

COURSES IN ACADEMIC TEACHING - AN EXAMPLE FROM SLOVAKIA

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to compare models of Courses in Academic Teaching (AT) conducted at several Slovak universities. There is also briefly described the pedagogical education in Slovakia as part of the internal form of further education for university lecturers at particular Higher Education Institutions (HEI). The text illustrates the experience with the implementation of courses in higher education at Slovak universities and summarizes results from questionnaire survey on the importance of the pedagogical preparation and educational needs of the course participants - university lecturers. In education, it is important to draw on the tradition and good practice proven by years of experience. Of course, it is not possible to unilaterally strengthen conservatism in approaches to education, but mainly to develop a tradition with regard to societal needs and developmental tendencies in education science. It is important to focus on prospects for development and modernization in orientation to increase quality and efficiency of higher education process. The source of inspiration for quality improvement is from variety of good practices, surveys and opinions of participants and graduates from various models of education. The study also intends to emphasize the requirement that teachers' work at any level of education (even in higher education) cannot be the result of high erudition in the scientific field and only intuition-based knowledge of education and its' principles.

Keywords: *Courses in academic teaching, university lecturers, opinions on pedagogical education, questionnaire survey.*

1. Introduction

Since the first universities originated, higher education has changed significantly with many new forms, methods and tools of teaching. University lecturers are confronted daily with innovations and social changes and their teaching methods need to reflect this. But are lecturers sufficiently prepared for their pedagogical activities in the contemporary education? What is typical for lecturers is the fact that they don't specifically prepare for their profession before they start practising (Petríková, Ondriová, 2015). Lecturers are constantly assessed in their scientific-expert activities, but the assessment of their teaching activities is usually limited to mere evaluation of the numbers of students. Faculties in Slovakia focus on requirements expressing the lecturers' qualifications, but the competencies related to teaching methods for example the ability to organise and communicate are not assessed (Kravčáková, Jelenová, 2010). There is not always a correlation between the quality of a teacher's subject knowledge and the quality of their teaching. Only a few Slovak universities provide their teachers with opportunities to improve their teaching skills. Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) that teachers need to effectively teach a particular subject or course is essential. PCK combines content knowledge with pedagogical knowledge, or knowledge of how to teach that subject matter (Schulman, 1986; Rollnick, Mavhunga, 2017). Since 1989, there has been no legislative groundwork implemented to improve the pedagogical education of lecturers in the Slovakia, but their research-scientific and publication activities are subject to regular quality assessment under the accreditation process, and lecturers must comply with qualification requirements in line with Act No. 131/2012 on Higher Education Institutions and Act No. 269/2018 Coll. on Quality Assurance of Higher Education. In the former Czechoslovakia, the emergence of higher education pedagogy of AT began in the 1950s and it was developed in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1980s the obligatory model of pedagogical education was introduced as "System of Enhancing Pedagogical Qualification of Higher Education Teachers". This system copied the systems of the Soviet countries codified by Decree No. 8/1983 as obligatory for all lecturers. It included two stages: 1. Basics of AT for young lecturers up to 5 years of experience; 2. a specialised course in AT for all lecturers up to 10 years' experience at HEI. After the 1989 (the end of the Communist Era), this system of education of lecturers collapsed. In the 1990s, pedagogical seminars occurred sporadically at universities as an interest-based and voluntary activity. Later, at the beginning of the 21st century again appeared efforts to introduce courses in AT at some HEIs (Vašutová, 2010; Novák, 2019).

2. Design and objectives

The aim is to describe and compare models of courses in AT conducted at Slovak universities and to describe how the PCK of lecturers is acquired at particular HEI. *RQ1*: What models of courses in AT exist in Slovakia? *RQ2*: What are the educational needs of lecturers in higher education? The research design for this study was a mixed-methods design. In accordance with this design, this study is composed of two phases; the first phase, qualitative data collection and analysis, was conducted to identify and describe the models of courses in AT. The second phase was quantitative data collection and analysis. The data is based on a survey with open and closed questions and document analysis.

3. Methods

The primary sources of the content analysis were 8 randomly selected web pages from all 33 HEIs in Slovakia. The content analysis approach aimed at freely accessible web pages of selected universities. A questionnaire survey for obtaining feedback from the respondents (the participants of the courses and workshops in AT) was used as a secondary research method. Surveys were obtained in 2021-2023. The data was analysed by statistical calculation or phenomenological analysis by the author. The study was based on a written survey containing a total of 22 open and closed questions, and was emailed to 46 graduates of the course at the SUA of whom 29 completed it. The same questionnaire was sent to participants of the workshop in AT at UCM (27 answered).

