

# **DISTANCE TEACHING OF LEGAL DISCIPLINES AT NON-LEGAL UNIVERSITIES. PANDEMIC COVID-19 ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR ACADEMICIANS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The paper examines the specifics of teaching legal disciplines at public universities, emphasizing law education. The universities are not specialized in law education. Nevertheless, legal studies, especially public law, form a substantial part of their curricula. The pandemic brought a fundamental change of approach to university education of both parts students and academicians. The author presents the experience of two semesters of online legal teaching. The paper highlights the positives, including the possibility of interuniversity and cross-border education. The author points out the negatives of teaching in big groups, which disables the personal interaction and immediate modification of the subject matter according to the demands and needs of students. The author conducted a short survey about issues and challenges of online teaching among academicians. The author was interested in which methods they used online they would keep in the future contact teaching. The survey also examines how online teaching influenced academicians' private life. Based on its results and lessons from the pandemic university teaching, the paper concludes with practical proposals for online education of legal disciplines for non-lawyers.

***Keywords:** online legal Teaching, cross-border Teaching, survey, influence on private life*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Legal education and understanding of fundamental principles of the rule of law form the basis of university education in general. Students of all universities get acquainted with the basics of law and ethics needed for their fields. Teaching law at these schools differs significantly from teaching at law faculties. Teachers must introduce students to the essence of public and private law in a much shorter period, without the unacceptable simplification of legal notions. The teacher must also significantly focus on the practical application of law in the field of studies. The SARS- COVID 19 pandemic interrupted personal contact with students and brought the need to modify the usual way of teaching until then.

The paper examines the challenges of complete distance teaching law based on the author's personal experience at two Czech universities. One of them is the Police Academy of the Czech Republic in Prague, and the other is the Institute of

Social Work at the University of Hradec Kralove. Legal education forms a substantial part of studies at both universities, as they prepare public officers and social workers.

The article highlights academicians' issues of adapting to the situation, which was unknown, unexpected, and uncertain, both in the work and private sphere. The paper examines the author's own experience and observations and the results of a survey among academic colleagues. This fact can lead to a subjective view of the studied phenomena. However, this does not automatically distort the results as the personality of the academician influences and forms the teaching. In addition, there has been no such challenge as the long-term closure of universities and total distance teaching.

Public health emergencies could affect the health, safety, and well-being of both individuals and communities. These effects may translate into a range of emotional reactions), unhealthy behaviours, and noncompliance with public health directives. [1]

Academicians also had to carry out their teaching duties and support students despite the uncertainty of their situation. They faced difficulties related to their health and their loved ones, the lack of material resources and profound knowledge of technologies. The need for teaching from a home office, copying with the new family situation as the home office of other family members and distance education of their children, together on all levels, underlined the possible psychosocial risks. These risks are closely related to work-related stress. Reduced social interaction, worsened work conditions, and concentration can cause physiological pain, cardiovascular problems, and a higher incidence of mental illness, such as depression and anxiety risk. [2]

Despite this fact, most of the surveys and evaluations, including support for persons affected, were focused on university students, not academicians, as no one expected, how long the universities' closure may last.

## **REMARKS ON LEGAL TEACHING FOR NON-LEGAL STUDENTS**

Since the mid of the 20th-century, concerns about the adequacy of the professional equipment in the students' legal knowledge and its interconnection with the public interest form a significant issue of legal education meets the needs of society, as the economy with which it operates should be more efficient. [3] The emphasis on increasing the performance of the economy is one of the primary consequences of a pandemic. Most modern states got into a negative balance of public funds because they supported the economy from public resources. In the Czech Republic, the public administration chaotically intruded on civic and economic freedoms. The Supreme Administrative Court recently cancelled many regulations, prohibiting the free movement of inhabitants, ordering the retail and

school closure. Public officers with a university education were unable to prepare legal documents properly. Of course, not all authors were not lawyers by education. Despite this fact, the Czech Constitution Court, in its decisions, reiterates that the public administration should defend its choices and legal interests in cases that do not overstep boundaries of its usual activity. [4]

As mentioned earlier, the legal teacher should be an academician and researcher who needs a profound knowledge of the practice. The teacher must apply all theoretical notions in practice in the legal context and the field studied. At the same time, an academic usually workn in a law faculty a relevant branch of law, a teacher at the non-legal faculty needs to know the basics of the main studied field of students.

