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An Innovative Use of Fidget Toys in a University Classroom

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An Innovative Use of Fidget Toys in a University Classroom

Fall 2008 Through Fall 2010

Dr. Donald Slater, P.E., Georgia Southern University

Abstract

➤The multiplicity of in-class negative distractions detracts contemporary students from the learning process. The researcher initiated the use of fidget toys in the classroom in order to create a positive distraction to help refocus student attention on in-class topics. The fidget toys used in this research were small, squeezable, spongy, hand-held items. A twelve (12) question Likert Rating Scale survey was used to record data both at the beginning and end of each of the semesters. Research survey results suggest that fidget toys were instrumental in refocusing the attention of those students who had previously succumbed to distractions to the learning process.

Modification

➤The Fidget Toy Survey was originally designed to accommodate both a course in construction management and a course in computer science. Since the collaboration with the co-researcher ended, the researcher has elected to eliminate questions three (3) and four (4) which were specifically aimed at computer use in the classroom.

Images of Fidget Toys Before Use



Data Collection, Presentation, and Value

Data Collection

➤Twelve question Likert Rating Scale (LRS) survey with the following:

- 1 = Terrible, None, Never
- 2 = Poor, Low, Seldom
- 3 = Neutral, Medium, Occasionally
- 4 = Good, High, Frequently
- 5 = Excellent, Highest, Always

➤At the beginning and end of each semester.

➤Students estimated the value of use of the fidget toys in redirecting their attention to in-class topic material.

➤Survey was used in the Site Construction course.

Presentation

➤Utilizes the LRS to display fidget toy survey data.

➤Survey questions illustrate the alignment of in-class student focus.

Value

➤Determining how survey data collected from both the beginning-of-course and the end-of-course assist in identifying strengths, improvements, and insights for course management, design, and teaching processes.

Sample Survey Form Spring 2010

FIDGET TOY SURVEY (FTS)				
DATE (mm/dd/yyyy)	FIS Number	TASK LIST	DATE (mm/dd/yyyy)	
Level Before Use		Please rate your response level in each item on the following list using the indicated 1 through 5 rating system. 5 = excellent, highest, always 4 = good, high, frequently 3 = neutral, medium, occasionally 2 = poor, low, seldom 1 = terrible, none, never	Level After Use	Before/After Level Difference
1		What was your reaction to the introduction of a fidget toy in class?		
2		What is your normal fidget (e.g., doodle, play with your pen, text message) level in class?		
3		What is your normal laptop or desktop computer use in class?		
4		What is your distraction level from content (e.g., email, assignments for other classes, news, surfing the Web) on your laptop or desktop computer during class?		
5		What is your distraction level from content (e.g., homework) other than electronic?		
6		What is the lowest level of a fidget toy to you during class?		
7		What level is it possible to pay attention in class and play with a fidget toy?		
8		How often should the fidget toys be available in class?		
9		On the days when you have a fidget toy available at what level are you able to concentrate on class proceedings?		
10		How often would you use the fidget toys in class when they would be available?		
11		What is your distraction level from other sources (e.g., text messages, cell telephone messages) during class?		
12		Would you like other instructors to incorporate fidget toys in their classes?		
Total Score		Please make any comments here.	Total Score	Total Score Difference
		At the end of the semester, please rate your frequency of use of the fidget toy using the indicated 1 through 5 rating system below. 5 = always 4 = frequently 3 = occasionally 2 = seldom 1 = never Rating:		

