

HOW TO INCREASE STUDENTS' ENTHUSIASM

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to emphasize the need for increasing students' motivation in their study, find ways how to enhance their enthusiasm and provide them with attractive education.

We compared success of students in partial exams in a differentiated way of teaching (contact teaching versus e-learning) in the course of Indoor Plants assuming the impact of their own motivation on the test results. The results here from revealed that students are generally not ready for e-learning self-study.

A questionnaire survey was conducted on those students having completed the course of Applied Interior Design in order to evaluate the benefits of a practical-ly-orientated project to increase their interest in the subject and the field of study. The aim of the project was to find out about growing demands of the selected range of indoor house plants, thus stimulating students to cultivate plants based on their own real experience. The results of the questionnaire survey point to an increase in students' interest in the practical form of projects, building of the relationship with the study field (and plants) and willingness of students to invest their own financial and material resources into the project. The project taught students how to think about the practical aspects of plant cultivation and care, provided space for confronting the acquired knowledge and experience of teaching, and helped to create a relationship with plants, which is crucial for application in the field of landscape architecture.

Keywords: *education, e-learning, motivation, enthusiasm, Landscape architecture study*

JEL Classification: *I2, P36*

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1 Introduction

Engaging and motivating today's generation of students is beginning to be rather difficult. Unlimited possibilities often lead to their indifference, a lack of inspiration, diligence and motivation.

The aim of the paper is to evaluate the students' enthusiasm in the course of Indoor Plants depending on the different teaching methods (contact teaching vs. e-learning), as well as assessing an increase of their motivation in connection with the practically-orientated semestral project in to Applied Interior Design.

In the winter semester 2016/17, students were tested to evaluate their success in the partial exam, depending on differentiated teaching method in the course of Indoor Plants. We also wondered if the students' own motivation had an impact on the outcome of the partial examination in contrast to teaching in the class. From the point of view of assessing the motivation (enthusiasm) of the students, we assume that during the contact instruction there is a possibility of motivation of students by a teacher. In e-learning, it is essential for a student to have a considerable degree of motivation that inspires him/her to study independently and search for information in the electronic environment. We can conclude that the outcome of the partial examination in a different way of teaching is influenced by the students' individual approach, motivation, purpose because self-study requires a certain amount of student's discipline.

The use of IT in education is an integral part of the teaching at the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, Slovakia (Hillová, 2016, Tóthová, 2016) and an electronic platform to improve and make teaching more attractive is created through the grant project KEGA 035SPU-4/2016 - Interactive Experimental Garden (Hillová & Šajbidorová, 2016).

The course Indoor plants is a compulsory course in the 5st semester of the Bachelor Study programme of Landscape and Garden Architecture at Horticulture and Landscape Engineering Faculty at the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, Slovakia. Exercises from this subject are scheduled for 2 hours/week, and every second week lectures are held for 2 hours. The focus of the course is to acquire basic knowledge about the origin of indoor plants in terms of geographic, ecological and climatic aspects, to learn about bioclimatic factors of plants, to approach methods of cultivation, care and propagation of indoor plants. Exercises from the subject are orientated towards practical understanding of the range of indoor plants in the Botanical Garden at the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra. E-course Indoor Plants consists of seven themes, the main part of which is the information summarized in e-books with the purpose of improving knowledge acquired through the URLs of links relevant to the topic.

In the winter semester 2017/18 a questionnaire survey was carried out between students after completing the course Applied Interior Design in order to evaluate the benefits of the practically-orientated project for increasing students' interest in the studied course and the field of study, as well.

Applied Interior Design (AID) is a compulsory course in the 1st semester of the Master study programme Biotechnics of Park and Landscape at Horticulture and Landscape Engineering Faculty at the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, Slovakia. This course is scheduled for 3 hours/week. The focus of the course is to acquire knowledge about the influence of plants on the humankind, the aesthetic, architectural significance of the use of green in the interior, the cultivation technologies for indoor plants, modern trends in the use of the range of indoor plants. Students also deal with the analysis of indoor conditions from the point of view of plant growing and processing of the design study of interior arrangements.

