

Research Article

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The Opinion of Latvian Teachers About the Most Suitable Teaching Methods and Possibilities to Make Lessons Interesting

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Abstract: Student's learning motivation and learning outcomes depend on the ability of the teacher to interest students, the chosen teaching methods and proficiency to manage the learning process. Teacher who can successfully choose teaching content, material resources and different teaching methods is able to cause interest about his subject. Teacher who is interested in teaching process himself can help students to learn a subject. The aim of the study was to find out the Latvian teachers' opinion about the disturbing factors affecting the achievement of high learning outcomes for students, the most suitable teaching methods and the possibilities to make lessons interesting. The survey of teachers of different schools in Latvia regarding their students' learning motivation was carried out. The data from 482 teachers' answers were analysed. The results of the research showed that the majority of surveyed teachers consider that learning motivation of Latvia students has decreased during the last few years. Teachers point out several factors, which do not allow students to reach high learning outcomes, the most important of them are: the inability of students to link career and success with learning and lack of life goals; inability of students to concentrate attention during lessons; indisposition of students to do homework. The teachers consider laboratory works, discussions, project works, group works and teacher's presentations and narrative of new material as the most suitable teaching methods. Teachers consider that the most important personality trait of teachers and learning motivation for students to improve their skills is the teacher's ability to teach the subject in an interesting way. Teachers believe that lessons can be made interesting if modern technologies and teaching methods are used during lessons and when the teacher is able to connect the subject with real life.

Keywords: learning motivation, teaching methods, students, teachers, high learning outcomes.

Introduction

The quality of education systems in the European Union Member States is currently being assessed on the basis of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results. The achievements of Latvian students in mathematics, science and reading in general are at the level of average achievement. The best results shown by Latvian students is in science literacy. In science literacy, the main topic of PISA 2015, 15-year-olds in Latvia score 490 points compared to an average of 493 points in OECD countries. Girls perform better than boys with a statistically significant difference of 11 points (OECD average: 3.5 points higher for boys) (Latvia Student performance (PISA 2015) — Education GPS — OECD, 2017). Increasing the student's learning motivation is the basis for

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positive changes of these indicators in the future. Students' learning motivation depends on different factors: interests and peculiarities of student's personality, working style and applied teaching methods of teacher, ability of teacher to inspire and captivate students and so on. The results of research have shown that when students are aware of their emotions and guided by specific teaching strategies, their learning performance improves in relation to their motivation, engagement and self-regulation (Arguedas et al, 2016).

The goal of education is to raise the standards of attainment in subjects covered by a national curriculum, better equip children to earn their way in the world and play a full part in society. The main means to achieve this goal is to improve teaching and learning within better organised schools, with improved facilities better trained teachers and crucially, more effective leadership (Leadbeater, 2010).

Young people are living, learning and negotiating transitions to adulthood and independence in an increasingly complex and challenging world, in which they face greater levels of choice and opportunity, but also unprecedented uncertainty and risk. There is a clear connection between social and emotional capabilities and positive life outcomes, including educational attainment, employment status, health and behaviour. All young people need to develop both cognitive skills (such as maths, problem solving and language skills) and social and emotional capabilities to help them achieve the outcomes that they, and others, value both in their lives right now, and for their future (McNeil et al, 2012).

Students learning motivation is closely connected with their goals, the desire to succeed and teacher's ability to stimulate students' cognitive activity. A perceived mastery goal structure is consistently associated with positive student outcomes (Gray et al., 2015). The examination of the domain-specificity of motivation in language and mathematics of upper primary school students showed that motivational constructs in language and mathematics are domain-specific in nature and developments in domain-specific motivational constructs mostly predicted the achievement growth in corresponding subject domains (Hornstra et al, 2016). If a motivational construct is fully domain-specific, then developments in this specific motivational construct will predict students' achievement growth in a corresponding domain better than the achievement growth in another subject domain. The research revealed that especially achievement goals were highly domain-general. The results suggest that the degree of domain-specificity depends on the nature of motivational constructs and students' age.

