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PRACTICAL WORK THROUGH THE ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS – FUTURE TEACHERS

Abstract: The work presents the results of the research conducted among students-future teachers as a part of the process in the realization of internationally supported pilot-project.

Students participated in an online – workshop and in the structured activities of the preparation for the practical work in university setting with the live presence, during the pandemic with Covid-19, October – December 2021.

The aim of the research was to gather data about students-future teachers's attitudes concerning practical work during their initial teacher education.

Practice-based teacher education is typically organized to develop a set of core teaching elements such as: content delivery, engagement of pupils in active learning, providing stimulative learning environment, evaluation of the results, etc.

To develop advanced understandings, an implementation of new concepts and methods, practice-based pedagogies should also support the critical attitudes of future teachers about practical teaching. Based on the premise that an inquiry stance is a key attribute of the adaptive expertise and teacher professionalism, this paper examines the function and value of inquiry within practice-based learning.

Findings confirmed that the common denominator of all the answers is the achieved experience, which is shown in the acquisition of teaching competencies in a real space.

Keywords: Students-future teachers, Practical work, Initial teacher education, Teaching competencies

Introduction

Contemporary educational approaches to the quality of education have significantly changed. Based on the previously applied concept that the university's major aim is to provide students with certain types of knowledge that they are expected to apply later in their professional life, universities are now focused on the process that enable students to reach teaching competences.

The main idea is to create content, mechanisms and environment where students can obtain knowledge by themselves and practice to work in ways that enable them to solve issues that will appear in an uncertain future classroom environment. In this way gaining knowledge is a starting point for further professional development of students – future teachers.

University curricula have to provide students with competences that will help them develop communication, organization and planning, collaboration and teamwork, flexibility and adaptability. In the field of education, there are the requirements of a "competency-based" teacher education and include the knowledge, skills and values.

The competency, which is essential to an educator's pursuit of excellence, is more than just knowledge and skills; it involves the ability to meet complex demands by drawing on and mobilizing psychosocial resources (including values and attitudes) in a particular context. Teachers need a wide range of competencies in order to face the complex challenges of today's world. Teaching competency is an inherent element of an effective training process, one that aspires to contribute to the welfare of a particular country or the world itself. The success of education and training of students-future teachers depends on their preparation, erudition and performance quality.

Aim

The aim of this work was to examine attitudes of students-future teachers toward the concept and realization of practical work during the winter semester (October -December 2021) at the "Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje", North Macedonia – Faculty of Pedagogy "St. Kliment Ohridski in Skopje" and the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics.

The data of this research is a part of information that were gathered during the realization of the QUAMEN pilot project that introduced the training and content-based mentoring system for students – future teachers. The purpose of the precisely structured activities within was to raise the awareness of the necessity to fill the existing gap in the initial teacher education – to coordinate student`s knowledge reached at the university with the teaching competences that has to be acquired during the practical work in kindergarten and schools. The pilot project was financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided by the European Wergeland Center from Oslo, Norvey.

The research was accomplished in the period of global pandemic with Covid-19, with restriction of public gatherings and prohibition of conducting the practical work in kindergarten and classroom settings. The main strength of the QUAMEN pilot project was in the possibility to offer sessions for students-future teachers with physical presence and also on-line, with the realization of an intensive mentoring process in mutual cooperation: university professors-mentors-students (planning, preparation, realization of practical work at university settings, observation, feedback).

Before and after participation in the pilot project activities, we sent survey to all students – participants.

Active Learning during Preparation of Sessions

In the realization of the pilot project QUAMEN, the practical work of the students is the most important segment in their acquisition of competencies to become a competent teacher.

After accomplishment of all activities in the conceptual preparation of students – future teachers (webinar) – next phase of the pilot project was implemented: preparation for the realization of the practical work.

We implemented the active learning process of all participants based on the precise directions given in the manual of prof. Gollob "Experts for learning in practice" (Gollob, 2020). It involves close and intensive collaboration in coordinating activities between the student, the teacher, and the university professor. All activities were understood as a process of sharing knowledge, experiences and attitudes. The most important part was the joint cooperation in preparing the planning for the realization of the lesson. The students independently organized the proposed idea as the base on which the mentor and the university professor in an open conversation gave suggestions, advice, rethinking the details together with the students. In that way, all stages in each daily preparation were checked in the terms of realistic possibilities for application in the real classroom.

The students' lack of experience in the work with pupils was supplemented by professional support from the more experienced colleagues – mentor and university professor.

