

Teaching Higher Education Pedagogy in a Department of Education: An Assessment Based on Students' Views and Opinions

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Abstract

In this article we present the results of a pilot implementation of a course in Higher Education Pedagogy in a Department of Education in Greece. Our goal is to investigate whether a similar course may be introduced into the undergraduate curriculum of a Department of Education. The course was taught according to remote flipped classroom approach, whereas the assessment is based on the views and opinions of the students who attended the course during the academic year 2020-2021, i.e., during the COVID-19 pandemic period. According to the findings of the research, the course achieved a particularly high evaluation degree regarding the interest it attracted, the usefulness and its relevance to the other courses of the curriculum of a Department of Education, while its introduction in a curriculum of this type produces additional benefits, both for the development of the students and for the field of HEP.

Keywords: Higher Education Pedagogy, University Pedagogy, Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, remote flipped classroom, COVID-19 pandemic

1. Introduction

Higher Education Pedagogy (HEP) or University Pedagogy or Teaching and Learning in Higher Education seem to be fields of a continuously increasing interest in the area of Educational Sciences and are mainly transformed into a transdisciplinary field having inputs from almost all disciplines. However, as shown by the literature, over the last fifty years, apart from all the above, theoretical foundations of the field have emerged, which are directly linked to the Sciences of Education. In this paper, we will outline in detail the attempt to introduce a relevant course in a Department of Education, by investigating any possible issues arising from the said introduction and by presenting research data which illuminate whether or not such a course could be introduced in the curriculum of academic departments at undergraduate or graduate level. From the overview of the literature, it can be established that this issue has not been raised, extensively at the very least, perhaps due to the fact that in many cases, the field of HEP is considered to be comprised of practical instructions, good practices and suggested applications for the upgrade of teaching and, therefore, it concerns the field of continuing education of the academic teaching staff. Investigation into curricula of Departments of Education did not reveal any relevant courses, therefore, we think that a pilot implementation of a course like this in a Department of Education is of great theoretical, research and practical interest.

At first, we will outline the reasons for the HEP emerging internationally, and also in Greece more specifically. Afterwards, we will analyze the content of the course and its way of implementation, as well as the data that were obtained from its implementation, emphasizing the views of the students who attended it.

2. The Field of Higher Education Pedagogy

The field of HEP has been globally emerging in a very systematic way since the second half of the previous century, and mainly after the mid-1960's and onward. Its development since then is constant and, additionally, over the last thirty years relevant publications have been doubling every decade (Karalis, 2019). During its development, certain disciplines have largely contributed, at first those which concern the education of health care professionals and engineers and which since the 1960's already had specialized journals (for example the British Journal of Medical Education and the IEEE Transactions on Education). The subject areas of these

journals were not limited to academic education of the respective scientists and practitioners, as they concerned their continuing education as well as the on-the-job training, however, they had already by then directed their attention to the conditions of initial training that was taking place in higher education institutions. After all, one of the first and most influential works comes from the field of medical education (Naftulin, Ware, & Donnelly, 1973), regarding the way teaching is conducted and not the instructors' competence in their discipline (also known as Dr. Fox Effect).

Nevertheless, the most important contribution, at least as far as the theoretical foundations are concerned, should be attributed to the field of Educational Sciences and, in particular, to the field of Adult Education. The existence for more than a century of the so-called mature students, mostly in the US and in Great Britain, both in programs leading to a degree and in programs in the context of linking actions with society, such as university extension, extramural activities, continuing education, lifelong education, resulted, at first, in the need to investigate the appropriate education conditions to this type of students. The emergence of the field of Adult Education, as academic discipline, reinforced the relevant research attempts. In 1926, Eduard Lindeman published his seminal book *The Meaning of Adult Education*. In this book the characteristics of adult learners are analyzed in depth for the first time, as well as the prerequisites for their effective education. Under the influence of the philosophical stream of Pragmatism and more specifically the ideas by John Dewey, Lindeman forcefully raises the issue of not focusing on the object of education anymore (i.e. the syllabus and content of the courses), but rather on the subject, i.e. the learner and the situations s/he experiences. It is a view that influenced Educational Sciences decisively and to a broader extent in the following years and mostly in the second half of the previous century. Among other major contributions by Adult Education, the participatory educational techniques could be mentioned, in contrast to the traditional approach of lecturing, and also the development of skills, such as critical thinking and critical reflection (especially through the approach of transformative education, see Mezirow & Associates, 1990).