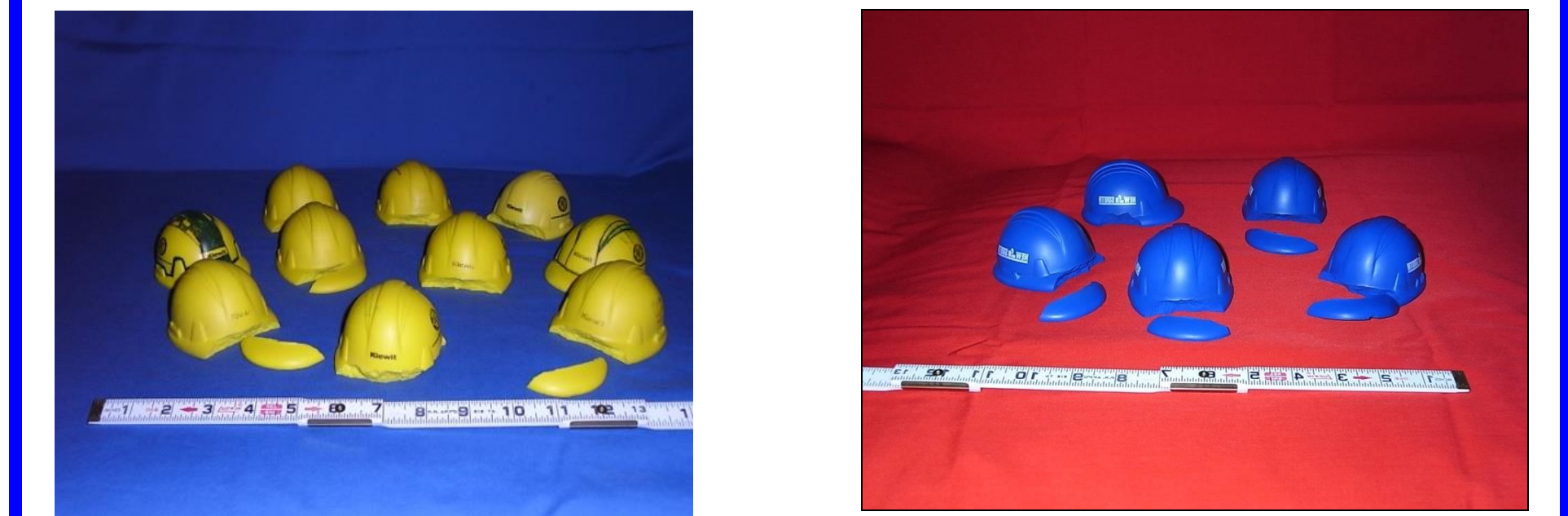
Conclusion

➤The cumulative trend from the selected ten (10) questions of the Fidget Toy Survey suggests an increasing acceptance and use of the fidget toys as the semesters progressed. The students' distraction levels from non-course materials decreased. The use of fidget toys helped refocus the attention of those students who succumb to distractions to the learning process and to in-class topics.

Acknowledgements

➤Fidget toys (hats) for the Construction Management course were donated for the research by both New South Construction and Kiewit Southern Company.

Images of Fidget Toys After Use



Examples of Student Comments

- Good idea
- Think they are good for people who need them
- Fidget toys helped me to pay attention and stay off of my cell phone
- Was nice to have some days
- Helpful
- Good for paying attention
- Good tool to stay focused in class
- I usually stayed focused and had low stress
- I found myself more focused while using the fidget toy
- Good for an anxious person like me
- Very good idea
- I didn't use it but I believe that it is very beneficial to many students
- Nice having them available
- Very useful on days when I was fidgety

Presentation, Problem, and Solution

Presentation

➤Summarizes and analyzes data collected from Fall 2008 through Fall 2010 (i.e., five semesters) from 166 students.

➤Demonstrates the value of students' perspectives, values, and opinions in the use of fidget toys in the classroom..

Problem

➤In-class distractions for contemporary students include, but are not limited to, fidgeting, chewing gum, chewing on pencils, nail biting, hair twirling, nose picking, clicking pens, tapping fingers, sleeping, doodling, consuming food and beverages, communicating on cell phones, text messaging, working cross-word puzzles, reading newspapers, working on assignments from other classes, and doing math puzzles.

