Role of Pedagogues in the Alternative Forms of Education

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Abstract

Changing the role of the teacher is a characteristic and important part of adaptation of the school for educational activity, realized by other educational form, alternative present (face to face) form of teaching. For many pedagogues, including university teachers, this change represents the real problem and requires changing the attitude towards the pedagogy process and to pass through special training.

In contribution we comment on the main differences of the pedagogues’ work in the present or distance form of education. We analyze students’ ideas of distance form of study in connection with the different approach of three teachers and their objective different level of methodical training for tutors activities (work). The research was realized on Pedagogical faculty of the Masaryk university in Brno.

1. Introduction

Within the last 15 years higher education in the Czech Republic has recorded significant conceptual changes. These came about thanks to a number of circumstances, primarily due to the obvious need to connect the Czech higher education system with the European approach. It is also important to ensure their permeability, higher education students’ mobility and thus enable their preparation and development to succeed in the economic system of the entire European Union. Such strategy together with the Economic growth strategy of the Czech republic has required a thorough higher education reform which has been completed by the adoption of the new higher education act (Act no. 111/1999 and following amendments) and other related legal measures. Great emphasis has also been placed on life-long learning support of the whole population in the Czech republic. Further education and development of those economically active has become one of the priorities of the Long term plan for education and research, artistic and other creative activities in the higher education sector in the 2006 – 2010 period.

In order to be able to achieve this priority it is necessary to support the development of the distance or combined form of study, preparation and introduction of training aids (multimedia training device) use of e-learning and interactive training programs and materials for such forms of study. It is also of great importance to establish joined training laboratories, project and problem based studies develop the consultancy- information center. This is a great task, which will require an active involvement of the higher education pedagogues, their understanding, interest and individual commitment. At the end it will be the pedagogues who will ensure the quality of education, create the content of the educational products and look for and put in place new methodologies and concepts.

2. Alternative forms of education at higher education institutions

Teachers, higher education pedagogues or academic employees constitute the main element within the educational process as they provide the educational content, select the pedagogical methods and didactic approaches which allow the students to access the educational content most efficiently in contact teaching. No one doubts the significant role of the teacher in the face to face form of education. All hitherto approaches in the face to face form of education are based on the traditional approach which is also used in the preparation and training of teachers for all types of schools. A majority of teachers so far only have experience with the traditional form of teaching.

In relation with the new challenges facing the higher education institutions in light of the higher education reform a number of new demands also await the higher education pedagogues. These do not affect the educational content as higher education pedagogues guarantee high quality and proficiency. They mainly target the area of pedagogical competencies.

The requirements are by no means insignificant:

- Manage the adult education methods and pedagogical approach to adults from the practice, who come back to school to study in graduate study programs or life-long learning courses.
- Successfully master the influx of new information communication technologies and their pedagogically efficient introduction within the educational approaches.

1 The Actualisation of the conception of higher education reform, www.msmt.cz
• Manage the preparation and realization of new forms of education, alternative to the traditional face to face education.

**Distance learning** has been long used as an alternative to the face to face learning across the world. Distance learning is based on a managed self-study, not pure individual self-study. Given the high requirements on the students (psychological pressure, study skills, high degree of motivation, ICT skills and competences etc.) as well as the fact that within some areas of higher education graduate study or some further education courses it is difficult to transmit some of the skills and competencies using distance learning methods, some higher education institutions rather choose the so called combined study. The Higher education act defines the **combined form** of study as a combination of the face to face and distance form, not an intensified face to face studies over the weekends (previously considered distance learning). These alternative forms of studies require very different approaches to students from the pedagogues, different pedagogical methods, specific scope and distribution of contact with the students and significantly different preparation of the study materials and knowledge of the psychological – consultancy methods to support the students.

**Are the higher education pedagogues ready for this? Do they have the necessary competences necessary to meet the requirements and demand on the distance education pedagogue?**

Some do because they themselves try to get enough new information and they consider the new pedagogical situation; thanks to their pedagogical experience, personal qualities, empathy and individual commitment and interest in the result of the studies they are successful. On the other side, there are many who are not aware that new pedagogical competences are expected from them. Often not even the academic officials realize this need despite the fact that they decide whether the distance or combined form will be used in their study programs. Wrong decisions or at least those without proper backing result in misunderstanding, confusion, overload of pedagogues and finally in their lack of motivation in this pedagogical work.