Apart from these theoretical contributions, the development of HEP needs also to be examined in the light of important developments and changes in society and education. One of these developments is the massification of education in general, but more specifically in higher education, which takes place in a large number of countries mostly since the beginning of the 1960's onward. As a result, students no longer belong to the higher 10% of a cohort, usually with high scores and also self-motivation to follow the higher education track. Nowadays, in many countries, a rather high percentage of secondary education graduates enroll on university considering this particular education level as an almost natural continuation of their education path. For example, in the case of Greece, in contrast to a percentage of 7% of a cohort who had access to tertiary education in the beginning of the 1960's, nowadays, in some cases, this rate exceeds 70%. This in turn creates the requirements for new ways of teaching, for the motivation of students and for different ways and paths for them to approach new knowledge.

At the same time, the gradual development of computers, the Internet and ICT's, and also their constantly increasing penetration in education, create learning environments with radically different possibilities and features. The development of e-learning, MOOCs and other forms of digital education (Depover, Karsenti, & Komis, 2017), result in the emergence of new forms of education which do not simply renew distance education but also face-to-face traditional education, such as flipped classroom. The younger generations of students demonstrate a remarkable familiarization with many of these technologies, a fact that orientates the learning environments accordingly in higher education (Kamarianos, Adamopoulou, Lambropoulos, & Stamelos, 2020).

In Greece, except for some few, scattered research attempts, the field of HEP was not developed enough until very recently. Moreover, given that at least until recently the Greek education system was to a large extent teacher-centered, the form of education was mainly lecture (Rotidi, Collins, Karalis, & Lavidas, 2016) and until recently no mentions could be found to the ways of improving the educational intervention in universities.

In 2016, at the initiative of the Department of Molecular Biology and Genetics of the Democritus University of Thrace, a group of few academics and researchers participated in the founding meeting of the Hellenic Network of University Pedagogy. In this meeting, the foundations for its development as a research field were laid, and also as a sector of development of relevant activities in universities. Three years later, this Department hosted the first conference of University Pedagogy in Greece, while the number of the network's members now amounts approximately to 150 (Kedra & Rotidi, 2017; Rotidi, Kedra, Frementiti, & Kaltsidis, 2020; Gougoulakis, Kedra, Oikonomou, & Anastasiades, 2020).

Almost simultaneously, attempts were initiated to create Centers of Teaching and Learning (CTL) at Greek universities. The two first were founded at the University of Patras and the Democritus University of Thrace and were also founded relatively recently at the University of Aegean and the University of Thessaly. Relevant

activities have been developed at other Greek universities, such as the University of Crete and this sector is now showing a remarkable development. In 2020, the first research in Greece was conducted, and also one of the very few in the European territory, at the very least, for the educational needs analysis of the teaching personnel, from the Laboratory of Didactics and Professional Development of Bioscientists of the Democritus University of Thrace (Kaltsidis, Orfanidou, Kedraka, & Karalis, 2021).

3. Outline and Modules of the Course

The course under investigation in this paper is entitled “Higher Education Pedagogy” and it was scheduled to be taught for the first time in the third year of studies of the Department of Educational Science and Early Childhood Education (DESECE) of the University of Patras during the winter semester of the academic year 2020-2021. The University of Patras is one of the most known higher education institutions in Greece, having 35 departments in the wider region of Western Greece and more than 33,000 students. In the aforementioned Department it was considered necessary to introduce a course that would concern an emerging field in the Sciences of Education, that of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

