



A Trial for Giving Studying Habit for Effective Teaching

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Abstract

Teachers expect students to be prepared for class upon arrival and to review the day's lessons once at home. Those who do not prepare for class beforehand have difficulties participating in the class and their learning process becomes more difficult. This study examines ways to increase preparation levels of students and so turn their learning process into a more participatory and engaging one. The group involved in this study consisted of university students studying primary school teaching. One hundred and thirteen of the participants were female while 57 were male. The study took place over a ten week period. In the first fifteen minutes of each class, short answer exams were administered. Each student answered the questions independently. Following these exams, active teaching methods were used in the classes. At the end of the ten weeks, three questions, each with two sub categories were asked of the students and data, in the form of opinions, was obtained. Almost all of the students, 92%, stated that they would try the practice as teachers. The classes in which they would apply the practice are Introduction to Science, Social Studies and Science and Technology classes. It was noted over the course of the study that negative orientations such as fear, nervousness, and difficulty were replaced by more positive ones such as usefulness, readiness and comfort. It seems possible that this shift is a result of students embracing the method used in the study

Keywords: School achievement, Student class preparation, Study habits, Attitudes towards studying.

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INTRODUCTION

The reasons for success or failure, particularly in terms of cognition, are regularly questioned in the education system. Positive outcomes are sought as a result of the energy and efforts dedicated to good student outcomes at almost every level of education. In the meta-analysis research of studying habits, skills and attitudes, study habits, study skills, studying motivation, and attitudes towards studying were found to be significant variables in explaining student success (Crede & Kuncel, 2008). In his study on university students, Aquino (2011) found that the students with high levels of success had good study skills and attitudes as compared with students with low level of success.

Study habits refer to the degree that students carry out class-related activities by themselves when away from school. Good study habits involve the use of proper study strategies and the devotion of adequate time and resources to meet academic expectations. Attitudes towards studying involve the student's internalizing of his/her learning objectives by him/herself. Although the acquisition of study habits is clearly advantageous for students, many claim that they do not have time to study in their busy lives (Nonis & Hudson, 2006).

Research has found that when the students use good study habits and learned memory strategies there are notable improvements in academic success (Bugg, Delosh & McDaniel, 2008). In his study on the variables affecting the success of university economic students, Darwin (2011) found that both student effort and student study habits were important factors. Mawthoh and Kumar (2011) tested the effects of study habits, gender and faculties on the success of students in the faculties of fine arts, science and economics and found that while gender didn't have an effect on study habits; students in the faculty of science were significantly different in terms of study habits than those in other faculties.

Although most students are aware of the importance of acquiring good study habits, if this awareness does not include an obligation, they tend to postpone. Demirel and Gülsoy (2010) conducted a study on candidates who graduated from university and subsequently enrolled in an English language certificate program. In this study, the learning and study characteristics of the students were assessed and students identified their tendency to postpone studying for a variety of reasons. Similar findings were noted in a study by Berr et al. (2011). This study interrogated university students about whether they arrived in class having read the required text and how much time was spent engaged in such readings. Students in the study stated that they were aware of the importance of reading the text, knew the instructors expected that they would complete their readings, and found the classes to be more fruitful when they did so. In spite of this, however, they were not in the habit of coming to class having read the text.

Nonis and Hudson (2010) studied the relation between time spent studying and the study habits of students in economics. A significant relation was found between the time spent for study, particular study habits and success. In this study, contrary to expectations, last minute studying and well prepared summaries were found to be effective in increasing student success.

METHOD

This study was conducted after three years of trial practice/pilot studies at post graduate level. In their oral statements, post graduate students noted that while they had a hard time at the beginning, after a while they found the method to be fruitful. The central objective of this study is to encourage students to adopt good study habits. Studying before attending class increases the level of readiness of the students and the subsequent quantity and quality of material learned in class. This leads to a more effective teaching process and long-term learning.

Research Design

This research was conducted with a single group. No control group was used.

Study Group

The study group consisted of third year students in the Primary School Teaching Department of Mehmet Akif Ersoy University's Faculty of Education in 2011-2012. A total of 170 students across six classes participated in the study. The rate of male student participation was 33.5% (f= 57), while female student participation was 66.5% (f=113).