In the Czech Republic, students of social sciences, law and other humanities usually work during their studies. Many of them are part-time or distance students. It means that they have a regular job during their higher educational level. That is why the legal lessons must point out the interrelation of theory and practice. The teacher should highlight the mentioned relation when solving I during the lecture or seminar examples from students' work experience. Such an approach demands the knowledge of academics and students, but at the same time, it brings enrichment for all participants. According to the author's experience, students are very keen on such discussions, but predominantly during face-to-face education.

## **DIGITAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

When teaching digitally, the academicians can use either synchronous or asynchronous methods. Synchronous teaching means that the teacher and students are together in real-time in a digital classroom. Educational institutions prefer to use MS Teams for seminars and workshops, Zoom conference services for extensive lectures and public exams. As the transition to distance digital teaching in many countries was rather unexpected and very quick, students had to start working with the syllabus, books, and pre-recorded lectures at their homes place. This approach forms asynchronous teaching. [5] The mentioned methods are not separated. In both types, students can contact teachers digitally, through chat sessions or by mail. The Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic, did not interrupt the educational activities for the tertiary sector. Streaming lectures and workshops proved to be much more appropriate for students in lifelong learning, as they could open the course anytime. The author perceives the combination of various methods and possibilities of distance teaching and communication-blended learning- as very good and facilitating the understanding of the subject. Such an approach is blended learning; "*Blended approaches use multiple methods to deliver learning by combining face-to-face interactions with online activities.*". [6]. Teaching in such a way means that teaching material, such as textbooks and articles, should be available digitally.

There were two main challenges and obstacles for teachers when moving to remote online teaching.

First, the teachers had to adapt to the fact that students disappeared in the digital world. Many students had no digital literacy. They faced difficulties with technologies and internet access. Students also had to comply with wholly changed family life and new job issues. Most students became passive participants who thought they were entitled to be educated without their effort. Discussions or exchanges of views during distance learning almost disappeared.

Second, the academicians had to process their new situation at home, family, and work. Many university teachers could not use the digital connection and the technologies for the daily grind; others needed to help their children with the daily distance education. Information on the problems academicians were required to comply with was practically unavailable.

## **SURVEY**

The author conducted a short self-administrated questionnaire survey for gathering information about the impact of distance teaching from a sample of colleagues. Experienced academicians and teachers, assistant and associate professors, professors with more than 14 years of teaching experience responded. The academicians teach at non-legal universities, either law or social sciences and social work. One male and one female respondent come from Norway university, one female respondent works both at the Czech and Slovak universities. The author decided to examine gender views because one of the assumptions was that females' lives were more affected by new, unexpected working conditions.

The author used a contactless questionnaire, distributed per e-mail, with nine open questions. Twenty questionnaires were sent, twelve came back. The author surveyed between midMarch and the end of May 2021. The results reflect universities' closure for more than a year when the pandemic has been litter throughout Europe.

Assumptions:

- A. Academicians prefer contact teaching
- B. Academicians prefer contact exams
- C. Academicians prefer to teach and take exams from the home office
- D. Academicians will not use new methods when contact teaching is allowed
- E. Females' family and private life was more affected by new, unexpected working conditions

The survey questionnaire, Online teaching and exams, 20 sent, 12 returned

## 1. Education (multiple possible) - University

Law and legal science	Security legal studies	Social work	Social Sciences	
5	3	5	5	

## 2. Sex

Male	Female
8	4

## 3. Years of academic experience

14-30
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## 4. From the point of view of an academician, please, specify

1) Advantages of online teaching
2) Disadvantages of online teaching
3) Advantages of online exams
4) Disadvantages of online exams
<b>See comments</b>

5. Which knowledge and methods from online teaching will you utilize when returning to contact teaching?

<b>11 will use online teaching for credits and works; one refuses</b>
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6. Which knowledge and methods from online teaching will you utilize when returning to the contact examination?

<b>11 will use online teaching for credits and written tests; one refuses completely, 11 prefer oral contact exams but can copy with online exams</b>
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## 7. Online teaching and exams took part from

When combining both, please give a percentage estimation

Home office	Work
3 - 100%, 7 - 80%,	1 - 100%, 7 - 20%
2 - 50%	2 - 50%

8. Online teaching affected my personal and family life

Yes	No
10	2

9. If the answer to question 8 was "Yes ", I would be pleased if you indicated how

<b>3 - positive, 7- negative</b>
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Source: author

**Comments on the Survey**

The academicians preferred a home office. Two female respondents explicitly stated that they saved time and could better organize their family life. They evaluated this fact positively as a complete calming with a positive impact on their teaching. One male respondent taught from his office since his wife; one of the respondents stayed at home with two children on compulsory remote education. So the family had to look for the solution of not having enough quiet space. Female respondents also emphasized that staying in the home office protects them from infection.