The DESECE is one of the oldest education departments in Greece and it was initially founded as a department for the education of preschool education teachers. Afterwards, over the last 20 years, it has expanded its scope with the objective, on the one hand, to train preschool education teachers, and, on the other hand, to include all subjects of Educational Sciences in its curriculum. The Department has been evaluated three times over the last twenty years by committees of external experts, receiving considerably high evaluations. Recently (2020) its curriculum has been certified by the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education, receiving a high-level accreditation based on the European Standards Guidelines (ESG) of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The Laboratory of Pedagogical Research and Lifelong Education, one of the five research laboratories of the Department, was founded 25 years ago and one of its research areas is that of Adult and Higher Education. In the last fifteen years, in the framework of the Laboratory’s activities, three PhD theses have been completed concerning issues of higher education in the context of Greece, as well as more than 50 papers regarding these issues. These papers have been used inter alia to define the content of the course (indicatively: Raikou, Karalis, & Ravanis, 2017; Liodaki & Karalis, 2013; Raikou, 2012; Raikou & Karalis, 2011, Karalis, Sotiropoulos, & Kampeza, 2007). The course was incorporated in the third year of the four-year curriculum, in order to ensure that students choosing it, would have already attended Lifelong Learning of the previous year which is considered a prerequisite for the understanding of a HEP course. Additionally, until the third year of studies, students have attended a large number of courses (24), among which all the basic courses on pedagogy, sociology of education, psychology, didactics, etc. When choosing the modules of the course, it was deemed necessary to be based, firstly, on some of the most internationally widespread books and handbooks (indicatively: Vermunt & Donche, 2017; Kreber, 2013; Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Tennant, McMullen, & Kaczynske, 2010; Fry, Ketteridge, & Marshall, 2009; Kreber, 2009; McLean, 2006; Cranton, 2001), putting more emphasis on theoretical approaches which are proposed by these and less on practical implementations, including the most contemporary approaches (such as for example, critical reflection, critical and radical approaches, scholarship of teaching and learning, authenticity). As already mentioned, one of the main sources were the papers on higher education of the Laboratory of Pedagogical Research and Lifelong Education and also the research papers of the Hellenic Network of University Pedagogy, in order to provide closer connection with the Greek context. The syllabus was developed by the two co-authors who were also the instructors during the first implementation, and it consisted of the following five modules:

Module 1: Higher Education as Learning Environment

This module is an introduction to the course and it mainly consists of a brief description of higher education, its evolution throughout time, mostly in the European and Greek context, the broadening of access over the last fifty years, the characteristics of academics and the dimensions of their role (teaching, research, administration).

Module 2: Characteristics of students

In this module, the dimensions and characteristics of adulthood are analyzed starting from the first views on the field of adult education (see for example: Lindeman, 1926; Knowles, 1926) and reaching the most contemporary (for example the Arnett’s emerging adulthood and Kegan’s structural developmental approach). Some data are additionally provided for the generational/cohort approaches and the characteristics of generations are briefly analyzed (Lost Generation to Generation Alpha).

Module 3: Design and Evaluation of a Course

In this module the basic views on designing and evaluating a course in higher education settings are presented.

The module consists of elements such as basic principles of course design, study load systems, course objectives, evaluation models, course evaluation. In addition, this module encompasses some participatory teaching techniques for the implementation of a course, e.g. buzz groups, debate, brainstorming, role play, and also main principles of the field of adult education for structuring a course in a way that the learners' active participation and self-motivation are enhanced (Cervero & Wilson, 1994; Dirx & Prenger, 1997; Diamond, 1998; Caffarella & Ratcliff Daffron, 2013).

Module 4: e-learning in higher education

The issues included in this module are penetration of ICTs in higher education environments, basic principles for the design of an e-learning, analysis of the various forms of e-learning (synchronous and asynchronous, MOOCs) as well as some forms and ways of organizing the course (i.e. the flipped classroom approach). For the structuring of the syllabus of this module, apart from the approaches on the part of ICTs, relevant papers in the Greek context were also taken into consideration for the implementation of the principles of adult education in e-learning environments (Pavlis-Korres, 2021; Pavlis-Korres, Karalis, Leftheriotou, & Barriocanal, 2009; Karalis & Koutsonikos, 2003).

