

ASSESSMENT OF SATISFACTION WITH STUDYING THE "HIGHER EDUCATION DIDACTICS" COURSE AMONG FIRST-YEAR DOCTORAL STUDENTS OF WARSAW MEDICAL UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Introduction:

In the academic year 2013/2014 a new syllabus for the "Introduction to Higher Education Didactics" course was introduced for the first year full-time and part-time students of a doctoral (third level) programme at all faculties at Warsaw Medical University. The new syllabus was compliant with the guidelines of outcome-based education (European and National Qualification Frameworks). The teaching classes comprised a total of 30 hours of lectures and 12 hours of seminars. The following classes: *Fundamentals of Voice Production* and *E-learning and remote learning - new forms of education - in the form of seminars* were introduced in the curriculum for the first time. The course began with the *Introductory class* conducted in seminar groups.

Aim:

The study aimed to analyse the opinions of the first year doctoral students about and their satisfaction with the changes in teaching methods used in the "Introduction to Higher Education Didactics" course.

Materials and Methods:

A total of 96 first year full-time and part-time students of a doctoral (third level) programme took part in the study, including 61 women and 35 men. The mean age of the study group of students was: 28.46 years; min. 24, max. 37, SD: 3.808. Medicine graduates constituted the largest group (42 persons), the study group comprised also 10 pharmacists, 9 dentists, and other specialists in health science.

Quantitative study, poll, anonymous survey, questionnaire developed by the authors, auditorium questionnaire, voluntary participation in the study. The study was conducted on June 2nd, 2014.

Results:

During the introductory classes conducted in seminar groups (January 2014) the students were asked to present group reflection about what they would like to learn with reference to the higher education didactics and to answer the following questions: *What are you interested in?* and *What seems to be useful in your situation?*

Approximately 130 answers were provided. They were analysed and subdivided into several thematic fields. The analysis became the basis for development of the syllabus. General assessment of classes amounted to 3.92. Introductory seminar and a series of 8 lectures: 4.7. Lecture: Teaching Designing: development of course outline, planning classes - 3.7. Lecture: Development of Didactic Tests - 3. Seminars: E-learning and Remote Learning - 4.4. Seminars: Voice Production - 3.8. A vast majority of the students reported that the teaching content in the following areas: *Dealing with difficulties during classes, Teaching/learning methods, Teacher as a person: features, skills, and competence that build authority, Arousing interest among students* was presented at a fully satisfactory level. The smallest number of students reported their satisfaction with Voice Production classes.

Conclusions:

1. The new and improved syllabus for the "Introduction to Higher Education Didactics" course met the expectations of the first year doctoral students and may be used in this form next year.

2. It is advisable to increase the number of hours of seminars or teaching classes in order to improve the quality of education with reference to the preparation of doctoral students to their teaching-related activity.
3. Introduction of e-learning classes covering the contents of selected lectures should be considered.

Keywords: satisfaction; doctoral students; medical university; didactics.

1 INTRODUCTION

In Polish medical higher education system of the third degree (PhD studies), students are prepared not only for research but also for work in the field of didactics with students of medical departments and, as a result, their curriculum should also include content concerning didactics of higher education [1-3]. According to Polish legal acts that regulate curriculum of studies of the third degree, such content should concern didactics skills leading to achieving aptitude connected with methodology and the technique of conducting lectures. Basing on the guidelines stipulated in current legal acts, during their studies of the third degree, as part of their university didactics, students should realise also internship in form of classes at university which they would conduct or participate in them (annual minimum amount is 10 whereas maximum 90 hours) [1-3].

Didactics classes in the field of higher education didactics have been conducted at the Medical University of Warsaw (MUW) since 2002. These classes have been conducted since the very beginning by the Department of Teaching and Learning Outcomes of the Faculty of Health Sciences at MUW.

Initially, between 2002 and 2014, these classes, under the name of “Pedagogical Training” were conducted in co-operation with the employees of Academy of Special Pedagogy in Warsaw. They were mandatory for the students of the first year of all PhD faculties at MUW. Moreover, all scientific workers and PhDs who were interested in the subject of MUW could also participate in these lectures.

In the academic year of 2012/2013, due to the need to adjust education to the requirements of European and National Qualification Frameworks and within the activities aimed at improving the quality of teaching, an analysis and evaluation was performed concerning current manner of preparing PhDs for their future work as an academic teacher. As a result, a process of numerous changes concerning the content, method and forms of education was initiated that would increase its effectiveness, adjust to the needs of modern times and the specificity of the target, and increase the PhDs’ satisfaction with their participation in classes and teaching work. It was assumed that planning education teaching of the PhDs is a process that should include the following stages:

1. Diagnosis of the PhDs’ needs as far as higher education didactics is concerned
2. Establishing the aim of the curriculum
3. Selecting methods and techniques of the curriculum
4. Identifying the resources necessary to realise the curriculum
5. Planning the curriculum evaluation
6. Elaborating the plan of curriculum realisation
7. Realisation of the curriculum and evaluation of the process
8. Evaluating the outcomes.

