Social Work Education in BiH under Pandemic: A (Post)Disaster Perspective

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Introduction

▶ COVID -19 Pandemic as a drastic disruption of economic, political and social life on a global scale

▶ Revolutionary change in the field of(higher) education: a global experiment in online teaching and learning

▶ Aims/Goals of the presentation:

  ▶ To offer insights on the **impact of pandemic on social work education** (FPS, Sarajevo): **how students and teachers experienced online learning**

  ▶ To critically **evaluate the presence of disaster-content in social work curriculum**

Going Virtual: Familiar, but still different

- In the summer semester *2011/2012*, Faculty of Political Sciences developed a **Distance Learning Study Program** (Online Learning) in all five disciplines (sociology, political science, journalism and communication studies, social work, peace and security studies) at BA & MA level

- The task group discussed two models of online learning

- *Asinhronical DL stud*ies (student can access learning content/materials at and time, with modalities of virtual and real interactions between teachers and students)

- *Sinhronical model which implies full, in real - time based interaction* between teachers and students

  - **We opted for "*asinhronical model*" (DL studies parallel to inclass study programs)**

Advantages:

- *Doubling the market offer of the Faculty and opening opportunities to deliver study programs at BA and MA level both in class and online(flexibility with regard to number of students enrolled)*

- Direct control of revenues

- Adapted learning (students) and additional capacity development (academic staff)

Disadvantages:

- Additional workload for academic staff (in terms of the need to parallel conduct classical and online learning(

- Necessary administrative changesand allignement of regulatons

- Objective burden tied to the idea to inaugurate the DL studies from academic year 2012/2013 (start in October 2012)

Dinamicy of DL Studies Introdction

Organizacioni dio		
	Zaduženje	Rok
Usvajanje DL Programa FPN	NNV	25. 05.2012.
Donošenje Odluke o metodologiji načina odvijanja nastave i polaganja ispita	NNV	25. 05.2012.
Odluka o imenovanju Rukovodioca DL studija	Dekan	30. 05.2012.
Donošenje akata o nadoknadama za DL studiji	Dekan i UO	30. 06.2012.
Imenovanje DL Koordinatora	Dekan	11. 05.2012.
Prijedlog DL zaduženja i izrada DL silabusa predmeta na I godini	Katedre	31. 05.2012.
Formiran DL tim – izbor DL operatera	Rukovodilac DL studija	21. 05.2012.
Trening DL Kooridinatora i DL operatera	Rukovodilac DL studija	31. 05.2012.
Nabavka opreme za DL tim	Dekan i Rukovodilac	31. 05.2012.

NASTAVNI PROCESI I SADRŽAJ			
PRIPREMA DL MATERIJALA ZA I SEMESTAR DL NASTAVE			
	ZADUŽENJE	POČETAK	OKONČANJE
Prijedlog DL zaduženja i izrada DL silabusa za predmete na I semestru	Katedre	25. 05.2012.	31.05.2012.
Trening nastavnika i saradnika zaduženih za I semestar DL studija	Rukovodilac DL studija	1. 06.2012.	15. 06.2012.
Priprema obaveznih DL materijala / prvih pet nastavnih jedinica svakog od 11 predmeta I semestra	Nastavnik/saradnik DL Kooridinatori i DL operateri	15. 06.2012.	20. 07.2012.
Priprema dodatnih materijala i kvizova / prvih pet nastavnih jedinica svakog od 11 predmeta I semestra	Nastavnik/saradnik DL Kooridinatori i DL operateri		
Izrada DL Web stranice svih 11 predmeta I semestra	DL operateri	02.07.2012.	20. 07.2012.
Testiranje i kontrola kvalitete prvih pet nastavnih jedinica svakog od 11 predmeta I semestra	Rukovodilac DL studija u domenu kontrole kvalitete	20. 07.2012.	03. 08.2012.
Priprema obaveznih materijala/preostalih pet nastavnih jedinica	Nastavnik/saradnik DL Kooridinatori i DL operateri	03.09.2012	14.09.2012.
Priprema dodatnih materijala i kvizova / preostalih pet nastavnih jedinica	Nastavnik/saradnik DL Kooridnatori i DL operateri		
Dopuna DL Web stranice	DL operateri	17.09.2012.	21.09.2012.
Testiranje i kontrola kvalitete preostalih pet nastavnih jedinica	Rukovodilac DL studija u domenu kontrole kvalitete	24.09.2012.	28.09.2012.

The Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and policy on higher education (UNSA)

▶ Following the introduction of the lockdown in March 2020, the University of Sarajevo shifted automatically to online learning: in class teaching, field education and exams suspended

▶ Hzge diversity in relation to single faculty capacities to handle the new situation: for majority of the faculties, online learning was totally unknown

  ▶ diverse practices of organizing/conducting education online (delivering materials without lectures and/or interaction with students, using available platforms, such as skype, zoom, google meets, etc.)