Module 5: Development of critical thinking skills in higher education

Critical thinking and critical reflection are analyzed in the introduction of this module, emphasizing the processes for the promotion of critical reflection in the way it is conceptualized in J. Mezirow's transformative learning theory. Among the ways of promoting critical reflection, the analysis of the method Transformative Learning Through Aesthetic Experience is also included (see: Kokkos, 2010), as well as the presentation of research data from its implementation in higher education in Greece (Raikou, 2016).

The course was incorporated in the curriculum after approval of the General Assembly of the Department and it was integrated into the Quality Assurance System of the University of Patras, to be taught and evaluated during the next semester. Even though the period of the last phase of designing the course coincided with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the course was designed to be taught face-to-face and this was because a return to auditoria was considered. According to the initial design it would be delivered based on the flipped classroom approach (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2014), a highly innovative method by the standards of the Greek higher education context, since, up until that point, only two implementation cases were mentioned in Greece, both of them in Departments of Education, one from the Department of Special Education / University of Thessaly and the other one from the DESECE / University of Patras (Plota & Karalis, 2019; Rakitzi, Botsoglou, & Roussakis, 2020). Finally, after the closure of all Greek universities for the academic year 2020-2021, the course was taught using a variation of the flipped classroom approach, what the authors called *remote flipped classroom* (Karalis & Raikou, 2021). This approach follows the flipped classroom approach with the only difference that instead of an auditorium and a classroom, a teleconference software is used for synchronous education (in this case Zoom, one of the approved teleconference systems by the University of Patras during the COVID-19 pandemic). During the meetings no lectures are delivered, but queries, discussions, projects and other participatory and engaging activities for the students take place. As indicated by the flipped classroom approach, studying new material was carried out through the asynchronous education system, which included multimedia material of a relatively long duration (15 videos with a total duration of 7 hours, 7 PowerPoint presentations, notes of almost 300 pages and carrying out tasks and activities, see Karalis & Raikou, op.cit. for a detailed description of the course).

Assessment of the course during the first time of implementation was considered necessary by the two instructors and this was because this implementation included two innovative points, the implementation of a course with this title and content, and also the teaching method. For this reason, the assessment was twofold, and it was based on a variety of tools (initial and final questionnaires, diaries of the instructors, learning analytics of the asynchronous education system). In this paper, we will only refer to that part of the assessment which concerns the *content* of the course.

4. Presentation and Discussion of Findings

In this section we will use data mostly from the questionnaire that was handed out to the students by the two instructors at the end of the classes, and it was filled in by 91 students. From the initial questionnaire, which was filled in by 132 students, we shall draw data only concerning the students' profile and the reasons for which they chose this particular course, while all the other data listed below have been drawn from the final questionnaire and also from the Official Information System of the Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP), University of Patras (it should be added that completing the two questionnaires was anonymous and optional). From the data of the initial questionnaire, it was found that out of the 132 students who answered, 125 are women and 7 are men (this is approximately the ratio among the students of the Department, as this Department has been chosen mostly by

women over time). The course was taught as an elective in the third year of studies, however, according to the academic regulations of Greek universities it could be selected by students of higher years as well, in this particular case by students of the fourth year or by students who had completed the minimum study period. Students in their third year of studies amounted to 60.4%, 38.5% were in their fourth year, while 1.1% had exceeded their minimum study period. Since attending the classes is not mandatory, it was considered necessary to pose a question regarding the students' level of attendance. As it was established from the questionnaire's data, around 8 out of 10 students (76.9%) stated that they attended "much", whereas "quite" was shared by 14.3%. A percentage of 8.8% stated that they attended "moderately" or "a little". This is consistent with the data from the instructors' diaries, according to which the arithmetic mean of those attending the classes via Zoom amounted to a percentage of almost 75% of the total.

Table 1 lists the data concerning the reason for which the students state they chose this particular course. As it can be observed, almost half of the students state that according to its outline, they thought it belonged to a group of relevant courses, from which they had already chosen other courses. Moreover, 21.2% indicated that the modules and their content attracted their interest, in the way they are described in the course outline. Therefore, more than 60% of the students seem to have formed an opinion on its content and that was the reason they chose it. An equally significant percentage (31.0%) indicate that they chose it upon discussion and encouragement by their fellow students.

