

Students' perceptions of geography and the way it is taught

(Source: Weeden, P. (2006) *Pupils' perceptions of geography: a literature review*, University of Birmingham, commissioned by RGS-IBG)

'The research literature on students' perceptions of subjects and their reasons for choosing subjects is limited, especially for geography. The research suggests that the learning process and the quality of the teaching are far more influential than subject content in making geography interesting. It also suggests that students' conceptions of geography are unclear.

Students' preferred activities included:

- watching videos
- fieldtrips
- drawing maps and diagrams
- map/atlas work
- project work
- discussion practical work
- making posters
- having variety in the methods and approaches.

Students' disliked activities included:

- writing ('working through endless booklets and worksheets')
- atlas/mapwork
- copying
- bookwork
- tests
- homework
- big projects (too long)
- drawing maps and diagrams.

Students did not like being passive recipients of knowledge and 'technical terminology' through copying terms and definitions, particularly in certain physical geography topics.

Teachers suggest that geography is successful in competing with other subjects when it is relevant, topical, up to date, reflects the cutting edge of geography, and is fun and interesting. The value of fieldwork is emphasised.

Geography is less successful where the students' experience of geography lacks progression or variety and students find it uninteresting or irrelevant.

The impact of teacher enthusiasm, approach and quality on entries has not been researched. The content base of the subject came in for little criticism although at KS4 students enjoyed learning new aspects of subject content rather than studying a previous topic in more depth.

Preferred content included finding out about:

- the world
- other countries / cultures
- hazards / disasters.

Disliked content was physical geography and weather.

There is some evidence that students perceive geography (and history) as harder than other subjects because of:

- workload (coursework and homework)
- the opportunity to express and justify opinions – although these aspects also made the subject enjoyable and interesting.'