3. **What are the main pedagogical roles of a pedagogue within the distance learning process?**

1. **Implements the pedagogical leadership and methodology towards the students as part of the study texts** and other study aids of the particular subject/module, which he is in charge of. The author of the distance study texts must be trained in the specifics of distance education in order to be able to correctly and efficiently use the methodological approaches and self-study support elements. A study text used in self-study form is significantly different both formally and methodologically from a traditional face to face study materials. The use of electronic media pens new opportunities for its improvement and meeting the demand of the students. A completely different approach is required from the author, new skills, interest in the pedagogic work. More time is needed for the creative work and there are higher requirements on the technical support and technological backup.

2. Provides support to the student during their studies and **fulfils the role of a distance learning tutor:**

   • Regularly consults with every member of the study group depending on their needs, helps manage the workload and content of the studies;
   • Corrects the written assignments which constitute a part of the support system and organization of the studies, hence provides the students with the necessary external feedback regarding their study progress
   • Continuously communicates with the students and assists them in overcoming study difficulties, enhances their motivation and provides the organizational and psychological – consulting service (based on his/ her ability and competences)
   • Prepares and facilitates tutorials and other face to face meetings aimed at discussion over the studied matters, training concrete skills and competences, obligatory laboratory exercises etc. The tutor hence does not teach so much but rather serves as a facilitator in the process of training skills and helps manage the practical application and use of the matters learned in practice.

It is obvious that the role of the pedagogue in distance learning and his concrete tasks vary significantly from the traditional pedagogical activities and approaches and as such require a completely different attitude and approach, mastering new skills and capabilities and furthermore also more time for preparation. Both theoretical studies as well as practical experience from abroad show that the role of distance learning study aids authors and distance learning tutor is crucial for the success of distance learning.

4. **Research of the impact of the tutor on the success of distance learning**

As part of a research realized at CSVŠ „Tertiary education in the knowledge society” together with the Pedagogical faculty of the Masaryk University in Brno we have done an empirical study of the impact of the tutor on the success of distance learning graduates. The working hypothesis which we were trying to verify was an
assumption that the degree to which the higher education pedagogue has been theoretically trained in distance learning and has understood the tutor work methodology will impact on the success of the students and their opinion on this form of study.

4.1 Material and methods

We have verified this hypothesis in a group of 508 students of the Pedagogical faculty (students of preparatory pedagogical studies) who have attended the course Information technologies I. These students were randomly dividend into three groups led by 3 different pedagogues (tutors).

Tab. 1. Distribution of the sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>tutor 1</th>
<th>tutor 2</th>
<th>tutor 3</th>
<th>total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>girls</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boys</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>508</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tutor 1 was at the same time the author of all the study materials available to students and was a distance learning certified pedagogue. The other two pedagogues (tutor 2 and tutor 3) had less knowledge and experience in distance learning tutoring. All the students were provided a complete set of materials created for their self-study. They included a textbook with a number of solved exercises and explanatory animations. The textbook covered the main content of the course. Those parts of the content, which rapidly change and are dynamic in their development, have been introduced in a form of video tutorials or web links. Students also received a detailed schedule with specific chapters covered and listing of study materials for each of the topics. The whole content of the course was split into three parts and each was accompanied with a set of tasks and exercises for self-study to practice the knowledge and skills taught. In total there were 56 exercises and tasks. Teachers advised the students how to proceed with their studies. Working out all exercises and successfully passing three tests constituted a base for acquiring the necessary credit at the end of course. At the end of the course students were asked to fill in an anonymous questionnaire.

4.2. Results of the survey

Almost 90% of the students realize the necessity and usefulness of the acquired knowledge and skills and almost a third of them have expressed this by allocating the highest number of points available (10), see figure 1.

