

Quality and Ethical Dilemmas in the Education of Future Teachers under the Conditions of Distance Education

Tatjana Hodnik, Janez Krek, Neža Podlogar, Janez Vogrinc
Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Since March 2020, all university education has been forced to introduce distance education due to restrictions imposed in countries affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. This situation has been extended into the 2020/2021 academic year. In comparison with non-pedagogical studies, the conditions of distance education in study programmes for the education of future teachers also raise specific questions (in addition to general quality issues) arising from the fact that in addition to providing a range of disciplinary knowledge (languages, mathematics, science, social sciences, etc.), a fundamental goal of pedagogical study programmes is the acquisition of pedagogical and psychological knowledge and skills which students develop primarily in direct contact with professors, assistants, and other students. Unlike in non-pedagogical studies, the execution of the pedagogical process itself has important educational effects for future teachers, as it includes knowledge that is the direct content of the study and work of future teachers. At the same time, higher education teachers and professionals, through their work, indirectly communicate to students their attitude towards the ethical values and principles that should be followed by a quality pedagogical process. In the empirical research, which included a representative sample of students from one of the education faculties in Slovenia, we obtained data on the conditions and implementation of study programmes via distance teaching and learning. Research questions were divided into the following content areas: what are the experiences and attitudes of students towards (1) execution of distance teaching (contact hours with students); (2) independent study of students (study of literature, preparation of seminars, preparation for exams); (3) “practical training” in distance education; (4) rules for conducting distance education; (5) assessment of knowledge; and (6) the “academic community” (discussions and direct contacts, reflection on one’s own behaviours/thought processes in interaction with others, acquisition of social skills, informal socialising). The contribution of the research is not only findings on the quality of distance teaching and learning. In the interpretation, we connect the quality of execution and the pedagogical ethics that future teachers should experience during their studies and we open other ethical dilemmas related to the (in)ability of students to achieve the goals of study in the conditions of distance education.

Key words: distance education, quality of teaching and learning, ethics, future teachers