In the academic year of 2013/14 there was a new pilot programme of a subject called “Introduction to the didactics of high education” for students of the first year of PhD both full-time and part-time at all faculties of MUW. It was elaborated on the basis of opinions of two groups: the authors and addressees of the programme and also in co-operation with the MUW authorities. Co-operation with the new year of PhDs was begun by diagnosing their needs concerning didactics of higher education and their choice of priorities.

During the introductory classes that were conducted in seminar groups (January 2014), students were asked to reflect in groups over the problem of what they would like to learn from the field of high education didactics and answer the following questions: *What are you interested in?* and *What seems most useful to you in current situation?*

Overall, around 130 answers were given. They were analysed and qualified into several topic categories (Tab. 1). This analysis became the basis on which curriculum was prepared. A new timetable was prepared and introduced, classes were monitored and so were the results. Following the series, PhDs were asked to provide feedback and complete a survey concerning their experience didactics that was gained during the first year of their PhD studies (surveys were anonymous). This helped gain information useful in further works over improving the quality of education in preparing the PhDs for their future work as academic teachers.

Tab. 1. Expectation of the first year PhDs at the Medical University of Warsaw concerning their pedagogical education.

Research area	Number of applications
Dealing with difficulties during classes	24
Teaching / learning methods	23
Teacher as a person: features, skills, competences building up authority	18
Creating interest in students	16
Motivating students	13
Rapport with students	8
Verification of knowledge and evaluation	8
Voice emission	5
Focusing students' attention	4
A good lecture / presentation	4
Preparing classes	3
Student: a learning adult	1

2 THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to analyse the opinions of the first year doctoral students about and their satisfaction with the changes in teaching methods used in the "Introduction to Higher Education Didactics" course.

3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

Overall, there were 96 students of the first year of the PhD (both full- and part-time) studies participated in the research from all faculties of the Warsaw Medical University. There were 61 women and 35 men, mean age of the studied group was 28, 46 years; SD: 3.808, min. 24, max. 37. Tab. 2 presents in detail education in the studied PhD group.

Tab. 2. Competition structure in the studied PhD group.

Occupation														
doctor	dentist	pharmacist	physiotherapist	Nurse	midwife	paramedic	dietician	graduate of public health sciences	Dental hygienist	Dental technician	audiologist	electroradiologist	Medical analyst	other (biologist, chemist)
42	9	10	5	5	3	1	4	2	0	0	0	0	4	2

A survey based on independently created questionnaire was carried out on June 2nd, 2014. Participation in the study was voluntary and the survey anonymous. The studies were conducted during the last meeting with the students of the first year of PhD studies at MUW, when students were also taking their final exam. Students taking the exam were given a survey form to be completed after their exam; they were also informed about its aim by a representative of PhD Students at MUW Authorities.

The survey consisted of two thematic parts:

1. **"Feedback concerning classes on higher education didactics"**
and
2. **"Teaching experience after the first year of PhD studies"**

Overall, there were 22 questions: 10 closed questions, 6 open questions and 6 specification questions: sex, year of birth, education, participation in organised classes preparing for work as a teacher, experience gained during classes with students and perceiving one's future as an academic teacher.

4 RESULTS

Students' expectations presented during the first class of **"Introduction to the higher education didactics"** were mostly or fully assessed as satisfactory. Detailed results of students' satisfaction in the areas described as needed and reported as such at the beginning of the course **"Introduction to the higher education didactics"** are presented in Table 3.

Tab. 3. Students' satisfaction from the areas described as needed that were reported as such at the beginning of the course (the number of studied PhD students).

Thematic area	Number of applications	Content was included in the following manner:		
		Fully satisfactory	Partly satisfactory	unsatisfactory
Dealing with difficulties during classes	24	71	23	1
Teaching / learning methods	23	74	20	1
Teacher as a person: features, skills, competences, authority	18	78	15	2
Stimulating students	16	66	25	4
Motivating students	13	53	36	5
Rapport with students	8	53	38	3
Knowledge verification and evaluation	8	36	39	20
Voice emission	5	31	38	26
Focusing students' attention	4	65	27	3
Good lecture / presentation	4	62	27	6
Preparing classes	3	59	30	6
Student: a learning adult	1	69	21	5

A vast majority of students of the 1st year of PhD studies at MUW did not participate in any organised forms of classes that would prepare them for a teacher's job, apart from the mandatory classes on **"Introduction to the higher education didactics"** which were realised during this year of PhD studies at MUW. Over half of them did not have any previous experience in teaching (Tab. 4).