Table 1. Reasons for choosing the course

Reason	N	%
I think it belongs to a group of relevant courses	56	42.3
It was suggested by my fellow students	41	31.0
Its description made it seem interesting	28	21.2
By chance	4	3.0
Because of the instructors	3	2.3
Total	132	100.0

All the data listed in the following tables, were gathered *after* attending the course and most of them concern the content of the course.

Table 2. Interest, usefulness, and relevance of the course

	Not at all		A Little		Average		Somewhat		To a great extent		Mean (1-5)	SD
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
How interesting do you find the course?	0	0	0	0	3	3.3	26	28.6	62	68.1	4.65	.545
How useful do you think the course is for your studies?	0	0	0	0	9	9.9	29	31.9	53	58.2	4.48	.673
How relevant do you find this course in relation to the other courses you are taught?	1	1.1	4	4.4	21	23.1	37	40.7	28	30.8	3.96	.906

The questions in Table 2 were aiming at investigating three different issues, directly connected with the possibility to incorporate a course of this content in the curriculum of a Department of Education, based on the concern developed in the previous sections of the article. The interest in a course points to its attractiveness and although it is absolutely subjective, it cannot be overlooked when structuring a curriculum, since it contributes to the students' self-motivation, certainly for every single course but potentially for all courses. Usefulness points to the extent in which students consider the course necessary for their studies, and also for their professional career. Relevance concerns whether the students think it is related to the other courses of the curriculum. For all three of these elements, the fact that students are in their third or higher year of studies is of particular importance, because they have already attended more than 50% of the courses included in the curriculum, while they have a broad overview of the rest of the courses, as they are shaping their choices taking into account the available courses of the curriculum.

All three elements of the table constitute elements which could or could not advocate for the incorporation of this course in a similar curriculum, however, each one is completely different from the other ones. Although interconnected, each one of these could be used depending on the perspective that structuring of a curriculum

adopts in order to incorporate or not a course of similar content. Nevertheless, when all three factors are positively evaluated at the same time, they create a very powerful rationale for the incorporation of the course. This is true in the case of this particular course, as shown by the data in Table 2. As it can be noted, the arithmetic means are very high for interest and usefulness and rather lower for relevance, yet not low, since it is almost 4 in a 1-5 scale. It should be pointed out that the sums of [not at all] and [a little] add up to 0% for the first two elements, whereas they are approximately 5% for relevance. As for the total amounts of the positive opinions, i.e. [somewhat] and [to a great extent], these are higher than 90% for the first two elements and a little higher than 70% for relevance.

Table 3. Understanding and study load of the course

	Not at all		A Little		Average		Somewhat		To a great extent		Mean (1-5)	SD
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Are you having difficulty in understanding the course's syllabus?	50	54.9	29	31.9	10	11.0	1	1.1	1	1.1	1.62	.813
Do you think the workload is heavier compared to other courses?	39	42.9	22	24.2	21	23.1	5	5.5	0	0.0	1.91	.960

The elements of Table 3 concern how students perceive their contact with the content of the course. These two elements are directly linked to the course and also to the structuring of the curriculum. In the framework of student-centered approaches, as they have been laid down by the specifications for structuring a curriculum on national and European level (ESG – EHAE), the study load of a course is necessary to be taken into consideration when structuring the total load of every semester of studies, while the ability of students to access, understand and familiarize themselves with the content of the course, are undoubtedly a factor to be taken seriously into account. As it can be seen, the arithmetic means of these two parameters are very low, which means that students did not find it difficult to understand the course, while the study load of all individual activities is not considered excessive. Negative views on the two factors add up from 1.1% to 6.6%, while positive ones from 67.1% to 86.8%.