Students' academic success and learning motivation depends on the teacher's ability to engage students' interest, choice of teaching methods, and teacher's skill of conducting the learning process. Successful application of adequate teaching methods by teachers allow students to better acquire the subject (Munawaroh, 2017). Teaching method, followed by lecturer quality, and classroom management significantly correlate with students' motivation to learn and perform. Classroom characteristics truly stimulate learning motivation and performance; therefore, it can be used as potential learning intervention (Abdul Aziz et al., 2015). It is important for teachers to seamlessly integrate technology into their innovative teaching techniques. Using virtual worlds is one alternative to traditional teaching methods that can provide rich learning experiences (Wyss et al, 2014). It gives positive experience in terms of learning motivation and knowledge improvement. So, the teacher who understands his students' interests and chooses appropriate teaching methods, has a great role of creating the student's interest in the subject.

Aim Of The Study

The aim of the study was to find out Latvian teachers' opinion about disturbing factors affecting the achievement of high learning outcomes for students, the most suitable teaching methods and the possibilities to make lessons interesting.

Materials And Methods

The survey of teachers from different Latvia schools regarding students' learning motivation was carried out. The data on teachers' opinion about changes of students' motivation during last few years, opinion of teachers about disturbing factors affecting the achievement of high learning outcomes for students, opinion

about most suitable teaching methods, opinion of teachers about teacher's personality traits and skills connected with students' learning motivation and teachers' opinion about possibilities to make lessons interesting were analysed.

The survey was placed on the Internet and sent to administration of Latvia schools with the request to ask teachers to participate in the questionnaire. 482 replies to the questionnaire were received from teachers. As the number of respondents in the survey is $N = 482$, it means that the obtained results actually reflect the opinion of the teachers of Latvian general education schools. 93% of respondents were women and 7% were men, the majority of teachers who responded to the questionnaire were in the age group of 41–50 years (37.6%) and in the age group 51–60 years (33.7%); 8.9% of teachers were in the age group 61–70 and 19.7% of teachers were younger than 40 years. 8.3% of respondents were primary school teachers, 26.4% – basic school teachers, 47.6% – secondary school teachers, 11.6% – gymnasium teachers and 6% – teachers of professional secondary schools, technical schools and vocational schools. 21% of respondents were from Riga schools, 6.4% – from Riga district schools, 44.5% – from different Latvia town schools and 28.1% – from rural region schools. In the survey, different subject teachers participated: 22.8% were mathematic and informatics teachers, 13.5% – Latvian language teachers, 10.8% – foreign language teachers, 9.3% – primary school subject teachers, 6.4% – social science teachers and 5.2% – science teachers; the rest were other subject teachers.

The answers to the questions were made on the Likert scale from 1 to 6 (1 – fully do not agree; 6 – fully agree). SPSS method was used for data analysis.

Results

The results of the Latvia school teachers' survey showed that 56.4% of respondents consider that learning motivation of Latvia students during last few years has decreased, 30.1% teachers believe that the motivation has not changed but only 10.5% of surveyed teachers consider that student's learning motivation has increased (see Figure 1). 3% of the surveyed teachers emphasized a tendency of the students' learning motivation polarization: the learning motivation of the motivated students has become even higher, but the learning motivation of unmotivated students has decreased. Teachers added that majority of students are not highly interested in the teaching process, especially after the 5th grade. Some respondents emphasized the importance of interactions between teachers and students highlighting, that learning motivation is connected with student's and teacher's ability to communicate with each other.

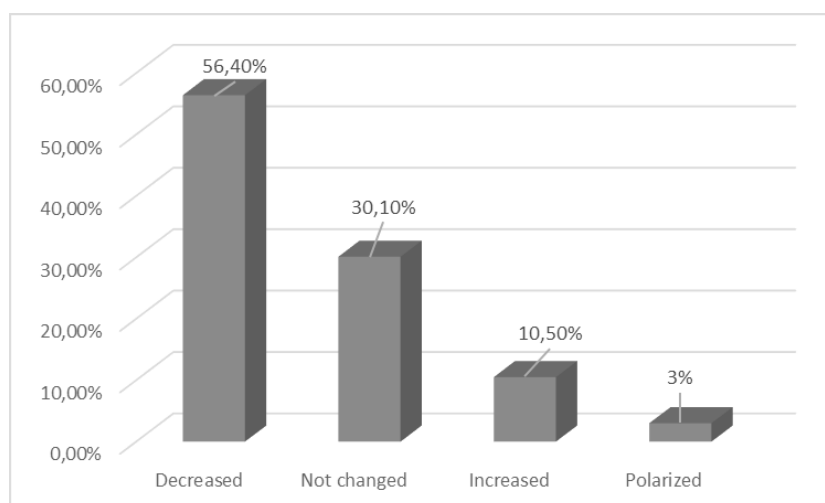


Figure 1. Opinion of teachers about changes of students' learning motivation during last few years (in % out of total number of respondents)

Comparing the responses of teachers working in different types of schools (primary schools, secondary schools, etc.), differences in the evaluation of this question are not statistically significant ($F = 1.237$, $p = 0.270$). Differences between answers of teachers working in the capital of Latvia and rural regions and between answers of different subject teachers are not statistically significant as well. The sample size involved in the study ($N = 482$) allows to generalize the findings at the Latvian level, and it means that student's learning motivation in teacher assessment has decreased.

