

# Reflecting on Acting Under Uncertainty: Risk-Taking by Students in a Project-Oriented University Course – A Qualitative Analysis

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## Abstract

Project-oriented teaching formats provide an opportunity to impart not only subject-specific knowledge to students but also theoretical and practical skills in project management. The objective of this qualitative research study was to explore the risk behaviour of students in a community-based research service-learning course at a German university. The research focused on the question of whether the students took risks and were aware of them, and for what reasons. The investigated university course dealt with the topic social inequality, poverty and homelessness and confronted the participants with new situations, uncertainties and unclear outcomes of their actions. Qualitative data were obtained through written reflections from the 15 course participants. One of the questions asked referred explicitly to risk behaviour. The responses were analysed using qualitative content analysis, inductive category formation method. The vast majority of students were aware that they had taken risks in their project work. They mentioned representing one's own point of view, selecting the team, establishing contact with community partners, and meeting with vulnerable individuals. The reasons for taking risks include time constraints in the project, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the course instructor's good preparation, one's own willingness to help and self-efficacy. Due to the small sample, the study results have a limited scope. However, it became apparent that the learning effects of students' risk behaviour are interesting subjects for investigation and should be anticipated and addressed in further studies. Dealing with and reflecting on risk management prepares students for project work in a professional context.

**Keywords:** risk taking; insecurity; course participants; service-learning; research-based learning