Table 4. Appropriateness of the course on undergraduate level

	N	%
Not at all	2	2.2
A little	0	0.0
Quite	12	13.2
Much	33	36.3
Very much	44	48.4
Total	91	100.0

Mean 4.29 - SD=0.860

Table 4 presents the students' views regarding whether the course is appropriate for the undergraduate level of studies, i.e. the degree to which it is appropriate for the undergraduate curriculum of a Department of Education. As shown by the data, the arithmetic mean is again very high (4.29), while the percentage of students who choose [quite] and [much] is around 90%, whereas one in two students thinks that it is very much appropriate for an undergraduate level.

Table 5. Students' opinion in which year of studies they think it is best for the course to be taught

	N	%
1st year	9	9.9
2nd year	6	6.6
3rd year	40	44.0
4th year	16	17.6
Any year	20	22.0
Total	91	100.0

The students' answers concerning the year of studies actually confirm the data listed in the previous tables.

Given that the majority of students come from the third year of studies and the least among them from the fourth, by examining the data of Table 5 we were led to the conclusion that students consider the course appropriate for the year they are in, if one calculates the percentage of 22.0% as well, who state that it could be taught in all years. Students seem to acknowledge the knowledge required to attend the course, since only 16.5% believe that it could be taught in the first or second year.

Table 6. Student's opinions on the specific modules of the course

	Not at all		A Little		Average		Somewhat		To a great extent		Mean (1-5)	SD
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
M1 - Higher education as Learning Environment	0	0	1	1.1	15	16.5	42	46.2	33	36.3	4.18	.739
M2 - Characteristics of students	0	0	0	0	1	1.1	31	34.1	59	64.8	4.64	.506
M3 - Design and Evaluation of a Course	0	0	0	0.0	14	15.4	42	46.2	35	38.5	4.23	.700
M4 - e-learning in higher education	0	0	3	3.3	9	9.9	42	46.2	37	40.7	4.24	.765
M5 - Development of critical thinking skills in higher education	0	0	2	2.2	10	11.0	21	23.1	58	63.7	4.48	.780

As already mentioned, the modules of the course have been selected based on the relevant international literature, on the one hand, and previous research by the Laboratory of Pedagogical Research and Lifelong Education in the Greek context, on the other hand. As it can be observed by the data in Table 6, all five modules are of particular interest to and accepted by the students, since the means fluctuate between 4.18 and 4.64 (in the 1-5 scale). Therefore, no module can be found which was considered inappropriate or problematic and which students would have preferred to not be included in the course. Negative views have a low percentage, from 1.1% to 6.3%, whereas positive ones from 82.5% to 98.9% for all modules. The module with the higher values (M2) is the one that could be thought to stand out due to a higher degree of proximity and intimacy with the students, and therefore, this could mean that these considerably high values may be due to the fact that the content of the module is directly linked to their characteristics and the stage of life the students are in. Another interesting point is the fact that the following module is the one referring to the acquisition of critical thinking skills, while both these modules have percentages higher than 60% in the upper part of the scale (to a great extent). Nevertheless, as it has already been mentioned, there is not a module which could be considered as superfluous according to the students' opinions.

One could argue that students' opinions could be biased due to the fact that both questionnaires were filled in during the attendance of the course. For this reason, we thought it was necessary to list the results that are produced from the assessment of the course by the students from the competent unit of the University of Patras, the Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP). All the data listed in Table 7 have been drawn from the Official Information System of the Quality Assurance Unit. Before moving on to citing these data we think it is necessary to specify how the student's assessment of the courses works according to the Quality Assurance System of the University of Patras. In the end of every semester, all the courses of the University of Patras are assessed by the students using an anonymous questionnaire which is filled in online, even from the students' mobile phones. The results are shared with the professors a little later after the exams have ended and the students' grades have been submitted. Every professor has access only to the results of the classes s/he teaches, as well as the means of the individual items of his/her Department. The results are disclosed to the students or to anyone else at the professors' discretion. The questionnaires include 27 questions which cover all the dimensions of the professor's performance, the content of his/her course and the mode of implementation. Table 7 cites the means for the two professors (because they had a divergence lower than 10%) for this particular course, only for the questions that concern the content of the course. It should be pointed out that since completing the questionnaires of the course and that of the Quality Assurance System is anonymous and optional, those who reply to these two tools are obviously not the same.

