

Innovative proposal for teaching economics in vocational training institute in Greece

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Abstract

This paper proposes a new teaching methodology for teaching economics in Vocational Training Institutes in Greece. The research utilizes cooperative, experiential learning and field research in teaching the didactic unit “Money” in the 1st year of vocational training institute. The main research aim is to evaluate whether this process can be implemented in the Greek Educational System for adult learners and how the students react towards this process.

Keywords: adult learning, cooperative and experiential learning, field research, teaching economics, teaching methodology

1. Introduction

Vocational Training Institutes in Greece are facing a great growth during the last years because they are proposing direct absorb into the labor market. Studying in Vocational Training Institute is the only sure way that leads to security in the labor market, allowing young people to succeed their personal goals with confidence and achieve the maximum after graduation from secondary school. However, Public Vocational Training Institutes lack of actions that enhance the innovation and creativity in their teaching methodology system.

As for teaching Economics in a Vocational Training Institute, teachers have to deal with many problems related on how they can make easily their students understand basic economic terms and phenomena and their application in everyday life. So as to overcome such problems, teachers have to discover and apply new teaching methods which are relating to the interests, needs and the abilities of their students. One teaching method that seems to appeal students’ attention is the below one presented method.

Our proposing method is a combination of teaching through field research, cooperative and experiential learning, constructivism and interdisciplinary approach. The method based on a research that carried out in a Vocational Training Institute and had impressive results concerning the didactic methodology. The purpose of this paper is to present this proposing method and to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of students during this teaching methodology and to examine the extent to which this method can be implemented in Greek Vocational Training Institutes.

2. Literature review

The main requisite to design a new teaching method is the establishment of a pedagogical approach. The pedagogical approach in which this paper is relying on consists of the following:

2.1 Cooperative learning

It is the instructional use of small groups so as students to work together in order to maximize their own and each other’s learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1993, p. 9). Cooperation learning can also be defined as the principles and techniques

which are necessary to help students work together in a more effective way (Jacobs, Power, & Loh, 2002, p. 1) [6]. The main point is that cooperative learning involves more than simply asking students to work in groups. Instead, conscious thought goes in to aiding students make the experience as more successful as possible. Cooperative learning is an innovative experiential educational approach, with main aim to organize learning activities into social and academic learning experiences (Wikipedia).

2.2 Field Research

Any activity aimed in collecting primary (original or otherwise unavailable) data, using methods such as face-to-face interviewing, telephone and postal surveys and direct observation (Business Dictionary). Field research is the collection of information outside a laboratory, library or workplace setting. The methods and approaches used in field research vary across disciplines. The objective of field research in economics is to get under the surface, to contrast observed behavior with the current understanding of a process, and to relate language and description to behavior (Wikipedia).

2.3 Experiential learning

Experiential learning involves a ‘direct encounter with the phenomena being studied rather than merely thinking about the encounter, or only considering the possibility of doing something about it.’ (Borzak 1981: 9 quoted in Brookfield 1983) [3, 5]. David A. Kolb (with Roger Fry) created his popular model for experiential learning out of four elements: concrete experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts and testing in new situations. In order to represent these, he utilized the experiential learning circle that involves 1. Concrete experience 2. Observation and experience 3. Forming abstract and 4. Testing in new situations (after Kurt Lewin). His model appears time and again. Kolb and Fry (1975) [10] suggest that the learning cycle can begin at any one of the four points – and that it must really be approached as a continuous spiral.

2.4 Interdisciplinary

Interdisciplinary teaching includes the use and integration of analytical frameworks and methods from more than one academic discipline to investigate an issue, a theme, topic or question. The basis of interdisciplinary education is the integration of guiding principles and notions from multiple disciplines so as to systematically form a more complete framework of analysis that offers richer understanding of the under examination issue (Pedagogy in Action).

2.5 Constructivism

Constructivism is a learning theory based on psychology which explains how people may acquire knowledge and learn. It can have direct application to education because the theory argues that humans construct meaning and knowledge from their experiences. Constructivism is not a particular pedagogy. Piaget's theory about Constructivist learning has had broad ranging impact on teaching methods and learning theories in education and is a fundamental theme of many education reform movements (University of Sydney).