The purpose of such relations was to create a professional working atmosphere of relaxed, but at the same time focused active process of joint thinking and creation. It was fascinating to experience that all parties were involved in active learning:

- The student, by acquiring knowledge and receiving professional advice based on the experience of the mentor and the university professor,
- The mentor, by acquiring new quality knowledge for an active methodological, pedagogical guidance of the student by using new adequate communication strategies,
- The university professor, by gaining insight into the thinking processes of the students and the mentors, gathering experiences in the realization of first-hand teaching.

Survey for Students – Questions and Analysis of the Data

To gathered data about different aspects of student`s practical work during their participation in the QUAMEN pilot project, we conducted an online survey after the realization of all project activities. The total number of respondents were 24 students, with the survey that was conceived by giving free answers to 5 questions.

The goals of the survey were to get students views, impressions, opinions concerning the process of practical work. This was the reason why we decided to include the open-ended questions. Despite the fact that these types of questions are less structured than questions that are intended to obtain quantitative information, they provide input into the ways of thinking, the motivations, and the approaches to a topic or situation; they provide answers on "why" and "how" questions (Agee, 2009; Irwin & Stafford, 2016).

Our intention was aimed to understand the opinion of a certain group (in this case students) with relatively homogeneous professional status and chronological age, but with different personal qualities. To obtain information that presents the experiential, vivid aspects of a particular phenomenon, we decided that the analysis should be phenomenological which goes in line with the views of Walston, Redford, & Bhatt (2017); Hancock, Amankwaa, Revell, Mueller (2016). This choice also corresponds to the findings about of surveying of small groups of participants confirmed by Agee (2009), Irwin & Stafford (2016). They prove that qualitative analysis provides and understanding of the phenomenon and of the process, with both: the strengths and the weaknesses of the process of interaction we were interested about.

The metacognitive abilities of students were particularly in focus, because in order to fully understand their approach and reactions, it was necessary to activate the reflection about their own learning process with the questions (Jiang, Y., Ma, L., Gao, L., 2016; Hausman, H., Myers, SJ, Rhodes, MG, 2021).

The questions were defined in a way to obtain information for each segment:
 1. Attitudes, 2. Competencies, 3. Values, 4. Expectations, 5. Skills.

First question:
If you think ahead to when you will be a teacher – what is most important about the opportunity to do practice work in a real-life classroom during your studies?

This question detects the views of students regarding the importance of practical work during their studies, and before their employment.

Students state that practical instruction is extremely important to:
- gain experience of real school situations and
- to acquire the teaching competencies – presentation and communication skills.

Regarding the first segment – practical teaching in the context of experience, students often named the help of mentors as a crucial in overcoming anxiety and stress, also in perceiving the realistic atmosphere in the classroom, in transmission of adequate approaches, vibrations and

positive energy to encourage pupils for active collaboration. Their answers refer to the value of practical work with mentors in terms of gaining emotional stability and active relaxation in communication with students.

The second segment of the first question – the importance of practical work for acquiring teaching competencies arises as a systematization of student's answers, including:

"Well-designed organization, content and understanding of the purpose of the class activities"; "Opportunity to use various methods, techniques and teaching materials to motivate students and to transfer knowledge"; "The productive teaching content to attract the pupils' attention with various methods"; "To organize time, environment and materials, to try and apply new activities." The answers present the students' awareness of segments of the teaching process for which practical work is proved as necessary by their own experiences during enrolment of own academic studies.

Second question:

What did you get out of the practice work you have realized?

The common denominator of all the answers is the achieved experience, which is shown in the acquisition of **teaching competencies** in a real space. This confirms the students' confidence in the importance of the practical work for the personal development of the teachers: "solid foundation for building the personality" – self-reflection; "A wonderful experience where you can see the progress and the mistakes that need to be addressed" – self-criticism; "Experiencing the situations that were mentioned only theoretically, but also those that are new, both require adequate response" – creativity.

This is followed by **teaching competencies** such as: "organization of time"; "Cooperation with students and empathy"; "Building an atmosphere of active communication".

Third question:

Why do you think it was and is valuable for you future teachers to be able to practice in a real-life classroom with the support of a trained mentor?

The interaction with the pupils was emphasized as the greatest value that is realized in the classroom with the help of a trained mentor. In this context, their answers were presenting the quality of cooperation with the mentor in: "getting acquainted with the atmosphere in the classroom"; "opportunity for application of knowledge and mental readiness in interaction with students", "Interaction with students, application of the shared ideas from colleagues into teaching strategies and activities".

