation for teaching that had already been used in the classroom was requested from the PhD students in the second and third years as well as from junior lecturers. The role of PhD students in the first year was to draw up their first written preparation for teaching on any topic. Intentionally, the students did not receive any instructions. The creators and lecturers of the course had the opportunity to review the pedagogical thinking of the course participants based on this activity. The course participants were then divided into two groups. They were acquainted with the professional standards and competences of a university teacher and with different types of teaching and learning styles.

The participants were given information about the psychological specifics of a university student in the psychological part of the course. Each participant received recommendations about building appropriate authority as well as practical advice in reducing stage fright and stress. The PhD students also had the opportunity to apply individual recommendations during the rhetoric skills training. The rhetoric skills training included each course participant recording a talk and subsequent feedback. There was also a group analysis of the individual talks in terms of non-verbal communication and spoken language techniques. Part of the course on didactics of economic subjects aimed to provide information on how to prepare teaching according to information sheets of individual subjects and syllabuses, didactic analysis of the curriculum, evaluation methods at the university, creation of didactic tests, didactic techniques and teaching tools. The course consisted of various teaching methods and activities. Lectures, seminars, exercises and workshops were alternated depending on the content of the lesson. The participants were able to discuss many educational elements closely linked to university education, such as the need to know the specifics of students' learning styles. Participants could test how the various methods and activities (such as the KWL method) worked on them. It was essential to know how the methods would affect students when they were used.

The aim of the final part of the course was to give participants the opportunity to discuss questions that had arisen after completing all parts. Getting feedback from the participants in person as well as anonymously in writing was also part of the final sessions. The participants were also assigned a final task which was to do a written preparation for a teaching unit (seminar/exercise) with the same topic as the beginning of the course and hand it in to the lecturers. They were given two weeks to submit the written assignment. This was followed by the results provided at individual meetings with the course participants.

4 Feedback

The analyses of the written preparations for the teaching units elaborated by the participants in the course are considered as one of the forms of feedback on the course teaching. This can be seen as double feedback where the first is for the participants themselves and the second is for the organizers and lecturers of the course. The dominance of the content-subject orientation of the preparations that the participants made before the course was established was noted. All lecturers and participants agreed with this. It can be said that most of the PhD students were able to implement the selected didactic requirements and elements after completing the course. The participants were able to express their satisfaction with selected elements of the course on a 5-point scale (1 = poor; 5 = excellent) in anonymous feedback. The ratings regarding the usefulness, organization, composition and content of the course ranged from 3.2 to 3.84 and were satisfactory for the course organizers. Lower ratings were recorded regarding the course date (arithmetic mean of 2.36) and the duration of the course (arithmetic mean of 2.8). This assessment is one of the essential findings that will be taken into account when the course is re-organized.

The Dean of Faculty of Economics TUKE has confirmed the pilot course as being a worthwhile venture:

"The first idea to organize a course of pedagogical skills for PhD students at Faculty of Economics came in December last year. Personally, I would like to highlight the professional and highly committed approach of DEE throughout the entire cooperation period. I am very happy that this course has taken place. I appreciate the level of the course and I believe it was of great benefit to our PhD students. At the same time, I believe that the collaboration between Faculty of Economics and DEE will expand in the future and our common ideas will benefit our teachers and our students."

The evaluation of the course participants is encouraging to the organizers and lecturers to prepare a similar course in the future. The ambition of the course organizers is to be prepared not only for the PhD students of Faculty of Economics, but also for PhD students at other TUKE faculties. Some selected course feedback is as follows:

Leos; new Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Economics and Management:

"The Faculty of Management also enrolled us as new assistant professors for an intensive one - week pedagogical course for PhD students. Even though we have already had experience with teaching, at the end of the course we assessed that it was beneficial for us. The most inspiring part of the course was certainly rhetoric, which will help the PhD students improve their expression. I believe that this pilot course will continue to develop and become an integral part of the training of younger colleagues in the early weeks of their teaching process. I can appreciate how this course would have benefitted us at the beginning. I thank my colleagues from DEE TUKE for their willingness, energy and time."

Veronika; PhD student, 2nd year:

"I consider the basics of pedagogy for PhD students very useful. Not only for those in the first year, but also for the other years. After passing these basics, we realized what we were not doing right and how it could be improved. Teaching is just a science."

Katarina; PhD student, 1st year:

"We all appreciated the rhetoric exercise as well as discussions with teachers who have a lot of experience. The practical information and tips from these discussions benefited us the most. Some of us also appreciated the practical information on how to prepare for teaching, how to plan a semester, and how to study the level of student knowledge."

Based on the findings, a SWOT analysis was created which captured the essential elements that will determine the preparation of following courses.

We have identified the strengths of the course in several areas: the skills and attitude of the trainers; a supportive approach from TUKE management especially Vice-Rector for Education; good relationship with the management of TUKE faculties realized through the Vice-Deans for education as well as the organization of the course. On the other hand, weaknesses have been identified: the current profile of lecturers which would need to be expanded due to the specifics of teaching at individual faculties. In addition, there are also the spatial and material issues of DEE (small classrooms, noise, ventilation) as well as the duration and intensity of the course.

There are a number of opportunities which have arisen in connection with the course. In particular, it is the possibility of cooperating with other experts and the creation of supervision. The threats we identified include: the need for a higher number of lecturers in the case of an increase in the number of course participants and the associated time and organizational complexity; underestimating the importance of pedagogical training by the academic community and university management; failure of participants to master the content of the course (given the intensity of the course).

The experience gained by this pilot course will be the basis for DEE staff to improve the proposed training for PhD students in the area of acquiring pedagogical skills.

5 Conclusion

DEE has been organizing courses for university teachers for many years. One of the main objectives of organizing these courses is to eliminate the preference of scientific activity over teaching. As the organizers of the course, we started from the assumption that it is necessary to acquaint beginner university teachers with pedagogical-psychological aspects and specifics of the work of the university teacher as soon as possible. This would preferably occur before the first direct pedagogical activity. That is why we focused on PhD students and initiated a pilot course for them. The course results are an important basis for the preparation of further courses for KIP as an initiator and organizer of this type of education.

We endorse L. Endrizzi's criticism (Labancová, 2015, p. 44), according to which "at universities, education is based on the assumption that one must be a quality scientist in order to become a quality teacher. However, one becomes a good teacher only by teaching". It is essential to consider the statement by I. Turek (2008, p. 3) that "as if the ability to teach at university was given to everyone in some way automatically, as long as they controlled the subject matter content".

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