

EXPERIENCE EDUCATION TO ALLEVIATE FEARS OF EDUCATOR CANDIDATES IN THEIR UNIVERSITY STUDIES

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Abstract: An intensive piece of research has been conducted at the Teacher Training Faculty of J. Selye University since 2017 to investigate the drop-out conditions of university students. We compared the results of these studies to some indicators of recent international studies. Based on the findings so far, we have outlined a set of procedures that are expected to enhance students engagement with and through university studies, and to assist them in the areas of social relationships, learning, curriculum development, and personality development. Our goal is, first and foremost, to reduce early school leaving, to help students integrate into university life, to complete their university studies successfully and, last but not least, to prepare mature personalities for the teaching profession.

Keywords: dropout, personality, self-confidence, self-image, self-confidence, vocation

1 Introduction

An intensive piece of research has been conducted at the Teacher Training Faculty of J. Selye University since 2017 to investigate the drop-out conditions of university students. Surveys on the topic were carried out at four higher education institutions. First at Selye János University (Komárno, Slovakia) and at three other institutions, namely II. Rákóczi Ferenc Hungarian University of Transcarpathia (Beregsk, Ukraine), the Christian Partium University (Oradea, Romania) and the Faculty of Hungarian Language Teacher Training at the University of Novi Sad (Subotica, Serbia). We compared the results of these studies to some indicators of recent international studies. Based on the findings so far, we have outlined a set of procedures that are expected to enhance students engagement with and through university studies, and to assist them in the areas of social relationships, learning, curriculum development, and personality development. To accomplish this, we plan to use the tools of experiential education by classifying an optional personality development course in higher education. Our goal is, first and foremost, to reduce early school leaving, to help students integrate into university life, to complete their university studies successfully and, last but not least, to prepare mature personalities for the teaching profession.

Early school leaving is one of the most pressing issues in education in recent years. Churn is a phenomenon in practice and a defined concept in the literature. It is a complex and multidimensional process that is exploring the causes of this in a growing number of investigations both domestically and internationally (Kenderfi 2011, Stiburek 2017, Jungert 2015, Frey 2014, Şahin 2014, Houssemand-Meyers 2013, Larsen et al. 2013, Faria 2012, Charmaraman-Hall 2011, Jacot et al. 2010, Wudu-Getahun 2009). To get to the end, the Ratio Research Group, founded in 2017, at The Teacher Training Faculty of Selye János University started its research. The first studies were carried out among the students of Selye János University of Komárno, and continued at three other institutions of higher education in the Carpathian Basin, namely at II. Rákóczi Ferenc Hungarian University of Transcarpathia (Beregszász, Ukraine), the Christian University of Partium (Oradea, Romania) and the Hungarian Language Teacher Training Faculty of the University of Novi Sad (Subotica, Serbia)¹. We used standardized and proprietary measuring instruments, tests and questionnaires as measuring instruments. The results obtained were compared with the results of the latest research published in the international

literature. Following the analysis, we drew the necessary conclusion, which is based on the outline of our plans and proposals to be implemented in pedagogical practice.

2 Procedure, realization, results of the investigation

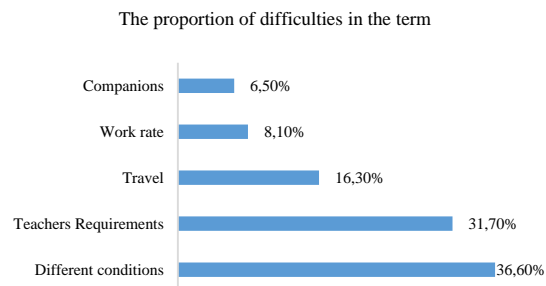
The first phase of our longitudinal research was represented by a pilot study in the school year 2107/2018². The Ratio research team, which conducted the study series, chose the specific way of achieving the objectives, according to which the students' opinion was the primary source. In the initial phase, information was collected with 123 first-year teacher students at J. Selye University through a questionnaire survey after the end of the first semester. Some of the questions concerned the personal background of the students (family, study conditions, life situation), the other focused on the difficulties experienced during the first semester and the first exam period and the mapping of the helping circumstances³. We have been paying close attention to the difficult circumstances that may hinder the successful completion of university studies. Our questions on this aspect included:

- 1) What difficulties did you have during the semester in completing your studies?
- 2) What was the difficulty in meeting the requirements during the exam period?