Table 7. Student's assessment of the course

Question/Item	Mean
How interesting do you think the content of the course is	4.7
How useful do you think the course is for your studies	4.6
How relevant is the course to everything you were taught or are being taught at other courses	4.6
Do you think the syllabus structuring and the cohesion of the lectures over the course of the classes were satisfactory	4.7
Did the professor adjust the delivery of the course to the student's level of knowledge	4.5
Is your knowledge of your scientific field enriched in this course	4.4
To what extent do you acquire the desired knowledge in the outline of the course	4.2
To what extent do you think that this course contributes to your scientific identity	4.5

Source: Official Information System – Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP), University of Patras

As can be seen, some of the answers, or similar to these, are included in the questionnaires distributed by the professors as well, and thus, they are suitable for a comparison with the official results of the assessment by the University of Patras, especially when the grading scale is the same (1-5). As for the interest and usefulness of this particular course, the arithmetic means are slightly higher than those in the questionnaires, nevertheless they are at the same high levels. As for the relevance of the course to other courses of the curriculum, the official results by the Official Information System of the Quality Assurance Unit show higher percentages than those of the questionnaires distributed after attending the course (4.60 compared to 3.96, approximately 15% higher), while relative to the Department's mean, the index for this particular course is much higher. Additionally, the means are rather high regarding whether students think that by this course they could enrich the knowledge of their discipline, and also regarding whether they think that this particular course contributes to their broader scientific identity. Taking into account all these findings lead us to the reasonable conclusion that students consider the course very interesting, useful and relevant to the other courses they are taught, and moreover, that it contributes to their formation as professionals in the field of Educational Sciences. Finally, both the cohesion of the individual modules and the adaptation to their level are highly evaluated, with high arithmetic means.

5. Conclusions

This paper deals with presenting the research data from the implementation of a course with the subject of Higher Education Pedagogy in a Department of Education in Greece. According to the overview of international literature, no other attempt was found so far to introduce a course with this content. The assessment presented here is based on the views and opinions of the students who attended the course during the winter semester of the academic year 2020-2021, i.e., during the COVID-19 pandemic. The course was taught according to remote flipped classroom approach, in order to ensure as far as possible the broader active participation of students, while structuring the syllabus and its individual modules were based on the recent international literature and also on research in the Greek context. In essence, with this pilot implementation we have attempted to answer the question concerning whether a similar course could be introduced in the undergraduate curriculum of a Department of Education or whether anything concerning HEP is “doomed” to constitute only the object of training or further professional development for the teaching staff of higher education institutions.

According to the data listed above, we think that the answer to the aforementioned question is absolutely positive. The course achieved a particularly high evaluation degree regarding the interest it attracted, the usefulness and its relevance to the other courses of the curriculum of a Department of Education. The students who attended the course think that it contributes to a great extent to their identity as professionals in the field of Educational Sciences. Its introduction in a curriculum of this area produces additional results, apart from the ones listed above. Students who attend this course may gain deeper insight into the dimensions of the context they are in during their studies, the characteristics of the life stage they are going through (emerging adulthood), the ways in which an academic course is structured, and also how they can develop critical thinking skills, in other words, they may increase the level of self-motivation and engagement in their studies, and they may gain better control of their learning course. At the same time, although the field of HEP has many significant influences from a large number of different disciplines, introducing it in a curriculum of a Department of Education could contribute to its connection with the main underlying scientific fields and also enhance its research production starting from its basic foundations.

As indicated above, this pilot implementation was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a period of disruption and turbulence of the normal way of studies, a period in which students appear to experience

increased psychological pressure (Konstantopoulou & Raikou, 2020), both regarding their studies and more generally due to the way of life during the pandemic. Its implementation through a system of teleconference, even if the approach of remote flipped classroom had been chosen, clearly limited the possibilities of students' active participation and the activities and applications that could be implemented through face-to-face education. Therefore, we believe that if the implementation takes place under face-to-face education circumstances, the assessment by the students may produce even higher results, a fact that attests that a similar course could be an elective course in the undergraduate curriculum of a Department of Education.

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