Research on the Relationship Between Teachers’ Professional Skills and Students’ Expectations for Improving the Study Environment

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Abstract

The teacher's attitude towards the teaching process and communication skills is of particular importance and plays a crucial role in today's rapidly changing world. It has to go together, raising consciousness and awareness of individuals on study environment issues and ensuring that they contribute to solutions of learning problems. The research was conducted with 405 prospective professionals from the Faculty of Forest Sciences and Ecology, Aleksandras Stulginskis University. An interactive questionnaire ‘Study subject in student’s eyes’ (SSSE) developed at Aleksandras Stulginskis University (2014–2017) was used as the data collection tool. This article analyses the teachers’ pedagogical work from the students’ point of view. The multi-variate analysis and regression tree model were used in the interpretation of results. The results confirmed the hypothesis that hard working students better evaluate teachers’ professional skills. It seems that elder course students with age have higher expectations from the teaching environment.

Keywords: 
1. Introduction

The relationship between a student and a teacher is particularly significant in this age of fast-moving technologies. Communication is a common everyday attribute, but qualitative communication is not common to all members of the university community. Therefore, it is very important to highlight the main disturbances of communication and take measures for the development of communication competencies (Tereseviciene et al., 2015).

Communication and student motivation are the topics that are often analysed and discussed (Alberto et al., 2013; Frith, 2009; Guerrero & Floyd, 2006; Jurik, Groschner & Seidel, 2014; Kenneth, 2007; Lambrechts, Mula, Ceulemans, Molderes & Gaeremynck, 2013). In fact, communication in the audience is a complicated and unpredictable process. Communication is often strongly influenced by the degree of personal socialisation. The audience needs to have a mutual understanding; therefore, not only the presentation of the information, but also the ability of the audience to receive, evaluate, analyse, fuse and adapt it to the solution of real situations is important (Adamoniene, Statkeviciene, Kriksciunas & Pugevicius, 2007; Daukalis & Kasperiuniene, 2015).

Usually, we use a variety of ways and means of communication. We gradually move away from academic lectures and try to incorporate new technologies into the transfer of ideas, information and expectations. Other ways – in terms of using visual tools, tasks of varying levels of engagement, written information, and so on – remain relevant. The teacher should pay attention to non-verbal communication and increase his ability to use various tools to find opportunities for engaging with students. The teaching and learning process cannot take place without communication (Kenneth 2007; Norliza Zalizan, Norzaini & Saemah, 2010). The teacher, able to communicate, creates a more successful learning environment, which can lead to learning success (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006).

For the teachers of the 21st century, it is very important to have belief of self-efficacy in order to achieve targets of modern education, to keep struggling with problems and to create new and creative solutions (Kahyaoglu, 2014). Williams and Williams (2011) discuss five key ingredients generating motivation: student, teacher, content, method and environment. Student has to perceive himself as a part of system and has to recognise the value of personal input and ownership. Student ownership is expressed through mutual goal setting and individualising learning assignments (Lent & Gillmore, 2014). Students become more responsible for learning, thus empowering them to engage their personal interest, critical thinking and evaluation skills.

The aim of this study is to explore the elements of the teachers’ pedagogical work from the students’ point of view depending on the students’ age, gender, subject final mark and academic consciousness.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The study was conducted in 2014–2017 at the Faculty of Forest Sciences and Ecology, Aleksandras Stulginskis University, Lithuania. The participants were prospective professionals, studying Forestry (240 participants) and Applied Ecology (165 participants), bachelor level study programmes. The research instrument was implemented on a total of 405 students aged 18–21, of whom are 132 females (32.6%) and 273 males (67.4).