  ▶ diverse capacities, knowledge and experience of academic staff in the context of digitalization of higher education

▶ Learning at the Faculty: **move from a-synchronical to synchronical study model**:

  ▶ Moodle platform used adopted to include **Big Blue Butten as virtual classroom**

The Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and policy on higher education (UNSA): Field Education

- *Field Education has traditionally been a crucial part of social work training*
  - Integration of social work's knowledge, skills and values, and adoption of professional culture among future practitioners
- Corona pandemic imposed drastic changes to both contexts of learning, limiting space for meaningful integration
- Bridging the Gap Activities:
- 1. Webinar: *Field Education in SW under corona Crisis: Learning from SEE and North American Perspective(s)* (19.12.2020.)
- 2. Series of webinars on Field Education organized jointly with the School of Social Work in Zagreb (2020/2022)

Students Perspective on Online Learning

▶ In the context of quality assurance measures, *evaluation of the teaching* process at the end of each semester at the Faculty level, last conducted in July 2021

▶ (Voluntary) *Online Questionnaire* covering *availability of e-teaching materials, technical and other problems in delivering online classes, attendance behavior, online exams, efficacy, etc.*

▶ Number of students who participated/completed evaluation lower that in previous years (new strategy for upcoming semester: mandatory participation in evaluation

  ▶ *Social work students*: <u>48</u>

▶ For present analysis, qualitative analysis of student's reflections/comments which describe their understanding of positive/negative aspects of online education

▶ Responses Categorized in following thematic units:

(In)Adequate Access to Digital Technologies (own computer, Wi-Fi) and other constrains

- A sound portion of social work students reported **difficulties in access to technological prerequisites**: not having stabile and continuous access to the Internet, sharing computer/tablets with other siblings (digital gap/divide)
  - Smartphones as a solution of last resort, but severely limited for learning process in the long run

- Other people around schooling or doing work interferring
  - Siblings/parents

(Self) Management

- Many students reported ***dissatisfaction with online schooling while other activit***ies (sport, leisure, etc.) ***were opened***
  - Lost motivation in the context of fixed timetable, but without face-to-face contact, interactions with fellow students, guidance and cooperation
- The issue of **competence**: meeting deadlines, completing exams etc. harder
  - "I thought I have all time of the world at my disposal. And did everything other than reading. At the end, I had number of pages to write and submit, and felt overwhelmed."
- **Fear and anxiety** about the start of the new/upcoming academic year: at that moment, university management was not able to issue clear instructions about the teaching model
  - Student anxious about both:
    - in class teaching (in relation to the issues of accommodation, safety measures and vaccination, etc.).
    - online teaching: "how to survive another semester of online lectures"

(Social) Interactions and Participation in the Class

▶ Students also reported feelings of frustration over lost/missing **social interactions, connectedness and belonging to the class/group/institution**

▶ They were able to easily communicated and share information on organizational issues, but were less **ready/reluctant to participate in the discussions in virtual classrooms** (fear of being misunderstood, fear of being recorded)

  ▶ This issue applying even more to the student's groups which never experienced in class teaching, where students did not each other personally at all

▶ Some students were obliged to take over **caring responsibilities** for other family members and/or were infected themselves (increased health related issues, stress related to family situation in economic, health and mental health terms…)

Other Concerns/Expectations

▶ For some students, particularly those who applied for studies at the University of Sarajevo from smaller towns and remote rural places the online model was a failure

▶ They reported being 'stacked' home, in their remote communities, studying from there without real touch and opportunities available at the capital city they hoped for

Teacher's Perspective on Online Learning

Advantages:

- Continuity of education (no disruption)

Disadvantages:

- Online communication can not be a substitute for real communication between students, teacher-students

- Digital gap (online learning takes no care of economic, social, geographical status of actors and resulting frustrations

- Online learning as a demanding activity (need to rethink what works'in contrast to ordinary inclass mode/approach)

- No means of knowing whether students understood and what they did not understood

- Abesence of nnonverbal communication

- Alienation

- No clear boundaries between working and leisure activities

- Exam cheating

Current Situation and (some)Lessons Learnt

▶ Return to in class teaching since 4.10.2021. with COVID -19 related policies in place (limited groups of students, face mask, physical distancing)

  ▶ Back to classical lecturing model as group work etc. is difficult to implement

▶ (Social Work) Education needs to reinvent itself in new circumstances as ordinary practices which have been taken for granted disappeared

  ▶ To prepare students for living, studying and working in a 'one-and-a-half-meter-society': intrinsic motivation for studies

  ▶ Will be shaped by the ways in which the profession will evolve out of the pandemic crisis: move to digital social work/social services or…

Disaster-Related Content in SW Curriculum?

▶ Although devastating to comprehend and process, the (collective) experience of COVID-19 as a disaster provides us with opportunity to include disaster-related content in SW curriculum, advance student understanding of disaster-related practice and by doing so better prepare students to act

▶ Currently, there is a problem of a **general lack of education and training in disaster management and relief**

▶ On the other hand, social work profession is defined as the profession that "*intervenes at the points where people interact with their environment*" - enviroment is prone to periodic disasters, both natural and manmade - in the context of current climate change, they will obviously become more frequent

▶ focusing on **advocacy and empowerment** of vulnerable populations – can have a pivotal role in a response to disasters in various phases

▶ SW often without specialized training provide assistance in the areas of disaster relief, assessment, recovery, restoration, and policy development

Disaster-Related Content in SW Curriculum?

▶ In previous social work study curricula, there was an optional/elective course on *Social Work in Crisis Situation* which was to transmit disaster/-related knowledge and competencies

▶ However, at some point the changes in the curriculum which was considered too crowded and extensive, as well as a lack of faculty competence led to its abandment

▶ The floods which affected this region, BiH in particular in Mai 2014 proved its relevance and showed that social workers need increased education and training on disaster/specific content

▶ Obviously, there is a need to introduce disaster-realed content in SW curricula - tied to the mission and goals of SW profession – making future social workers better prepared to meet both local/national and international crisis

Thank you.

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