

Statistics ARE interesting – how do we get youngsters inspired?

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There is a lot of information available nowadays, and statistics are a very effective way to share information. Statistics do not need to be only figures in tables; they can also be presented in other ways. The big challenge is to motivate people to utilise statistics as a source of knowledge.

Motivation can be defined as “a reason or reasons for acting or behaving in a particular way” or “a desire or willingness to do something (enthusiasm)”. Motivation influences what, how and when we learn. The relationship between motivation and learning goes both ways: motivation effects learning and, on the other hand, learning effects motivation. Three very important ways to motivate young people are firstly, the teacher to be interested in the topic themselves; secondly, showing them examples they can relate to; and thirdly, letting them do things themselves.

If the teacher is not interested in the topic, it is extremely difficult for students to be interested either. Anyone is more likely to be interested when he or she can relate to the topic somehow. Teachers should always choose and use examples that their students can relate to. Many people learn better if they can actually do something instead of just listen, so having suitable exercises is usually also a good idea. This paper looks at teaching and learning the use of statistics especially from the point of view of economic statistics.

Statistics do not offer direct solutions to problems, but they can help in decision making when used wisely. Showing students how the information can be used is an effective way to promote statistics. Young people are smart, and they should not be underestimated – it is important to teach them to be critical, as well. Even with the most reliable statistics, it is a good practice to check and evaluate the sources and to compare the results with some other results of the same or a related topic, if possible.

There are many fascinating statistics about different topics in the world, but if the student has no personal interest in a particular topic, it is much more difficult for him or her to get excited. Therefore, the first step is to get students interested and then they will want to learn more and will find the data!

Key words: economic statistics, motivation, statistical literacy