The current research is the first attempt in Vocational Training Institutes in Greece for teaching economics via a combination of these techniques. The research uses the principles of the above theories and methods in teaching the teaching unit "Money", in the first year of Vocation Training Institute, in order to clarify basic economic meanings to students, enhance teamwork and propose ways of implementing this teaching technique.

3. Teaching methodology

The teaching methodology that is proposing in this paper consists of four steps, which are the following:

3.1. Presentation of teaching material

The first step is the presentation of the teaching material. Teacher has to present the didactic unit in class by using the traditional lecture. It is necessary prerequisite for the students to be familiar with the teaching material so as the visit in the Museum to be meaningful and students to be able to form their own views regarding the teamwork activity.

3.2. Team formation and activities determination

The second step is the team formation based on the total number of students in class. During this step, teacher has to explain to teams what they have to do during the visit in the museum and to select one team representative. The activities can include processing of museum items and expressing about their role and what they depict.

3.3. Conduction of activities- Museum Visit

The third step is the conduction of activities during the visit in the Museum. In this step, students have to select one item and answer questions like "what does it represent?", "how was the money used during this period?", "why was the money used?" and "what was the role of the money during this period?". The role of the teacher is to supervise the whole process and provide the necessary guidelines to students.

3.4. Discussion and Assessment

The last step is the discussion about the whole process so as students to express their thoughts. Then, an assessment of the teaching process and the teamwork has to take place. To

succeed this, teacher provides to students a questionnaire which has questions related to the benefits of the procedure, the abilities that they enhanced during the process and proposal of ways of improving the procedure (Brinia, 2007)^[4]. As a result, the overall teaching method is evaluated and the benefits for the students are emerging.

4. Research Methodology

Qualitative Research

In this type of research, the data are gathered more in a verbal and visual way than in a numeric form. When analyzing the gathered data, the research allows for an in-depth analysis and interpretation of view and attitude and intends to clarify processes via analytical induction (Bird M. *et al* 1999)^[2].

The presentation of the qualitative data is going to be done as follows:

1. Formulation of research questions.
2. Description of the research theme and instruments.
3. Description of the research sample.
4. Presentation of research process.
5. Presentation of research results.

Research Questions

The current research is the first attempt in vocational training system in Greece for teaching economics in Vocational Training Institutes through a combination of the above mentioned techniques.

The research utilizes the principles of the above methods and theories in teaching the teaching unit "Money", in the first year of Vocational Training Institute, in order to clarify basic economic terms to students, enhance group work and describe ways of implementing this teaching technique and field research. The research questions that are going to be investigated related whether this teaching method for the subject of Money:

- a) Contributes to the active learning and teamwork of the students so as to participate in a higher level.
- b) Enhances students to clarify the use of money and the economic influences that are related with it.

Research Instruments

Convenient Sampling

This type of sampling is a statistical method of drawing representative data by selecting members of the population because of the ease of their volunteering or selecting units because of easy access or their availability. A key advantage of this type of sampling is the availability, the convenience and the quickness with which data can be gathered. On the other hand, there is the risk that the sample may not represent the population as a whole, and it may be biased by volunteers. Although, this type of sampling is often used in the primary stages of research, for someone who has a rough estimate of the results, free of charge and time to select information (Business Dictionary).

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire is a preplanned set of questions which are designed to derive specific information to correspond a particular need for research information about a relevant topic. The research information is attained from the population normally from a related interest area. It is an economy way of data standardization even though participant's motivation is

difficult to evaluate, affecting the validity of response (Key J., 1997) [8].

Semi-structured Interviews based on qualitative questions

It is the most convenient way of interview because it allows the deepest analysis of facts. In this type of interview, the structure and the order of questions can be easily change in order to enhance the researchers to develop a deep understanding of the issue of interest which is necessary for developing relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation). Semi- structured interviews are used mostly in pilot research.

Research Sample

The research sample consists of 18 students of the 1st year of a Vocational Training Institute (aged between 20 and 30 years old). It was undertaken in the first semester of the academic year 2015-2016 (September - March). The Institute is located in municipality of Attica. The research lasted one week and was executed during the academic program offering one hour of teaching and two hours of field research.