From the results obtained it can be seen that in the case of clusters formed among the answers to the questions, the majority of the clusters show a relation to some person. Concerning the clusters of difficulties, the qualitative analysis of the answers reveals that the different circumstances, clusters, are due to reasons related to the people living in the students' environment and this applies to both the diligence and the exam period. The percentages of difficulty for students in their term of study were as follows, in descending order:

Different conditions:	36.6%
Teachers Requirements:	31.7%
Travel:	16.3%
Work rate:	8.1%
Companions:	6.5%

(Graph 1)



Graph 1: Percentage of learning difficulties reported by first-year teacher students during the term

Percentages of student reported difficulties during the exam period:

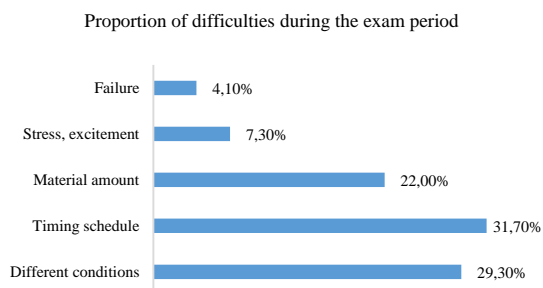
1. Different conditions:	29,3 %
2. Timing schedule:	31,7 %
3. Material amount:	22,0 %
4. Stress, excitement:	7,3 %
5. Failure:	4,1 %

¹ The results of the research and the resulting conclusions have been made public in several scientific publications. For example: Horváth-Tóth 2018; Horváth-Tóth 2019; Horváth 2018; Kanczné Nagy 2019; Kanczné Nagy-Csehi 2018; Kanczné Nagy-Tóth 2018; Nagy-Horváth-Szabóová-Kanczné-Nagy 2018; Nagy-Horváth-Szabóová-Kanczné-Nagy-Orsovics-Strédl 2019; Nagy-Szabóová-Horváth-Kanczné-Tóth-Bakos-Orsovics-Strédl 2018; Tóth-Bakos 2018; Tóth-Bakos-Tóth 2018;

² Horváth 2018; Kanczné Nagy-Tóth 2018; Nagy-Horváth-Szabóová-Kanczné Nagy 2018; Nagy-Szabóová-Horváth-Kanczné-Tóth-Bakos-Orsovics-Strédl 2018; Tóth-Bakos 2018;

³ The questionnaire survey was conducted with the help of Moodle system in order to optimize the collection of information and data processing.

(Graph 2)

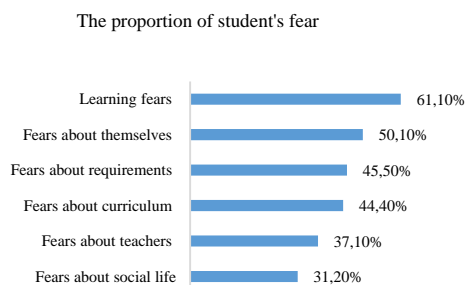


Graph 2: Percentage of learning difficulties reported by first-year teacher students during the exam period

From the results of this initial phase of our research, we concluded that interpersonal factors and human relationships play an important role in the early years of first-year college education, but there are other objective factors that are noteworthy.

In the next phase of our research, in the 2018/2019 academic year, we conducted a questionnaire survey with freshly enrolled first-year teacher students prior to commencement of their university education, and further expanded our studies to connect three further Carpathian Basin higher education institutions to J. Selye University in Komárom. Namely, II. Ferenc Rákóczi University of Transcarpathia (Beregszász, Ukraine), Partium Christian University (Oradea, Romania) and University of Novi Sad at Hungarian Language Teacher Training Faculty (Subotica, Serbia). As part of our comprehensive research, we conducted a background questionnaire that asked students about the amount and quality of their prior studies, as well as the challenges they face in their new, changed lifestyles, in addition to their family and home environment. As an integral part of this, we asked them to formulate their expectations and fears about university education. We asked the students' opinions on seven areas. These seven areas are the result of the pilot study mentioned above, according to which students' perceptions of the quality of their relationship to these seven factors influence the success or failure of their university careers. In order to shed light on the latter, we have focused on the fears, uncertainties, and anxieties of students, which are important factors in the process of university integration and successful university studies. Based on the cumulative results, students had high scores on their fears about social life (31.20%), fears about teachers (37.10%), fears about curriculum (44.40%), fears about requirements (45.50%). They have outstanding fears about themselves (50.10%) and have extremely high levels of learning fears (61.10%).