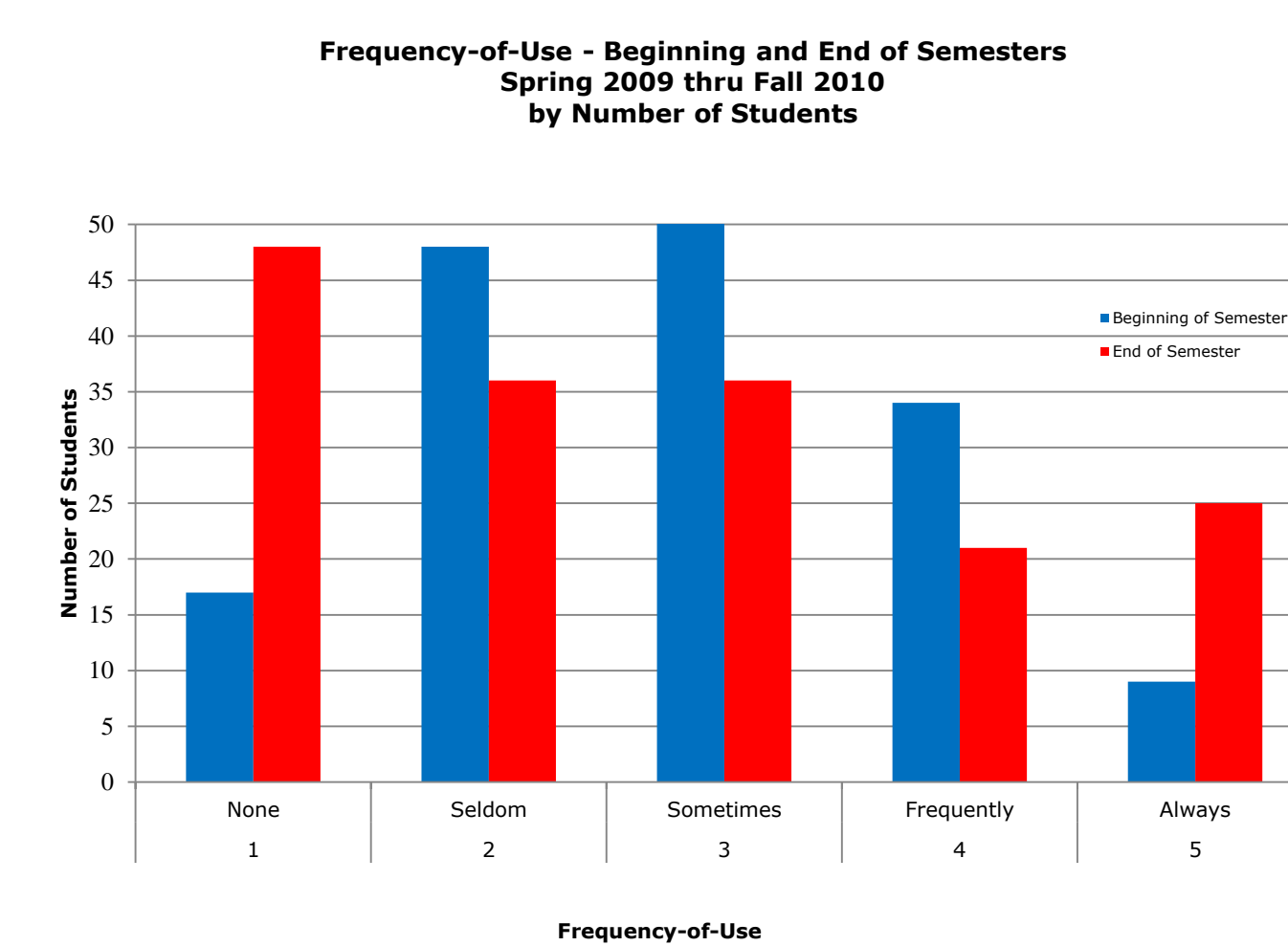
Solution

➤The working hypothesis was that the use of fidget toys would help refocus student attention on in-class topics. The researcher initiated the use of fidget toys in the classroom in order to refocus the attention of those students who succumb to distractions to the learning process. This may be viewed as a modification of behavior from a negative distraction to a positive distraction.