2.2. Research instrument

Survey SSSE: 17 items were written down regarding academic adjustment, the courses, academic issues, study habits, course schedule and their department. The results of one item covering evaluation of teacher pedagogical skills and abilities are presented in this study. Four factors of
students’ pattern (participants’ age, study year, gender, obtained final subject mark and academic consciousness/cheating) were considered. All the statements included in the analysed item are flat statements covering attitude to study the process. The statements (Q) are as follows: 1) teachers’ ability to engage students in the content of the subject; 2) teachers’ ability to apply scientific knowledge and to reveal a variety of views and opinions in the field of the subject; 3) teachers’ ability to emphasise and reveal the essential moments; 4) teachers’ ability to communicate knowledge in a clear, consistent, understandable way; 5) teachers’ ability to illustrate theoretical knowledge with practical examples; 6) teachers’ professionalism in the subject field; 7) teachers’ communication skills with students; 8) teachers’ punctuality and regularity; 9) promotion of students’ creativity and initiative; 10) the clarity of student knowledge assessment criteria; 11) objectivity and reasonableness of students’ knowledge assessment; 12) clarity of self-study (controls, papers, etc.) tasks; 13) the use of visual and technical teaching aids (board, posters, layouts, video and audio equipment and records); 14) recommended references correspondence to subject content and 15) teachers’ co-operation and counseling outside of lectures (possibility to find a tutor during on-call time, contact individually, etc.). The answers were designed as a five-point scale, being ‘Very well’ (five points), ‘Good’ (four points), ‘Satisfactory’ (three points), ‘Bad’ (two points) and ‘Very bad’ (1 point).

2.3. Data analysis

Redundancy analysis (RDA) is carried out by Canoco 4.5 (Leps & Smilauer, 2003). The data were centred, standardised and focused on inter-students’ statements correlation. The Monte Carlo test was applied with 499 permutations under the reduced model – the test of significance of the first canonical axis. The regression tree model was applied to separate the most important factors related to students’ statement about teachers’ professional skills.

3. Results

The findings of the study that aim to determine the teachers’ pedagogical skills from the perspective of the student are given in the following.

Figure 1 shows the significant positive assessment of teachers by students of the study years compared with the assessment by the fourth year students. There was no significant difference in the distribution of responses according to the gender of the participants. The Monte Carlo test was applied with 499 permutations under the reduced model – test of significance of the first canonical axis: eigenvalue = 0.069 (F-ratio = 29.292, P-value < 0.005). The first two axes explain 7.4% of students’ responses variation, while the responses and students pattern relations are at 93.7%.

Figure 1 shows that students’ statements about teachers’ professional skills correlate among each other. The best explained by students are the statements Q1–Q4, Q10–Q12 and Q 14–Q15. The students’ statements about teachers’ professional skills fall on to the first axis that is related to the students’ fairness, hard-work and study experience (study years).
Since the students' response statements are correlated among each other, the general evaluation about teachers' professional skills is calculated by arithmetic average of all statement grades by the students' responses.

The students' academic consciousness and responsibility to learn subject (by the final mark obtained for the subject) are almost the main factors influencing teachers' skills evaluation (Figure 2). It seems that elder course students with the age are more accustomed to the studies and become more demanding.
4. Conclusion and discussion

The teaching and learning process will not take place without communication (Frith, 2009). Hence, teachers with good communication ability will be able to create a more favourable environment. Students are looking for engagement into the study subject, teachers’ ability to reveal a variety of views and opinions in the field of the study subject and communicate knowledge in a clear, consistent, understandable way. The second most important point for students is a clear criterion of student knowledge assessment.

It is obvious that in order to achieve better learning outcomes, teachers should strive to give students more autonomy in learning and being responsible for it, creating the opportunity to choose the most appropriate individual or cooperative educational methods (Lai, 2011).

The variety of teachers’ work styles allows students to form an attitude and to choose which teaching characteristics are relevant to learning. Obviously, the elder students go deeper into their studies and are more demanding teaching excellence, and they are particularly needed the teacher’s availability.

Basically, the students rated the teachers positively, but they also had suggestions. The most of the students suggested teachers to communicate more with students, use various visual and technical tools, engage in subjects taught and spend more time on practical tasks.

References


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