(Graph 3)



Graph 3: Areas of fear of first-year students and their results showing in percentage

Based on the results obtained, in the next phase of the study, we identified the two areas that produced the highest rates. These

are students' fears about themselves and their fears about learning.

Fears about themselves were expressed by half of the respondents that is 50%, in various respects. 26% of students have fears about their personal qualities, 16% have fears about failing their studies and 8% have fears about their lack of ability.

(Graph 4)



Graph 4: The results of the students' fears related to themselves

Quantitative indicators are also reinforced and supported by students' verbal revelations, which primarily reflect their fears about themselves and their learning. Such as "I'm afraid I can't offer as much as I want; I'm afraid of a lot of things, I'm brave; I won't stand it; I am afraid I can perform as expected; Will I be able to adapt?; I am most afraid of exhaustion."

The study participants' fears, which show a significantly high percentage, were related to learning. Thus, the greatest fears of first-year teacher students are about learning (61.1%). They are particularly afraid of scheduling (39%) and of performance (37%), among whom they are often labeled as "failing, failing the exam, having to postpone". The next major fear factor was the curriculum itself (13%). (Chart 1)

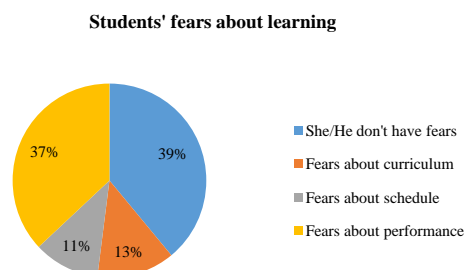


Chart 1: Results of testing students' fears about learning

Thus, the results of this phase of the study lead to the conclusion that particular attention should be paid to the fears, uncertainties, and anxieties of first-year teacher education students, whose indicators are significantly high for themselves and especially for learning.

3 Some results of international research, compared to results of our research

We have compared some of the survey results of the four presented higher education institutions internationally, with some new and current research results. We have included a comparative study of the aspects of the Ratio research group, namely the analysis of the fears and anxieties of university students, based on a representative study by Jean M. Twenge (USA 2017, Hungary 2018). This study is considered relevant because the author came to his conclusion based on 11 million interviews and comprehensive research from the American Freshman Survey, the American College Health Association, the Monitoring the Future, the General Social Survey, and Youth

Risk Behavior Surveillance System processed. Most of its surveys focused on the age group that is at the heart of our study, the "iGeneration"⁴ deriving from.

From the point of view of socialization, social relationships, learning, mental and emotional factors, it has illuminated the problems of our college students (also), their mental health. He pointed out that their fears are common, they struggle with insecurity, anxiety, depression, and their physical-mental-spiritual world is contradictory. (Twenge 2018) Twenge also draws attention to the American Freshman Survey, which focused on the mental and emotional health of university students. Indicators of change among first-year college students in 2009-2016 show significant growth. Based on these:

- mental problems and their mental health is below average: 18% increase;
- felt overwhelmed: a rise of 51%;
- wanted to start therapy: 64% increase;
- felt depressed: 95% increase (almost doubled). (Twenge 2018: 138)

Similar trends were reported in a study by the American College Health Association (ACHA) conducted between 2011 and 2016 with 400,000 students and around a hundred universities. From their results the following facts should be highlighted:

- college students are feeling overwhelmingly anxious;
- experiencing depressive states that block their actions and thinking - "they couldn't do anything" and anxiety and depression began to increase from 2013 onwards. (Twenge 2018: 138)

The qualitative and quantitative analysis of the information obtained so far and the comparison of the results obtained in the international context significantly reflect the fears, uncertainties, anxieties, lack of self-confidence, significant mental and psychological problems, the blocking of their actions and their thinking. In fact, they are suffering from depression, fear of not being able to perform well, failing to meet the criteria, failing the exam, confident in their own abilities and fears that they will not be able to integrate into the university community. These factors have been confirmed:

- i. Processed results of surveys conducted at J. Selye University,
- ii. In the results of surveys carried out in the four higher education institutions examined,
- iii. In the light of the results of our surveys and the indicators of the summarized international surveys.