Tab. 4. Participation in organised forms of classes preparing for a teacher's job, apart from the mandatory classes on Introduction to the higher education didactics" realised during this year of PhD studies at MUW.

No	question		Number of people
1.	Did you participate in any organised forms of classes that would prepare you for the job of a teacher, apart from the mandatory classes on teaching at university during this year of PhD studies at MUW?	Yes, during studies	13
		Yes, after studies	5
		no	75
2.	Apart from experience gained while teaching students during this academic year, do you have any other teaching experience?	yes	42
		no	50

Overall evaluation of classes conducted according to the new curriculum was high (Tab. 5. and Tab. 6.).

Tab. 5. Overall evaluation of classes on "Introduction to the higher education didactics".

Type of classes	Mean evaluation	Median	Modal
A series of 8 lectures on <i>"Introduction to the higher education didactics"</i>	4.7	5	5
Lecture: <i>Designing education: creating a curriculum and planning classes</i>	3.7	4	4
Lecture: <i>Creating tests</i>	3	3	2
Seminar: <i>E-learning and distant learning</i>	4.4	4.5	5
Seminar: <i>voice emission</i>	3.8	4	4

Tab. 6. Students' satisfaction from the series of lectures on "Introduction to the higher education didactics".

A series of 8 lectures on <i>"Introduction to the higher education didactics"</i>	Definitely yes	Rather yes	Neither yes nor no	Rather no	Definitely no
A. lectures were well organised	64	25	3	1	0
B. Requirements were clear	66	23	2	2	0
C. Content of the lectures was interesting for me	34	36	14	6	3
D. Content of the lectures was useful for me	37	39	13	3	1
E. Content of the lectures was presented clearly	65	25	2	0	0
F. Methods and techniques were appropriately selected	44	34	11	4	0
G. Lecture materials made learning easier	75	14	4	0	0
H. Atmosphere during lectures favoured studying	43	23	16	8	3
I. I learnt much during these lectures	34	34	18	6	1
J. I am satisfied with these lectures	38	35	12	5	3

Average number of hours worked out by the students of the 1st year of PhD studies was 128 (min. 12, max. 500). 48 of the studied people claimed they worked out more than the necessary normal working hours for students, i.e. 90 hours. In Table 7 and 8 there are teaching experiences of the studied group of PhD students of MUW presented in a detailed way.

Tab. 7. Teaching experiences of the studied PhDs.

No	Question	Answer	Number of people
1.	What type of classes did you conduct this academic year?	lectures	34
		seminars	73
		exercises	77
		internships	22
		others	2
2.	How do you generally evaluate your teaching competences?	Very good	13
		good	54
		satisfactory	27
		unsatisfactory	1
3.	How satisfied are you with your teaching work?	Very pleased	25
		Rather pleased	53
		Neither pleased nor displeased	16
		Rather displeased	1
		Very displeased	0
4.	Did you receive any helpful pieces of advice concerning your teaching students?	yes	44
		no	47
5.	If so, who provided you with advice/support?	Head of the unit	35
		PhD supervisor	31
		Other academic teacher	7
		PhD	34
		A person not related to the academic world	41
6.	In your teaching job, do you require assistance? (e.g. in preparing classes or their evaluation)?	Definitely yes	13
		Rather yes	26
		Neither yes nor no	20
		Rather no	26
		Definitely no	6
7.	Do you feel the need to master your teaching?	Definitely yes	50
		Rather yes	30
		Neither yes nor no	8
		Rather no	1
		Definitely no	3
8.	What type of educational training would be most appropriate in your opinion?	Conference / seminar	69
		Short workshops (4–6 hours)	30
		Longer workshops (up to 20 hours)	69
		Individual consultations	53
		e-learning or workshops (through the Internet)	66
		Other forms	87

A vast majority of students of the 1st year of PhD studies sees their role as academic teachers positively (Tab. 8).

Tab. 8. Self-perception as an academic teacher in the studied group of PhDs.

No	Question	Answer	Number of people
1.	Do you see yourself as an academic teacher in the future?	Yes	59
		Don't know	27
		no	7

5 DISCUSSION

In the presented work, the analysis concerned the results of studies into the teaching experience of the students of the 1st year of PhD studies at MUW connected with their perception of teaching competences and their needs in the area of didactics improvement.

Almost all students participating in the study are people with medical education. Prior to undertaking their PhD studies, majority of them did not participate in any form of organised classes that would prepare them for their future work as a teacher, over half of them had no experience connected with teaching at all. Thus, PhD studies, with their offer of classes in didactics that would be conducted at the university as well as participation in them, may become a golden opportunity to prepare for the position of an academic teacher. 61.5% sees themselves in this role, whereas 28% hesitates about this matter.