One male respondent appreciated having more time for his family and sparring money, as the large family could not spend money on travelling and culture.

As for the negatives of remote teaching, academicians perceived the lack of personal communication with students. They underlined the reluctance of students to participate in education in larger groups and the flattening of emotions. Three teachers (1 male and two females) also emphasized blurring the boundaries between work and privacy, including interventions in leisure activities. One respondent explicitly stated that the need to prepare for teaching and testing reduced her rest time. Another academician said that if distance learning continued, he would consider changing jobs. In testing, they felt the impossibility of ensuring sufficient control to be negative; asking questions was more complicated due to connection and technology issues.

Positively, academicians perceive that they and the students have become acquainted with the possibilities of using various educational programs. They will use part of their knowledge mainly in storing individual works and in credits. A significant positive was the opportunity to involve academicians from other universities, including foreign ones, in teaching. One respondent explicitly stated that she considers distance learning suitable for the inclusion of disadvantaged students. Some of the respondents did not like the intrusion of their own or students' privacy. It is necessary to emphasize that even the university IT support

organized training on how to use teaching applications, they just showed the essential functions. The author participated in several of them, but no highlighted setting the neutral background settings in Microsoft Teams or Zoom. These were the most exploited teaching applications.

Most of the surveys and evaluations, including support for persons affected, were focused on university students, not academicians, as no one expected, how long the universities' closure may last. The closure in the Czech Republic was one of the longest not only in the EU but worldwide.

## CONCLUSION

The beginning of the 21st century brought new challenges for education and educational institutions. Education at all levels remains at the centre of public attention. European welfare states cover its costs partly or entirely from the public funds. Modern educational systems enable creating virtual campuses and bringing various educational opportunities to individuals in their respective countries. [7] Cross-border teaching underlines the need for one common teaching language and sharing knowledge of different technologies. The pandemic speeded the demand to move from conventional face-to-face knowledge delivery to global marketized information sharing. The teacher and academician especially become more guides in educational activities than someone who exclusively decides what information students get. [The pandemic speeded up the debate among those who believe learning should be structured and directed by teachers and those who emphasize that students should take more activity and responsibility for their education. Until the pandemic, technologies had been used for extending the teacher-directed model. PowerPoint presentation, Moodle testing, and some web pages as a source of information were the highest technological support in many universities. The pandemic opened the world of video lectures, conferences and collaborative learning. New ways of teaching formed the major shift for both parties-students and academicians. [7]

The researchers and educators mainly concentrated on the needs and well-being of students, [8], though the academicians faced the changes and new types of workloads usually alone. The article highlights the academicians' needs and issues to comply with face during the pandemic online teaching.

Based on the self-administrated survey, the author examined common issues and challenges for social sciences teachers. The main risk of the survey was ethical because the author knows all participants personally and used to work with them. The author faced the same issues and challenges during online teaching. Therefore, the questions could be focused unilaterally to support the author's assumptions. [9]

On the other hand, the educational process includes the personality of a teacher, so they shared examined issues. Achieved results show that academicians

prefer contact teaching and personal exams or other forms of control. All respondents confirmed that students had become passive consumers of education. Gender did not play a role in views on the pros and cons of online teaching. Gender mattered when evaluating the private life of academicians. Females felt a more significant impact, both positive and negative. The academicians will exploit some new knowledge and teaching programs and face-to-face teaching; some plan continual remote control of repetitive and routine tasks. The author confirmed her assumptions, except for the rejection of new methods.

The main lesson resulting from the remote legal teaching for non-lawyers is that quality of education could be preserved just when the student's group are small and enable the discussion. Both academicians and students need to steadily improve their ability to work with new technologies and searching information on the web. This paper proves that quality scientific resources are available online. Universities have to prepare both parties to move to a new world of digital communication without losing the humanity and ethical dimension of education. In this, the human factor is irreplaceable. The way society values knowledge and education reflect its maturity and ability to overcome new disasters and crisis. Science and human potential to adapt and find solutions form the main factors for surviving and gaining quality of life. [10]

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