4 The relationship between experience pedagogy and personal development

The results of the studies outlined clearly indicate that in addition to acquiring professional knowledge, university students need to develop their personality and enhance some of their qualities, as well as a personality-developing pedagogical approach that develops students' love for learning and enables them to meet the challenges of the present age. (Robinson 2018) Based on our research, the proven success of well-functioning tools in experience education can help us achieve our goals. Experiential pedagogy is an opportunity for education and development that can bring about a positive change in people on a practical level. It relies on action and its evaluation. In experience pedagogy, experience is a tool, so learning, development is the goal of all experiences, and the feeling of joy follows. Since there is no full motivation without the feeling of joy, one of the main drivers of adventure pedagogical activities is the "flow-flow experience", the joyful and adventurous immersion in the activity. (Csíkszentmihályi 2008, 2010) Thus, experience pedagogy seeks the experience, the joy in learning and the development of the individual, the experience of self-

confidence and success as a reward. It all comes hand in hand with a better mood, better performance, better problem solving, more creativity, better physical and mental health. (Seligman 2012)

The purpose of experience pedagogy is to learn through concrete, hands-on experience, not in the usual way, but in different situations involving experience. (Schörghuber, Amesberger, cit. Szabó 2006) Practical situations involve the individual from different perspectives, thus facilitating the coordinated action of the brain, heart and hands. (Mészáros-Bármai 2010) It provides colorful, diverse, versatile applications, and is well adapted and adapted to different programs, activities and topics. "Victory" is not the primary goal, but the experience, whether in individual or group performance. It is the basis of experience and experience in which the learners are in direct contact with their environment, nature and people. (Petlák-Fenyvesiová 2009)

The benefits of experiential pedagogy can be demonstrated in improving self-concept, developing social relationship skills, managing friendly relationships, promoting social behaviors, accommodating disadvantaged groups, changing the quality of teacher-student relationships, in which the teacher is the facilitator" (Horváth-Tóth 2018; Horváth-Tóth 2019). It is also important that attitudes towards school attendance also turn in a positive direction and strengthen the problem-solving ability of the young person, as he or she does not acquire ready knowledge, but acquires knowledge, experience and experiences in a variety of forms and situations.

5 Possibilities of adapting experience pedagogy to higher education

Summarizing the facts and aspects outlined above, it can be concluded that the application and adaptation of the elements of experience pedagogy is fully justified in higher education. In addition to acquiring academic knowledge, personality development is accomplished through an experience-based process of gaining experience. Both intellectual and emotional factors play an important role in the process of transferring knowledge (Strédl 2013). In addition, setting manageable challenges, the experience pedagogy enables the student to become even more positive and receptive in their work: – involuntarily and unconsciously – began to use their social skills more actively (e.g. cooperation, empathy, problem solving and decision making) that could be a crucial and helping factor in their university studies and relationships (Marosi 2017).

With all this in mind, and with the research findings that have been discovered so far, in the academic year 2019/2020, we will incorporate a personality development pedagogical approach into the training of students at J. Selye University that strengthens the students' engagement and they are also strengthened to build relationships (peer-to-peer and student-teacher) and, last but not least, contribute to the positive development of their personality. We are initiating an optional subject or course and the classification of a development course in university education. The planned course is structured around three subjects: art education, pedagogy and pedagogical psychology. Based on these, the development course called 'MŰ-PE-PSZI'⁵ (Figure 1) was chosen.