According to the legal Act concerning higher education, academic teacher in Poland are research and teaching staff, teaching staff, researchers employed in various positions, which is connected with the requirement to present an appropriate scientific title [1-3]. Training for an academic teacher is not required, unlike for teacher of a lower degree [1-3]. Yet the need for such a preparation has been noted for a long time [4, 5, 6]. D. Newble and R. Cannon, authors of a well-known book entitled "How to teach medicine", opened their introduction with a statement that people who teach at medical departments are mostly those who have never or almost never studied the theory of teaching [4,5]. Studying any subjects is no guarantee of success in future work, however, teaching with no theoretical preparation may become the parody of teaching. Their book was an attempt to support academic teachers of medical directions in their teaching. In the fourth edition of the book, the above quoted authors pointed out to the changes that take place in higher education, to the inner and outer pressure placed on the improvement in the quality of teaching, to introduction of innovation and to the need for educating academic teachers. These changes, in their opinion, provoke the need to support the teachers in meeting these expectations.

According to A.T. Pearson [5], competent teaching depends on three factors: knowledge of the subject, systematized knowledge of teaching and reflection on practical experience. Among these domains, the second one seems most demanding to the author: as far as I know – he writes –nobody claims that someone can be ready to teach without knowledge of the subject, without participating in practical experience of teaching and the possibility to reflect on that experience. On the other hand, many think that there is no need for systematic knowledge about teaching to become a teacher, one simply needs to know their subject and have a chance to practise, and the rest will come with time [5]. Including systematic teaching of didactics into the curriculum is, in his opinion, most desired: if it is possible to teach without gaining professional knowledge during a teacher training course (and there are examples of successful teachers who have never been taught about teaching), then it does not mean that it is possible to teach without professional knowledge. It is necessary when teaching. It can be gained in various ways, but it must be gained. The best way to do so is by including it or at least laying some foundations during courses for teachers.

The studied PhDs seem to be aware of the meaning of knowledge on teaching and the need to be educated in the field of higher education didactics. The following could be the evidence:

1. Results of surveys concerning features of good and effective academic teachers and expectations concerning course on didactics in higher education that would be conducted at the beginning of the course in small groups:

- 15 out of 16 groups stated that the key feature of a good teacher is “competence” understood as “having knowledge and skills to convey it”. Also, PhDs pointed out to many other features of a good lecturer, including psychosocial skills.
 - Among the most interesting and useful thematic areas, PhDs included: dealing with difficulties during classes (24 groups out of 32), teaching and learning methods (23 groups), features, skills that build up a teacher’s authority (18 indications), motivating students (16 groups), establishing and sustaining relations with students (8 groups).
2. Results obtained as answers to the question about the need to improve their own teaching: 83% respondents stated that they definitely or rather feel such a need (52.8% and 31.3% respectively).

These results may be assumed as positive. The studied PhDs see the complexity of teaching, the need to have many competences: specialist (subject-related), educational and psycho-pedagogical (educational), and they also seem open to being educated in that area. This may promote their development as academic teachers and help them realise the basic university task such as [1-3]:

1. Educating students so that they gain and expand knowledge necessary in their professional work;
2. Educating students in the sense of responsibility for the Polish state, for strengthening the principles of democracy and respect for human rights;
3. Conducting research and providing research services.

The students mostly conducted seminars and exercises. The number of hours varied from 12 to 500, 128 on average. According to the regulations of July 1st, 2012, students’ internships such as conducting classes at the university or participating in them cannot be less than 10 and exceed 90 hours annually. Half of the PhDs stated they worked more than 90 hours. It seems that the following would be a good solution:

- to suggest developing classes relatively early, allowing to develop their teaching competences before they would start conducting classes with students.
- begin internship by participating in classes conducted by experienced teachers.
- provide educational support that would develop reflection over teaching while independently conducting classes within the framework of internship.

Without the above, they may feel as if “thrown into deep waters”, which may become a source of stress. It is worth noting that while preparing for the job of a teacher of a lower degree, internship is preceded by a period of theoretical psychopedagogical preparation and is usually carried out gradually (observation, co-operation in preparing classes, conducting classes) under the supervision of experienced internship supervisors. Such preparation is the necessary condition to apply for a position of a teacher and becomes the foundation of teaching career that precedes their entering the profession [7]. In case of preparing PhDs for their work as academic teachers, preparation and entering the profession blend together. Psychopedagogical preparation for the position of an academic teacher is not regulated sufficiently: if PhDs can practise by conducting classes or participating in them can be seen as the first step in the development of a teaching career.

6 CONCLUSIONS

1. The new and improved syllabus for the "Introduction to Higher Education Didactics" course met the expectations of the first year doctoral students and may be used in this form next year.
2. It is advisable to increase the number of hours of seminars or teaching classes in order to improve the quality of education with reference to the preparation of doctoral students to their teaching-related activity.
3. Introduction of e-learning classes covering the contents of selected lectures should be considered.

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