Within the given term, a practical semestral project named The monitoring of growing demands for indoor plants, was a subject of credit assessment. Based on our teaching experience in previous semesters, when the final output from the course was the project study for interior arrangements with green design, we decided to change the project scope of the AID this time. From our own observations and assessments, we found that students have very weak knowledge and experience of growing indoor plants, do not use their positive features, do not have practical skills related to plant care, and for this reason their project studies were often only "inspirational collages,, downloaded from the Internet without a real idea of growth and functioning of their proposed planting design. Therefore, the aim of the AID was to focus on its own practical project, from which students acquire real knowledge and skills in the cultivation of indoor plants, which is crucial for the planting design.

Teaching any subject (course) should prompt the learner to study because it is necessary. Not only because the students are able to carry out an activity, and becomes attractive to a potential employer, but also they can study other subjects, develop their own views, which eventually helps to create their own personality. The teacher should ask why the student should study his/her subject matter. The answers such as it is essential to learn the subject in order to gain insight in the field are not the right ones (Lojda, 2016).

The professionalism and personal well-being of the teacher, correct attitude to students, knowledge, acceptance and updating of their needs is one of the ways for motivating students , encourage their activities and cooperation (Grofčíková, 2007).

A university teacher should not forget that s/he works with adults who have their own ideals, opinions and attitudes. A good prerequisite for effective

student's motivation is taking them as partners who, in addition to learning something from us, can also teach us something new. Students are able to look at the pedagogue very critically. They follow his/her speech, behaviour, not only while teaching, but also in the external environment. They also follow teacher's non-verbal communication when she/he speaks, whether s/he expresses his/her own interest in the subject matter as well as the students, his/her mood and knowledge (Šebová, 2007).

2 Data and methods

51 students participated in the test of influence of differentiated teaching methods on results of the partial examination in the course Indoor plants. The students were informed about the date of testing and its topic. The students were not notified of any further use of test results. Students were acquainted with different forms of topic mediation (contact education and e-learning). We have set these hypotheses:

H01: There is no difference between success of the partial examination and a different approach to education (contact education vs. e-learning) in the course Indoor plants.

H02: there is no difference in the intensity of approaches among the e-books from which the reported test is written and those from which the test is not written in the course Indoor plants. The test results were evaluated by the Pearson's chi-square test at a significance level of 99%.

11 of 14 students participated in assessment of the practically-orientated project in the course of Applied Interior Design was attended by. The goal of the semestral project was to gain a realistic vision of the growing demands of the selected range of indoor plants. The students' role within the project was the purchase or obtain three pieces of different species of indoor plants which they will take care of throughout the semester and monitor the cultivation operations carried out here on (determination of irrigation dose and interval of irrigation, determination for fertilization of plants and execution of maintenance on plants) and morphological changes (growth of vegetative parts, flowering). At the beginning, it was necessary to analyze the conditions in the selected interior (light, air humidity, temperature conditions) and justify the selection of the plant assortment to these conditions. Students had a choice of options: buying new indoor plants and growing them at the college or selecting from already functioning plants at the place of their residence. The role of the students was to monitor cultivation of the selected plants at specified intervals, set the optimal irrigation dose and the

optimum irrigation interval for the plant, monitor its morphological changes and analyze the possible health problems of the plants.

We assumed that one practical experience can replace a number of memorized information about plant cultivation. In fact, students did not know how to estimate the correct irrigation dose and irrigation interval for plants, they were unable to analyze plants' health status and prosperity, respectively failure to thrive in the interior.

This only confirmed importance of implementing this project and its contribution to their own development.

However, it is worth noting that control days and communication between the teacher and the students about the course of plant growing were often full of very positive and funny experiences.

The survey was created and analyzed by Google Forms. The survey involved 71% of graduates (10 students out of 14). The questionnaire survey was sent to students after filling for the exam in January 2018.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Evaluating of the partial exam success in a differentiated way of teaching

The results of evaluating of the partial exam success in a different way of teaching in the course of Indoor plants confirmed the assumption that the contact method of teaching is perceived as more understandable and accessible for students. The topic they were about to study was presented in a PowerPoint presentation during the lecture, and university scripts were also available. 76% of students answered correctly to 80% and more of the test questions, which is 4 out of 5 students. The chi-square statistic is 13.6609. P-value is 0.003405. The result is significant at $p < 0.01$. (Table 1).

The results can also be influenced by the fact that the teacher can motivate the students to get interested in the subject during the lecture. There is an opportunity for verbal explanation of unknown concepts, brainstorming of new ideas and room for further discussion.

When evaluating the intensity of access to e-books depending on the announcement of the partial exam realization, we found out that up to 88% of the students opened the e-book when the partial exam was requested. If the announcement of the partial exam realization was not recommended, an average of 47% of the students opened six e-books during the semester (Table 2).