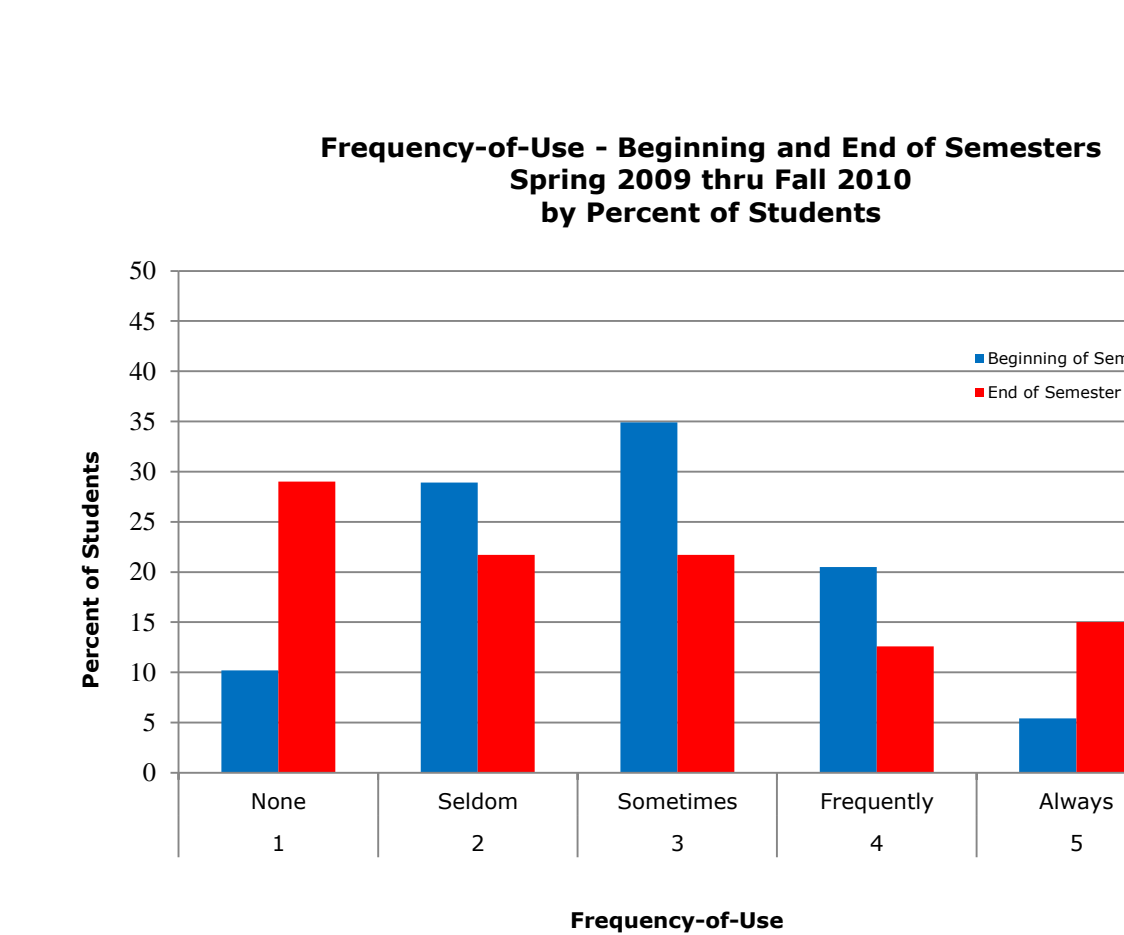
Frequency of Use Table

Frequency-of-use		Number of Students		Percent of Students	
		Beginning of Semesters	End of Semesters	Beginning of Semesters	End of Semesters
1	None	17	48	10.2	29
2	Seldom	48	36	28.9	21.7
3	Sometimes	58	36	34.9	21.7
4	Frequently	34	21	20.5	12.6
5	Always	9	25	5.4	15

Frequency of Use by Number of Students



Frequency of Use by Percent of Students



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