⁴ They were born after 1995. They grew up on a smartphone, had an Instagram page before they started high school and don't remember the days before the internet. They are all different from the generations before them. (Twenge 2018)

⁵ Phenomen MŰ-PE-PSZI in Hungarian language means „Művészet (in English is „Art”)-Pedagógia (in English is „Pedagogy”)-Pszichológia (in English is „Psychology)

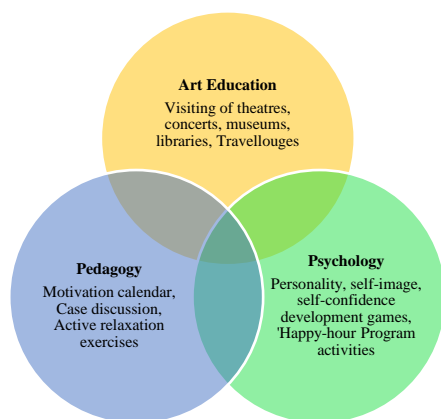


Figure 1: Contents of the 'MŰ-PE-PSZI' personality development course i.e. arts education, pedagogy and pedagogical psychology

In this course, experience pedagogy has a dual purpose. On the one hand, it strengthens the students' personality traits and positively develops their personality, and the application of experience pedagogy strengthens the problem-solving ability of young personalities because they do not acquire ready knowledge but broaden their knowledge through individual, such as smaller groups, spontaneous groups, variable composition groups, homogeneous or heterogeneous groups), within which factors such as the level of cooperation, interaction, motivation, mutual exemplification, or "adaptive education", play an important role. (Nádasi 2001). On the other hand, by acquiring applied experience-oriented pedagogical principles, teacher trainees themselves can apply modern methods, if they can become exemplary motivating teachers.

Important aspects of higher education and the Art-Pedagogical-Psychology course are:

Experiential forms, methods, techniques; experiential experience and learning; presentation, analysis, perception, emotional and emotional experience, experiencing, receiving experience reports; diversity and a creative atmosphere; stress relief and management; strengthening problem-solving capacity; students gain new knowledge through experience gained and experienced in each activity; developing reflective thinking through directed conversations; strengthening the capacity for collaboration and tolerance through group work and co-teaching; doubles and group activities improve communication skills; group activities contribute significantly to the development and positive development of relationship skills; knowledge of diverse, rich pedagogical methodologies, innovative, progressive methods through flow and positive psychology (Bagdy-Dezső 2018, Oláh 2012); positive psychology, flow as an emotional reward and profession-oriented motivation; an authentic, confident pedagogical personality.

Expected cumulative effects of the Art-pedagogical-psychological development course:

1. Harmonious personality development: self-confidence, effective self-expression, true self-esteem and the development of a credible self-image;
2. Development of communication skills: understanding and using diverse communication tools and channels, effective communication and self-expression;
3. Strengthening the capacity for collaboration, empathy, tolerance, first and foremost with the tools of the group;
4. Facing the difficulties of the teaching career with the help of situational exercises (difficulties of newcomers, generation differences in the educational board, career cycles, gender roles in the teaching career);
5. Commitment to studies and the teaching profession.

The success of the course will be monitored through a longitudinal study. For measurements and tests, we use standardized tests on the one hand and adapt them to particular conditions and conditions on the other. We use the Oxford Happiness Survey Questionnaire, the Hunopt Optimistic Test, the Assistive Attitude Measurement, the Coping Mode Preference Questionnaire for the juveniles, and the Experience Finding Degree test. To observe the changing factors, we also take into account the elements of sociometry, that is, the emotional functioning of the group, the acceptance (attraction) and the rejection (repulsion), and the levels of social network coexistence, cooperation and community life (Strédl 2017). Part of the tests and measurements will be done at the beginning and at the end of the course. Consequently, the results will be analyzed and compared and the conclusions will be drawn on the details.

6 Conclusions

The aim and content of the planned Art-Pedagogical-Psychological Development course focuses on the adaptation of experiential education and experiential learning to university education. Overall, experience-oriented activities have a significant impact on the development of the individual and the development of his or her mind, and ultimately on his or her whole personality. In addition, creative assignments and experiential assignment systems forge groups into a cohesive team, reinforcing friendship and social bonding. They also have a positive impact on relationships and on the staff at the institution. According to the studies of the relationship between experience pedagogy and positive psychology, it is necessary to emphasize the positive side of life, experiences and emotions, because with the help of positive experiences one is capable of successful self-realization, his / her coping skills are more powerful. (Bredács 2018)

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