Data Collection

At the end of 10 weeks, three open-ended questions, each with two sub-categories were given to students. Answers were requested in written form and were subsequently subject to content analysis. In the analysis of responses, categories were created based on questions arising from the answers, key words were selected, sample sentences were determined, and finally data was interpreted (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2004).

Process

The class under study, "Teaching of Introduction to Social Studies" is a theoretical class worth three national credits and is taught in the autumn semester of the third year of the primary school teaching department. The content of the next week's unit was determined together with the students. In the first fifteen minutes of each class, short answer exams were administered with three to five questions. Students answered the questions independently. Results of the exams were announced the following week. The average grade obtained until exam week was considered the mid-term grade and the average grade obtained until the final week was considered the final grade. The units for which the students were responsible consisted of about 25 pages. The study took ten weeks. Following the short exams, active teaching approaches were used in the classes.

FINDINGS

The questions directed to students, and their respective answers, are detailed below.

Question 1: Will you apply the short exams practice when you become a teacher? If yes, to which class or classes?

Table 1: Ideas concerning the short exam practice and the classes

<i>Answers</i>	F	%
Yes	156	92
No	14	8
Total	170	100
<i>Classes</i>	F	%
Social Studies (1-3 grades)	144	29
Social Studies (4-5 grades)	126	26
Science and Technology	89	18
Turkish Language	84	17
Math	30	6
English	10	2
Other classes	8	2
Total	491	100

Almost all of the students, 92%, stated that they would try the practice as teachers. The classes in which they would apply the practice are Social Studies and Science and Technology classes. For the most part students selected the classes in which one can learn by him/herself or achieve pre-learning.

The varying observations offered by students, in addition to the abovementioned class names, are as follows:

Student 1: “Yes, if I want students to come to class after some preparation, the method is proper.”

Student 2: “If the students come to class after preparing for the short exam it would be easy for the teacher to explain the subject and for the student to understand it. Therefore I can apply this method.”

Student 3: “This practice may help me know about pre-knowledge of the students.”

Student 4: “Actually if I have the time, I would like to apply this method at the beginning of every class.”

Student 5: “Yes I will use it. This practice leads students to come to class after some preparation and have information on the subject.”

Student 6: “I would like to apply it, because it would be fruitful to stimulate pre-knowledge of the students.”

Student 7: “I think I will apply it, because the more prepared the students are, the more positive the learning is.”

Question 2: Can you describe the emotions caused by pre-class exam at the beginning of the practice and now? The answers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of emotions before and after the practice

<i>Before the Practice</i>			<i>After the Practice</i>		
<i>Emotions</i>	F	%	<i>Emotions</i>	f	%
Fear	65	24	Helpfulness	124	29
Anxiety	54	20	Readiness	96	23
Difficulty	47	17	Comfort	88	21
Astonishment	35	13	Got over my fear	49	11
Anger	26	10	Got over exam anxiety	45	10
Pressure	25	9	Easiness	24	6
Reluctance	21	7			
Total	273	100	Total	426	100

As outlined in Table 2, initial negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, and difficulty gave way to positive emotions such as helpfulness, readiness and comfort as the practice unfolded. It is possible that the success achieved by the students influenced the change in their emotions.

The varying observations offered by students, in addition to the abovementioned before and after emotions, are as follows:

Student A: “At first I was scared, because having an exam every week made me nervous. Now it think it was really good for us. We came to class prepared, had knowledge and did not get bored in the class because I knew the subject.”

Student B: “I was scared at first, I asked “Are we primary school students, what is that?”, but I was wrong, it proved to be useful. It is really good and should continue. You read about the subject or maybe just take a glance, but still it helps.”

Student C: “At the beginning I was scared, because it was pointless to have the an exam before knowing anything about it... now it enables me to have an idea about the subject and get a brilliant knowledge of the subject.

Student D: “It was pointless, but since it is easier than studying for the regular exam, I think it makes sense.”

Student E: “I was nervous at the beginning... a good practice for coming to every class prepared.”

Student F: “I was alarmed in the first week, but later on I was relaxed. Since I was ready for the class, I was quite willing.”