4. Results and discussion

HEIs in Slovakia organise their own pedagogical education (as a pedagogical minimum) according to their needs and on a voluntary basis. Courses in AT are based on internal directives, or as a part of habilitation and inauguration criteria, or as occasional courses organised and financed within grant projects. Selected models of courses in AT are summarized in table 1. On the official web pages, were not found any information about courses at 3 of the analysed HEI (Constantine the Philosopher University, Nitra; Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica; Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava).

Table 1. Analysis of selected models of courses in AT.

University	Content of the course	Accreditation and organizational form
University of Žilina (UNIZA)	Two level model: 1. Course for PhD. students (23 lessons); 2. Course for the lecturers of engineering or economic orientation (116 lessons/2 years: 1 st year: Engineering pedagogy, ICT, Publication support; 2 nd year: Language education).	Internal Directive No. 200/2021: "Principles of the selection procedure for filling the posts of university teachers, researchers, professors and associate professors", and Directive 228/2022: "Professional Development of University Lecturers of UNIZA"
Technical University of Košice(TUKE)	Two level model: 1. Pedagogical Minimum for PhD. students; 2. Course in AT for lecturers (204 lessons/2 years).	The course is optional. Accredited by IGIP ¹ (title obtained - ING-PAED IGIP)
Technical University in Zvolen (TU)	One level model: 2 years course (204 lessons/5 blocks) - the curriculum corresponds to the IGIP criteria.	Actual information not found - the last information from 2016 refers to a 2-year course from September 2016 to January 2018.
Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra (SUA)	Optional seminars: - optional topics for lecturers (1 hour duration), who can choose from the list of offered 15 topics, the exact time and place is specified according to the interest.	Occasional seminars (webinars)/ workshops – optional - model is introduced since the year 2021; Previously – One level model: 3 semesters/2years, accredited by IGIP 2016-2020; re-accredited 2021-2025.
University of Economics in Bratislava (UE)	Three-level model: 1. course for PhD. students (2 days/introduction to the AT); 2. course for novice assistant professors (2 semesters/76lessons); 3. workshops for experienced teachers interested in selected issues ("Edubreak").	- Education is carried out in accordance with internal directive of the rector of UE (No. 3/2014) "Pedagogical Education for Teachers of the University of Economics in Bratislava) - accredited by a British organisation SEDA ²
University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava (UCM)	Two level model: 1. Course for PhD. students - part of the study plans as independent course - "Academic Teaching - Theory and Practice" (1 semester/26 lessons); 2. Occasional workshops under grants support (in 2012, 2014/2015 and 2022/2023).	- organization, scope and content depends on success of the grants (e.g. grants: ESF ITMS 26110230104 Support for the development of human resources in research and development; NFP312010BFQ3 Support of the internal quality assurance system of higher education at UCM)

¹Internationale Gesellschaft für Ingenieurpädagogik (eng. The International Society for Engineering Education) <https://igip.org/>

²SEDA is the professional association for staff and educational developers in the UK, promoting innovation and good practice in higher education. <https://www.seda.ac.uk/>

Results from the questionnaires revealed motivational factors of lecturers to further their education in AT: *a requirement of the head of my department; a condition for professional growth; my own interest; partly self-interest and uncertainty whether this will be a condition for the staff selection procedure.* Courses in AT are seen as very beneficial or partially beneficial, no response indicated that they were useless. The preferred educational needs of the participants are mainly in the field of psychology, followed by pedagogy and foreign languages. Fewer responses indicated an interest in ICT and the professional field of participant' specialization. Participants prefer courses in the form of *active learning, model situations, and presentations of practical tips for teaching.* Particular areas of participants' weaknesses are: *applying a variety of teaching methods; creating didactic tests; nothing; communication with students; work with ICT; developing study materials for students; student results evaluation; ways of motivating students; time management.* Selected suggestions are: PSUA2: *"The course in AT should be compulsory for all. I recommend it to lecturers as well as doctoral students"*. PUCM13: *"I would like to be advised how to be creative when lecturing, how to captivate students with my lecture, how to motivate students and teach them to think about the topic and to have their own opinion on the issue"*. PUCM23: *"It would be better to define in advance for whom the course in AT is intended"*.

5. Conclusions

The analysed models of courses are situated mainly at traditionally non-teaching HEIs, engaged in engineering and economic education. These universities have a tradition and higher interest in the development of pedagogical skills in comparison to universities focusing on humanities, social sciences and teacher training study programs. Existing courses vary from occasional workshops and one level models up to multilevel models. Organization of the courses in AT opens up many questions related not only to the scope and content but also to their financing, accreditation, etc. Courses in AT at different HEIs have similar objectives, and they are to develop lecturers' PCK. The respondents confirm the positive feedback on the courses through their statements. Lecturers' motivational factors to attend the courses differ, but the majority are motivated by their intrinsic motivation. The suggestion that arose from the text is to establish the national system for funding the further education of lecturers with multilevel modular systems of their pedagogical education.

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