

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Emergency remote teaching and emergency remote studying – results of a qualitative study

Sonja Sälzle¹, Linda Vogt², Renate Stratmann²

¹Hochschule Biberach/University of applied science, Biberach an der Riß, Germany ²Hochschule Biberach / University of applied science, Biberach an der Riß, Germany

Research Domain: Student experiences (SE)

Abstract:

Based on empirical findings from digital focus groups, this article presents how teachers and students experienced the teaching-learning situation during the Corona semesters. Due to the sudden change in the previously taken-for-granted presence of the university, both teachers and students had to develop new strategies for action. The focus of the entire life on the home computer was accompanied by a digital exhaustion and a mixing of private and professional/student everyday life. The lack of exchange and the need for a new learning culture became particularly apparent. As a consequence, the university is currently becoming particularly important as an educational and socialization space as well as a space for community and personality building.

Paper:

Introduction

Due to the Corona pandemic, teachers and students at German universities have been thrown into a completely new situation since the summer semester of 2020 and have had to adapt ad hoc to digital teaching and learning (Hodges et al., 2020). The following article refers to the study "Entwicklungspfade für Hochschule und Lehre nach der Corona-Pandemie" (Sälzle et al., 2021) and focuses the perspective of teachers and students on the past Corona semesters with the following research questions: (1) How did teachers and students experience the digital semesters? (2) What changed in their living situation inside and outside the university?

Methodical approach

Focus groups were selected as the qualitative research design in order to elaborate the subjective experiential knowledge and the different perspectives. So it was possible to capture to reconstruct a complete picture of the Corona semesters. The focus group method is characterized by a mixture of group interview and group discussion, i.e. questions are asked and at the same time the participants are motivated to talk to each other (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Based on the ten fields of study subjects in the Higher Education Compass of the German Rectors' Conference (www.hochschulkompass.de/home), six different subject clusters were formed to which the eleven Universities of Applied Sciences represented could be assigned. Fifteen interviews were conducted

with a total of 67 participants (26 students, 31 professors, 10 lecturers) in the period from February to March 2021. Based on the already published studies (Bosse, 2021; Kreulich et al., 2020; Lörz et al., 2020; OECD, 2020; Seyfeli et al., 2020) about teaching during the Corona pandemic, it was possible to identify important recurring topics, which were grouped into clusters. Interview questions for teachers and students were developed. The digital focus groups were analysed using category-based methods based on the Qualitative-Text- Analysis according to Kuckartz (2018).

Results

How did faculty and students experience the digital semesters?

Both, teachers and students experienced an increased workload in the Corona semesters. This was partly due to the new teaching/learning setting, and partly due to the lack of face-face interaction during and outside the lectures. The students missed the peer-to-peer learning and their personal study organization was more challenging for professors, missing regulations for data protection was a major issue in terms of recordings and turning on cameras. This was only peripherally addressed among students. Both groups pointed out that the teachers had to manage the digital teaching technically as the sole entertainers and get the students to interact, while the students became more like lone warriors and had to deal with the monotony of digital teaching and self-structuring. There was often little interaction in the synchronous lectures. However, the interaction was better in small groups and when turning on the cameras, students and teachers agreed. For all participants, the digital teaching/learning space and the unfamiliar, sometimes very reduced interaction represented a central point of discussion in the focus groups.

What changed in the living situation and outside the university?

The reconstruction of the overall situation shows that the space of residence and the space of teaching/learning became one single place. In the case of the teachers, the lack of role separation was an additional factor, for example, due to simultaneous childcare. Teachers described their situation as privileged in comparison to society as a whole. For the students the lack of separation between their private life and their studies was difficult. Due to the reduction of teaching and learning to the home computer workstation, a clear digital exhaustion was perceived in both groups. The participants tried to compensate this with sports, walks and similar individual activities. In both groups, friends were met mostly in the digital space, which sometimes intensified the digital exhaustion.

Conclusion

The abrupt change of the teaching/learning space that had previously been taken for granted led both, teachers and students develop new strategies for action, both in terms of teaching and learning and for the ad hoc changes in their life situations. The teachers themselves became digital learners. Students had to find their own way in their daily study routine. In the next months, it will be crucial

to integrate the experiences of the Corona semesters into university teaching despite of the wish of returning to face-to-face teaching.

This includes in particular, strengthening universities as space for education and socialization, giving greater weight to spaces for community and personal development, enabling the development of digital skills and the creation of digital interaction between teachers and students, and last but not least pushing for the adaptation of legal regulations.

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