Student G: “I thought it made no sense, in fact studying was hard and I was getting nervous before every exam. Having exams often enabled me to come over my nervousness”

Student H: “...I thought preparing for an exam every week was hard and boring. Since everyone was prepared for the class, it was more fun...”

Student I: “I was terrified, it scared me so much that I had to study, study the whole unit and then come to the class. We had such a nice semester contrary to my expectations. Having an exam every week is easier than a full exam.”

Student J: “It was hard at the beginning, coming to the class with the knowledge of the subject is better.”

Student K: “It was surprising and worrying to have an exam at the beginning of the class... later on I understood it was only about if the subject was learned or not... then I was comfortable again and appreciated the practice.”

Student L: “It was weird at first because we are used to having exams after the classes. Also I was scared that I would not be successful. The lectures were not totally unknown to us, because we were scanning the subjects beforehand. This is a proper method for a fruitful class.”

Student M: “I was surprised as this was a new method for me. “Is this possible?” I said. I got used to it as I took the exams and I think this is a useful method.”

Question 3: Can you list the positive and negative outcomes you have experienced as a result of this practice?

Table 3: Positive and negative student outcomes

<i>Positive Outcomes</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Negative Outcomes</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Class preparation	114	28	Anxiety	36	36
Studying habit	94	23	Fear	31	31
Attendance habit	76	18	Nervousness	21	21
Participation	73	18	Waste of time	12	12
Thinking skills	54	13			
Total	411	100	Total	100	100

As shown in Table 3, the method had a positive effect on class preparation, class participation and attendance. It is also clear that some students were not able to overcome negative emotions such as anxiety, fear and nervousness. It is suspected that such emotions would dissipate in the long run.

Additional student observations on the positive and negative outcomes are as follows:

Student N: “I cannot think of a negative characteristic. Since we were prepared for the class, it was easier to remember the subjects.”

Student O: “I think the time was limited, if we had more time we could study further. It helped me improve my criticism skills and ability to comment.”

Student P: “Exam stress every week led me to study regularly. Instead of studying just for the exams, we studied every week.”

Student R: “Receiving a grade put pressure on me, but this feeling went away after a while. Coming to the class with some knowledge helped me learn the subjects further.”

Student S: “At first we had stress and nervousness but in time we got used to it and got a good command of the classes.”

Student T: “I had to attend the class even if I had important things to do, therefore I gained the habit of full attendance.”

Student U: “At the beginning, I was reluctant as we had to come to class after some preparation every week, but unintentionally I started to study regularly and that helped me participate in the class during lectures.”

Student V: “Before the exams, people get nervous. As I came to class after preparation, the class was more fun...”

Student W: “It was hard to spend time studying every week. As we had knowledge on the subject, the lectures were not totally new to us.”

Student X: “Getting stressed regularly every week was kind of hard. Although it was hard, I managed to coordinate myself and study regularly every week.”

CONCLUSION

This study observed that as students internalized pre-class studying, their feelings about the practice, the exam, and their class, improved. Success at the university level is typically evaluated through a midterm and final exam. In both cases, students must become acquainted with a considerable amount of content. In this method, although students indicated having a hard time at the beginning, they adjusted to the regular short examinations and came to find them useful.

When students were asked about the ways in which they benefited from this approach, they noted improvements in class preparation, studying, and participation in line with the expectations of the teachers. At the end of the ten week study, a few students noted that they continued to experience fear and anxiety. This is likely to have been minimized were similar practices carried out in more than one class. In this study, the practice was carried out by the researcher. Throughout the process, participation and interactivity rates of the students increased and a productive and effective teaching process was achieved.

Recommendations

In this study, grade-based evaluation was preferred in order to ensure that the students came to class after they had prepared. At the level of primary school teaching, considering the ages of the students, various other methods may be used instead of grade-based evaluation.

At the level of branch classes, especially in social studies, the method may be tried in secondary and high schools.

This method can be easily applied in post-graduate studies considering the limited number of the students.

In order to accelerate the evaluation process of the questions, answers may be reflected via projector and the results may be reached in a couple of minutes.

This method can be tried in math and science courses for completing the prerequisite learning.

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