The evaluation of the partial exam, which the students were preparing for through e-books in the LMS Moodle, pointed out some of their deficiencies, unless they are not led by a teacher and are individually responsible for the selection of essential information from the literature. Their ability to orientate in relatively rich content in LMS Moodle appears to be low. Only 14% of students were able to answer correctly all the questions asked in the test. 20% of respondents answered correctly to 70% of the questions. It is evident that students are not fully prepared and capable of learning, perhaps due to their own in capacity or bad learning habits, to sufficiently orientate themselves in e-learning, select independently essential information from the text or to work with foreign articles and web pages. It is easier for them to passively receive information from the teacher in a class.

Learning the subject matter from e-books, links to websites or scientific papers is a more demanding form of education compared to the contact form of teaching (lectures, exercises, university scripts) although today's generation is seen as computer and IT literate. However, it is problematic for students to choose essential information from the literature by themselves, what is a teacher's role in the contact form of study. The exam results that were independently studied by students in LMS Moodle suggest that a few students are able to select from more complex information and understand the context of the subject matter, which reflects their personal qualities and prerequisite to master a university degree.

Table 1 Frequency distribution on a partial exam depending on the differentiated approach to education (contact education vs. e-learning)

points from the exam	frequency distribution	contact education	e-learning	totally
min 4 points	80 and more % points from the exam	39	21	60
min 3 points	60-79%	6	17	23
min 2 points	50-59%	6	12	18
min 1 points	49% and less	0	1	1
	totally	51	51	102

Table 2 Frequency distribution on the intensity of the access to the e-books by the announcement of the partial exam realization

frequency distribution	e-book access for several times	no e-book access	totally
e-book access with announcement of the partial exam realization (1 e-book)	45	6	51
e-book access without announcement of the partial exam realization (6 e-books)	180	126	306
totally	225	132	357

3.2 Evaluating an increase in students' motivation in relation to the semestral project of the Applied Interior Design

The students' reactions to the practically-orientated project in the course of Applied Interior Design show that 92% of the respondents considered the project to be interesting even prior to the solution although they could not estimate its contribution to their own development.

Nearly 84% of students identified the implementation of control monitoring days during the semester as beneficial from the point of view of confronting knowledge and experience with the teacher and also among the students. Checks were performed every 2 (4) weeks. In a friendly atmosphere the students presented the paper about plants cultivation operation, communicated their findings, plants growing problems and also cultivating achievements and subjective observations. These meetings provided room for mutual learning (student vs. student, student vs. teacher).

92% of students evaluated the given project as interesting, original and beneficial for their further study at the end of the term. .. The most important benefits (the students could chose more than one option in the survey) were as follows: I have learned how to cultivate indoor plants (58%), I have built a closer relationship with the plants (67%), my relationship with the study field has considerably improved (50%), my relationship to plants has had a positive impact on my family and relatives (33%).

The results of the questionnaire survey among the students after the completion of the semestral project on the AID course point to the following findings:

- increasing students' interest in the practical form of semestral projects
- acquiring (enhancing) the relationship to plants, which is a key factor for successful application in the field of landscape architecture
- willingness to invest their own financial and material resources into the project

During the control days or in the final presentation, about a third of students admitted a positive impact of the project for their own development in the study field. They expressed their enthusiasm for plant care, their interest in plant cultivation, and moreover, the project helped them to encourage and guide people around in planting issues, which will be of high importance in their professional careers. They also highlighted the fact that they were proud of creating attractive interior where plants were growing (dormitory rooms) and eventually managed to motivate their family and friends.

The teacher should be able to motivate his/her students to enjoy studying, see the contribution and benefits in the given field, and therefore the teacher should not stagnate and teach routine without any change. Nowadays, when a teacher's position within the society has changed considerably, it is essential to work on a teacher – student relationship, be able to motivate students and maintain their initial enthusiasm throughout the semester. We may conclude that the teacher is responsible for students' motivation. When the teacher is properly motivated, positively tuned, and maintains a friendly, but professional relationship, and what is more, she/he is interested in the subject matter, he/ she can easily pass this enthusiasm to the student.

4 Summary

It is essential to increase constantly attractiveness of teaching. Today's generation requires more and more stimuli, visual insights and attractive teaching methods. The teacher has to show the students proper thinking, increase their interest in the topic so as they would like to know, try and study

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