Teachers point out several factors, which do not allow students to reach high learning outcomes (see Figure 2). 93.8% of respondents mark the inability of students to link career and success with learning, and lack of life goals, 92.5% of teachers point out lack of interest, 91.7% mark inability of students to concentrate during lessons and 90.6% of teachers mark indisposition to do home-works. Obviously, there is not enough information and different measures (at school, in the media and so on), which clearly demonstrate the necessity of learning for a successful career. Lack of interests is closely connected with it — if there are no goals, there is no interest.

This is a problem not only in Latvia schools. Similar conclusions were drawn from investigations carried out in the United States of America: 69% of American teachers emphasize the lack of students' interest about studies as the main problem in schools (Bridgeland et al, 2013). The reasons for students' inability to achieve good results in studies and to follow the school's training course could be different: health or psychological problems, inability to plan time, inability to fully spend free time (computer games, addictions, etc.) that leads to poor sleep, tiredness and other interests not connected with learning. Disturbing factors for high learning outcomes are negative example of classmates and parents (in disadvantaged families) as well.

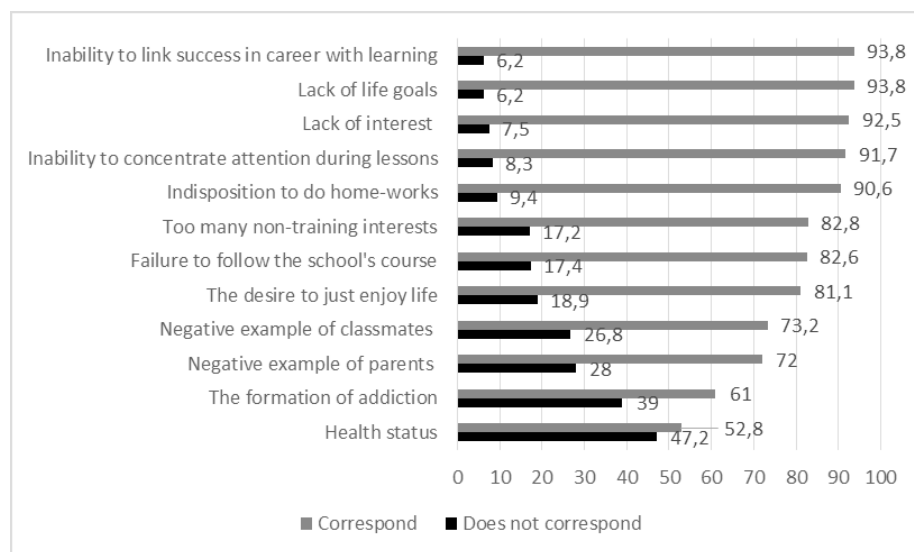


Figure 2. Opinion of teachers about disturbing factors affecting the achievement of high learning outcomes for students (in % out of total number of respondents)

Teachers of different schools differently evaluate disturbing factors affecting the achievement of high learning outcomes for students (see Table 1). Too many non-training interests as important disturbing factor affecting the achievement of high learning outcomes higher than average evaluate the professional secondary school teachers ($M = 5.33$ points in Likert scale from 1 to 6), evening high school teachers ($M = 5.00$ points) and basic school teachers ($M = 4.65$ points). Opinion of different subject teachers is also different about the factors affecting the achievement of high learning outcomes for students. Higher the factor — too many non-training interests — evaluate the teachers of history ($M = 5.3$ points), teachers of sports ($M = 5.1$ points), teachers of music, housekeeping and visual art teachers ($M = 4.8$ points), teachers of mathematics, informatics, and Latvian language ($M = 4.7$ points).