5. Research Process

At the beginning of the research, the teacher explained to the students about the teaching methodology and the process that was about to be followed the next few didactic hours. The students were very enthusiastic for the research and the procedure was about to begin.

The first teaching hour included the first stage of the methodology which was the lecture. The teacher taught to the students the didactic unit of "Money" in order to provide them with the necessary theoretical background for the next step. Then, the teacher separated the class into five groups of four and selected one representative for each group in order to be ready for the visit in the Museum.

The next step was the visit in the Numismatic Museum of Athens. Firstly, the teacher informed the students about the history of the museum. After that, each group had to select one item and present the history about it, present the role of the money during this historical area and how the money affects every day. Then, the representative presented in the other groups their work.

The last part of the teaching procedure was the completion a questionnaire which evaluated the whole process and a discussion about this experience.

6. Research Process Results

The results of the research process are figured out by the data that were produced by the questionnaire that was filled by the students in the end of the research.

Questionnaire results

The research questionnaire was completed in the end of the procedure. The first question examined whether the procedure was interesting. Question two and three investigated the extent to which the visit in the museum contributed to the understanding of the didactic material and the enhancement of the teaching. The fourth question is linked with the teamwork. Questions five to six aimed to emerge ways of improvement of the procedure and the benefits that were obtained by the students by this process. The results are the following.

Question one: All students agreed that the lesson was interesting

Question two: All students agreed that the visit in Numismatic Museum provided them with motives for active participation in the understanding of the teaching unit. Some typical students' answers where the following "the course was not boring and pathetic", our active role provide us with the will to learn more", "the procedure nurtured collaboration, discussion and view exchange that contributed to our participation".

Question three: Seventeen students cited that the visit in the museum enhanced their understanding of the basic economic meanings and terms.

Question four: All students except of three stated that the teamwork contributed to the effectiveness of the course. Some typical answers which were mentioned are below: "teamwork aided us to cooperate" "we had the chance to discuss and respect the opposite views" "it helped us understand many economic terms via opinion exchange".

Question five: Students proposals were that they should be more visits to museums, guest lecturers in class which are experts in the didactic material and more projects (individuals or in groups) concerning each teaching unit.

Question six: As for the overall benefits that students gained from this teaching procedure were knowledge (both economic and historical), collaboration, active participation, improvement of interpersonal relations and critical thinking.

7. Discussion of results

In general, the results show that this teaching methodology towards teaching the unit "Money" has been a prospective proposal for Vocational Training Institutes with great appeal to students, contributing to an innovative, interesting and interactive lesson.

All students agreed that the lesson became easier for them to understand especially with the visit in the museum, where students were separated into groups and presented their work. The visit enhanced students for active participation, provided them with additional motives and the will to learn more about economy in parallel with historical data. In the end of the process, students had understood the role of money in everyday life and were able to express their views regarding it. Teamwork helped students to express their own views and collaborate, ending up with understanding the basic concepts of Money. Furthermore, the items of the museum and the experiential learning facilitated the active participation of students and provide them with positive experiences. As a result, the climate between them became friendlier enhancing the freedom of expression.

In conclusion, this new teaching proposal for Vocational Training Institutes contributed to the enforcement of cognitive results which aided students to form their own opinions concerning the economic issues relating to Money and to develop a holistic view of economic science in relation to historical data and real life.

8. Conclusion - Guidelines for future research

The introduction of this teaching methodology in Greek Vocational Training Institutes is an innovative proposal which rises up many issues concerning its implementation. The state should ameliorate and integrate similar actions in the analytical programs of Vocational Training Institutes by

providing the necessary resources to all institutes of adult education and to adjust the detailed timetable in order to encourage teachers to utilize these teaching techniques during the educational process.

A necessary prerequisite is the investigation of educational needs of adult learners. The investigation of educational needs of adult learners is particularly important for education of adults, as it determines the successful development of an educational program. Therefore, the diagnosis of their needs need to occupy the relevant space and time in the designing and implementation of education programs (Adults Teacher Education Program).

Finally, throughout this teaching methodology, collaboration, communication, development of critical thought and interpersonal skills are developed. The challenge for the teacher is to grab adults' attention and apply properly the proposing teaching methodology so as to achieve the above.

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