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Expectations of, and initial experiences with flexible learning pathways at the PHBern

Abstract:

Teacher education operates in the context of social, technological and educational policy developments. This creates the challenge of anticipating and setting up innovative educational formats. According to the current trend, learning should no longer be restrained to specific times, places or learning modalities, but is increasingly individualised, mobile and flexible. Universities are responding to this trend by developing their curricula in such a way that the offered learning pathways take account of students' needs and interests (OECD, 2020; Li & Wong, 2018).

Two institutes of the University of Teacher Education in Bern designed two different curricula enabling more individualised and flexible learning paths according to the students' motivation and needs (Brenner, 2022).

The presented research project examines the implementation and initial experiences of the new curricula. In particular, it aims at finding out what the potentials and challenges arise for students and lecturers from operating within more individualised and flexible structures? This research would gain new insights into flexible learning pathways that serve the further development of teacher education.

To address this question, among other things two rating conferences (N=24) were held with students and lecturers of the two institutes. The rating conferences provide important insights into the experiences of the more individualised and flexible curricula (Hascher et al., 2020). The participants first fill out a short questionnaire and then transfer their answers to a larger, joint, and shared questionnaire using sticky notes. These provide the basis for the following group discussion. This method of data collection allows different perspectives to be made visible and creating opportunities for discussion about eventual discrepancies. In addition, it allows to validate communicatively the answers given in the short questionnaire. The discussions will be recorded, transcribed, and analysed by using qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2020). The results show that different challenges are perceived depending on the degree of flexibility and individualisation. However, the openness of the students and lecturers with regard to the innovations and to each other is an important prerequisite for the implementation of the curricula.