The desire to just enjoy the life as important disturbing factors affecting the achievement of high learning outcomes higher than average evaluate the evening high school teachers ($M = 6.00$ points) and professional secondary school teachers ($M = 5.6$ points). Inability to concentrate attention during lessons as important disturbing factor higher than average evaluate the boarding schoolteachers ($M = 5.67$ points), professional secondary school teachers ($M = 5.22$ points) and basic school teachers ($M = 4.97$ points). Looking from the point of view of subjects, this factor higher than average evaluate the teachers of basic school subjects ($M = 4.96$ points), history, housekeeping, music and sport teachers ($M = 4.9$ points), Latvian language and foreign language teachers ($M = 4.8$ points).

Health status and the formation of addiction as important disturbing factors affecting the achievement of high learning outcomes for students are differently evaluated in the answers of different school teachers. Most sharply, health status as an important disturbing factor is perceived by the boarding school teachers ($M = 5.0$ points) and professional secondary school teachers ($M = 4.5$ points). Formation of addictions as important disturbing factor affecting the achievement of high learning outcomes emphasize the boarding school teachers ($M = 5.67$ points), professional secondary school teachers ($M = 4.78$ points) and vocational school teachers ($M = 4.67$ points).

The negative example of classmates and parents as disturbing factors affecting the achievement of high learning outcomes is differently evaluated in the answers of different subject teachers. The negative example of classmates as an important factor marks the teachers of visual art ($M = 4.9$ points), teachers of music ($M = 4.6$ points), primary school teachers ($M = 4.4$ points) and foreign language teachers ($M = 4.4$ points). The negative example of parents as an important disturbing factor affecting the achievement of high learning outcomes is admitted by the foreign language teachers ($M = 4.52$ points) and primary school teachers ($M = 4.48$ points).

Table 1. ANOVA - disturbing factors of learning motivation

Factor	Type of school		Subject	
	F	p	F	p
Lack of interest	1.210	0.286	1.460	0.078
Lack of life goals	1.032	0.413	1.326	0.144
Inability to link success in career with learning	1.326	0.22	1.208	0.232
Too many non-training interests	2.000	0.038	2.073	0.003
The desire to just enjoy life	2.202	0.021	1.250	0.197
Failure to follow the school's course	1.820	0.062	1.414	0.098
Inability to concentrate attention during lessons	1.964	0.042	1.658	0.029
Indisposition to do home-works	1.129	0.341	1.623	0.035
Health status	2.184	0.022	1.458	0.079
The formation of addiction	2.290	0.016	1.332	0.140
Negative example of classmates	1.119	0.347	1.858	0.010
Negative example of parents	0.869	0.553	1.668	0.028

(F — Fisher's test value, p — level of significance)

Teacher's evaluation of the most suitable teaching methods gave the following results (see Figure 3): as the most suitable teaching methods, the respondents assess laboratory works ($M = 4.62$ in Likert scale from 1 to 6), discussions ($M = 4.56$) and project works ($M = 4.50$). Group works, teacher's presentations and narrative of new material and filling the given tasks during lessons are also evaluated as very suitable teaching methods. Relatively less appreciated teaching methods are independent work ($M = 4.14$) and work with textbooks ($M = 3.41$). Students are more interested to do practical works during lessons and obtain new knowledge by using games, laboratory works, tours, and so on. Use of information and communication technologies give students the ability to make their own presentations, movies, discussions and do creative work in groups or individually. Teachers emphasize that positive learning outcomes could not be provided by using only one of the methods, but it is necessary to use different methods according to the specifics of the topic and the result to be achieved. By the diversification of teaching methods, teachers can promote the

emergence of students' interests and the formation of further motivation for learning.

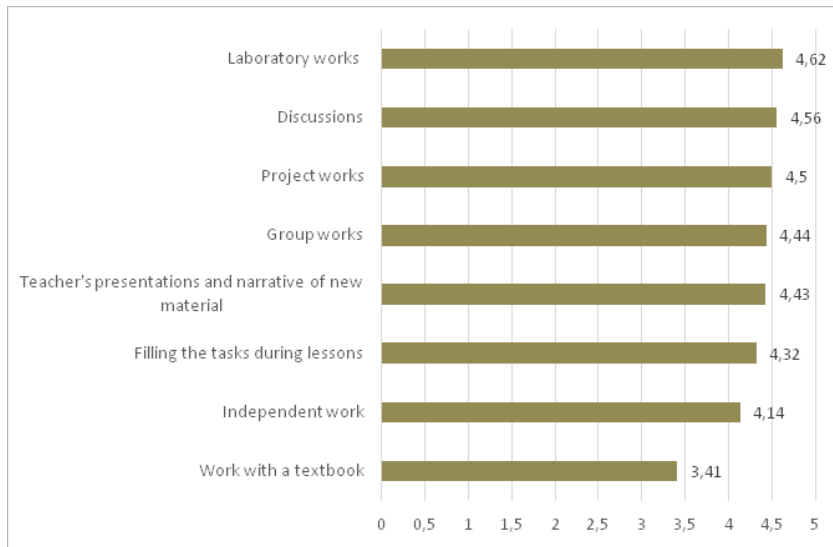


Figure 3. Evaluation of suitability of teaching methods by teachers (using Likert scale from 1 to 6)