Students were asked to assess the quality of the study materials, which were provided for them for the self-study. A majority of the students evaluated the overall quality of the materials positively. 86% of the students declared the quality was excellent or very good (ranking between 5 – 10 points).

Fig. 1. Usefulness of the PC skills learned

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Fig. 2. Overall evaluation of the materials in tutor 1 group

Fig. 3. Overall evaluation of the materials in tutor 2 group
Fig. 4. Overall evaluation of the materials in tutor 3 group

The differences in the evaluation varied significantly depending on who was the pedagogue working with the students during their studies and tutored them through the self-study (demonstrated in figure number 2 – 4). The difference became even more obvious in case of evaluation of the duality of the distance textbook. Students encountered this type of study material for the first time and hence needed a good support from the tutor in order to make use of it in the most efficient way. Another key issue was absence of a guide to the study program. Tutors were expected to play the role of the guide through the studies and should have explained how to work with the text and animations, how to proceed in the studies. The analysis of interview with the individual students showed the following:

- Some pedagogues have not read through the study materials carefully and relied on the fact that they know the content of the course.
- Tutors lacked practical experience. Less experienced tutors tended to use techniques traditional to the face to face studies during their consultations.
- Only tutor number 1 explained the students how to proceed in their studies and how to work with the study materials unusual for them.

The different approach of the individual pedagogues has also shown in case of evaluation of the distance learning form itself by the students. When asked whether or not they liked this form of study, 79% responded positively (between 6 – 10 points), however the differences between the individual groups tutored by different tutors is again tremendous (see figure 5 – 7).

Fig. 5. Evaluation of the distance learning form by students from tutor 1 group

Fig. 6. Evaluation of the distance learning form by students from tutor 2 group

Fig. 7. Evaluation of the distance learning form by students from tutor 3 group

There are great differences in students’ opinions in group 1 where the tutor is at the same time the author of the study materials, has extensive knowledge in distance learning and is highly committed to this form of study and aims at its implementation in the educational process. The
other two tutors are partly informed about the distance learning form, they have taken part in a training seminar on distance learning, they are interested in implementing this method in the studies; however they are afraid of the higher workload required and smaller student success rate. Tutor 3 generally does not belong among popular pedagogues and it has again been proved that negative personal characteristics show significantly in tutor work as part of distance learning.

4.3. Conclusions

The research has brought concrete outcomes from applying the distance learning approach in a graduate higher education program. A research done on a group of students of pedagogy has shown that in order to ensure success of such study program it is necessary not only to prepare high duality study materials but also to train and develop pedagogues who will realize this form of study and constitute the necessary support. We managed to verify our hypothesis that the role of the tutor is crucial and irreplaceable and that in order to manage this role it is not sufficient to only master the content of the studies and previous experience in the face to face learning traditional approach. It has also proved to be extremely important to draft a structured and simply study guide which could help the students overcome some of the main obstacles in their studies arising from isolation during their studies, lack of study discipline and self-study habits or lack of motivation, lack of previous experience in using electronic media etc. In choosing the pedagogues who will support this form of study it is crucial to place great emphasis on their training towards the tutor work but also to consider their personal qualities and individual interest and Commitment to such approach.

5. Summary

Distance learning form and its use as an alternative to the traditional face to face learning is an up-to-date issue and challenge for the educational system in the Czech republic. The issue of efficient education while working, ie. during the economically active period is becoming a hot matter in coherence with the life-long learning concept and in relation to life-long employability and working mobility opportunities in the EU. Facing this challenge requires the educational system to deal with often new and very complicated issues. It is of great importance and interest to achieve a high-quality and socially well perceived education in the Czech republic. Therefore it may be anticipated that interest in implementing distance learning methods and technologies will keep rising at higher education institutions. Based on our research this will not happen without significant material investment. It is also crucial to place great emphasis on human resources development among higher education pedagogues.

9. References


[2] H. Zlámalová, L. Rohliková, „Role of the higher education pedagogues in distance and combined form of study and eLearning”, Final report from the questionnaire survey, Internal report as part of a research project, CSVŠ, Praha, 2005