Students also added: "A wonderful experience where the progress and obstacles the shortcomings that need to be overcome are visible"; "Practice with self-confidence, understanding and realization of the administrative obligations"; "Gaining more self-control, courage in applying new ideas." As a strong benefit that arise from practice in a real-life classroom with the support of a trained mentor.

The main drawback was the realization of practical exercises in the university premises, instead of classroom due to the pandemic with Covid-19. In this way the real interaction with the mentors was even more emphasized.

Fourth question:

What did you expect from you mentor and how did the experience meet these expectations?

The focus in this question is on obtained information about the **value of trained mentors** in the realization of the practical work, which is confirmed by all students' answers: "more experience in planning and interaction is given"; "an opportunity to see how mentors behave in certain situations in the classroom"; "to be able to use methods for appropriate sharing of real-life experience with students", "to be able to observe carefully, to guide and advise professionally"; "to

be able to convey situations that are not learned from books". Students' perception of the mentor based on the level of professionalism is especially pointed out: "a trained mentor who will guide"; "a trained mentor who enable student to experience what it is like to be a real teacher"; "an important mediator in the realization of pedagogical practice".

The answers mirrored an idealistic image of the mentor in the eyes of the students, i.e., they believe that the main value for them is the will of the mentor to help, guide, advise. These answers presents a strong belief in the inviolable competencies of the mentor, which shows the students' trust in quality interaction with the mentors.

This clearly presents the correlation between the real competencies of the mentors and the students' expectations of the mentors' competencies. The answers to the second part of the question present satisfaction from the mutual communication: the mentor does not judge us, but gives advice, guidance"; "Mentors accepts us as a partner and not as her opponent"; "Collaboration and visions that imply creativity"; "Great guidance through personal example."

Fifth question:
How will the observation-based feedback of the mentor contribute to your skills as a teacher?

The responses stated that the feedback and transfer of the experience from the mentor to students will contribute to: "Easier to cope with the unexpected situations, become better prepared and trained for parents' meetings"; "Acquisition of new knowledge through practice"; "Personal practical experience and active application of applicative advice", "Conducting of the theoretical knowledge into the real situation"; "Perceiving the mistakes and shortcomings".

Many responses presented the **emotional relationship as a value** that students gained receiving feedback from mentors: "a better sense of time and organization of activities"; "The sense for the teaching as a profession and excitement to have the responsibility to teach"; "The desire to work as a teacher".

It can be concluded as a summary of all the received answers, that the interaction between the students and the mentors was perceived as: enthusiastic, greatly accepted and supported and also beneficial in regards to shared experiences. Two responses mentioned "building a partnership with mentors." The students received an active relationship from their mentors that met their expectations and gave them the needed support, assistance, and evaluation.

Most of the students stated that they received both criticism and advices, which implies that the mentors were not just observers, but that they actively evaluated all student activities, not only in the preparation phases, but also in the practical implementation of the teaching content.

This confirms that despite the clear guidelines given to the mentors for the necessity to actively observe students (provided by the expert and the trainers) with no critical review, only as a mirror – takes more time. The real application of focused observation of students by the mentors requires longer training and practice.

Conclusions

Based on the findings and analysis of the data, we can conclude that the participants in the research, students-future teachers referred critically to the implementation of practical work during the pandemic with Covid-19.

They all in own way conformed the need for a professionally guided practical work. Even with restricted possibilities to conduct the practical work with students in real classroom, preparation realized in close contact with university teacher and mentor gave adequate esteem and guidance to students. They presented their daily preparations in a model class teaching in the university setting, and prove that this segment of practical work is essential for quality performance of teaching content as well as exercise for communication with pupils.

The main result of the research was documented presentation of metacognitive skills of students-future teachers regarding their involvement and performance in practical teaching and learning. This competence is essential for their quality professional engagement in all teaching subjects.

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ANALYZING PERCEPTION OF SECURITY FROM A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Abstract: The changing nature of the environment has a major impact on an individual's sense of security. The way in how individual perceptions of danger and risk are shaped, and how cognitive and emotional information is processed, plays a key role in the development of subjective perceptions of security. This paper examines perceptions of security from a psychological perspective, with a particular focus on the phenomenon of cognitive vulnerability and exposure as a result of unprecedented information overload. The factors influencing the development of subjective feelings of security are measured through quantitative research. In the light of the results of this research, the factors that threaten psychological security were identified, and using cluster analysis, segments that can be described by individual preferences based on their attitudes towards security were described. Based on the findings, attention is drawn to the educational challenges to reduce society's vulnerability to psychological influence.

Keywords: Psychological safety, Cognitive safety, Threat perception, Cognitive and emotional components