Teachers consider that an important personality trait and skill to improve student's learning motivation for the teacher is his ability to teach the subject in an interesting way (see Figure 4). Respondents evaluated this ability $M = 5.33$ in Likert scale from 1 to 6. The other important traits and skills for teachers, connected with student's learning motivation are: pleasant attitude toward students ($M = 5.12$), adequately selected teaching methods ($M = 5.11$), ability to understand the student's interests ($M = 5.01$) and ability to make the students understand the significance of the subject ($M = 4.97$). Teachers consider that relatively less important traits for teachers and skills to improve students learning motivation are: ability to achieve strict discipline in the classroom ($M = 4.46$) and well-organized consultations ($M = 4.45$). However, the basis for improvement of student's motivation to learn is the teacher's call to be a teacher – that means: love for students, to be open and accessible, to be at the same time authoritative and a person who can be entrusted with student's fears and worries. Teacher must be erudite of his subject as well.

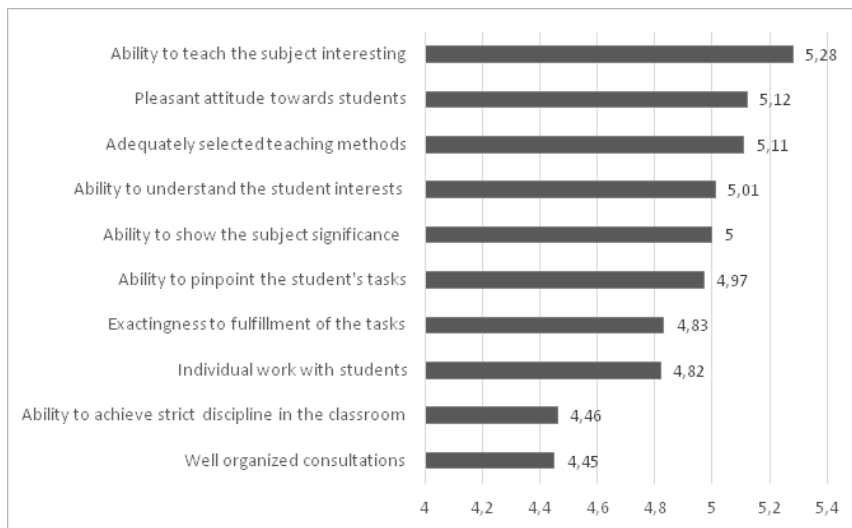


Figure 4. Opinion of teachers about teacher's personality traits and skills connected with students learning motivation (using Likert scale from 1 to 6)

Teachers emphasize that, lessons can be interesting if modern, innovative technologies and modern teaching methods are used; theoretical knowledge is used in practice and subject is connected with real life; students can do research work and use modern information and communication technologies during lessons; good relationship between teacher and students are established; review of study standard and getting rid of excess is carried out.

Conclusions

1. A majority of the surveyed Latvia school teachers (56.4%) consider that learning motivation of Latvia students during last few years has decreased.
2. The most important factors that do not allow students to reach high learning outcomes from the point of view of Latvian teachers are: the inability of students to link career and success with learning, and lack of life goals; inability of students to concentrate during lessons; indisposition of students to do homework. Teachers of different schools and subjects differently evaluate the disturbing factors affecting the achievement of high learning outcomes for students.
3. Latvian teachers consider that the most suitable teaching methods are: laboratory works, discussions, project works, group works and teacher's presentations and narrative of new material.
4. Teachers consider that important teacher's personality traits and skills improving the student's learning motivation are: ability to teach the subject in an interesting way, pleasant attitude towards students and adequately selected teaching methods.
5. Teachers believe that lessons can be interesting if modern technologies and teaching methods are used during lessons, students can do research work and use modern information and communication technologies during lessons and good relationship between teacher and students are established.

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