

## Students' Viewpoints as to Teaching Effectiveness in Shiraz University of Medical Sciences

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**Abstract:** Faculty members are the main core of each university and their work has the main role in the efficiency of educational systems, so evaluation of their teaching can reveal the quality of their teaching and if feedback is given to them on time and safe, they can contribute to improvement of their teaching quality. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the students' opinions as to their instructors' teaching methods' effectiveness and approaches in Shiraz University of Medical Sciences.

**Methodology:** This is a descriptive cross-sectional study using a self administered questionnaire. Data were gathered on one hundred students of dentistry, pharmacy and medicine. Statistical analysis was done using SPSS, version 15.

**Results:** The results indicated that in order to gain more of the lecturers' efforts in classes, the students preferred lecturing rather than other teaching methods. The majority of the students considered their native language as the preferred language of delivery of teaching. They also reported that multi-exam approaches are better than just one or two tests during a semester.

**Discussion and conclusion:** Using the students' attitude in evaluation of faculty members is useful in universities, so that the teachers can change their methodology and adapt themselves with the students' needs. But it is by no means perfect if the students' opinions are the only indicator in the assessment of the academic staff. Therefore, it is recommended that other evaluation methods should be used along with the students' viewpoints.

**Keywords:** assessment, teaching style, faculty member, feedback, students' attitudes

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Educational systems, as the main representation of human investment, play the main role in education and the choice of efficient man-power<sup>1</sup>. Similar to any social organization, universities can function differently based on the social advancement and needs.

The United Nation's Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) considers "science production" (research), "imparting knowledge" (education), and "spread of knowledge" (provision of services) as the main function of the universities. Each one of these functions is specifically important and lack of attention to them leads to irreparable failures for the society. Lack of emphasis on education, as one of the main functions of higher education systems, can lead to training inefficient individuals who are unable to apply their knowledge in work, production and social settings.

Academic staff are the scientific core of each university and their functioning plays a significant role in the outcome of educational systems. In case they are provided with appropriate and timely feedback, they can be aware about their weak and strong points so that it contributes to improvement of their teaching methods. In essence, lecturer's assessment is a procedure aiming at determining the efficacy of education<sup>2</sup>. In the university, there are different approaches to assessment of lecturers such as student assessment, self-assessment, assessment by head of the department, colleagues, vice-deans and dean of the faculty. One of the most common methods in Iran is students' assessment of their lecturers<sup>3</sup>.

The information obtained from this type of assessment can help the lecturers to improve the quality of their teaching so that the academic staff can remove their weak points in teaching and enhance their efficacy gradually. This process is of great importance, revealing a close cooperation of the students and lecturers. In fact, if the students understand that their ideas are utilized and accepted, it is more likely that they feel more responsible for their education and learning<sup>4</sup>.

University students can assess their lecturers in the classroom as to respect toward the students, their ability to challenge aiming at efficacious teaching, activation of the students' minds, design of an efficacious course, speech and lecturing skills, and their presentation<sup>5</sup>.

In the yearly assessment of the teaching of University of Coronel, based on the results of a meta-analysis, it has been indicated that: "We can surely state that the teachers' assessment by the students is a valid indicator of the efficacy of education"<sup>6</sup>.

Many studies have been conducted focusing on the validity of this type of assessment in our country and throughout the world.<sup>7,8,9</sup> The student assessment of the quality of teaching in the university has provided the authorities with effective insights so that they have a diagnostic feedback as to the functioning of the lecturers, nomination of distinguished lecturers, use of the obtained results for student guidance in enrolling in courses taught by scientifically competent lecturers.<sup>10</sup> Marsh and Michael have revealed that the result of students' assessment of the lecturers' efficacy will be influential in promotion of the quality of education, if used along with consultation and guidance.<sup>11</sup>

Zolfaghar and colleagues in their study entitled as "the efficacy of education on psychology from the students' viewpoints" adapted Zohoor and Eslaminezhad's study in 2002 in Kerman on the most important indicators of the efficacy of teaching from the students' points of view. They designed a questionnaire using the studies conducted in Iran and abroad. This questionnaire contains questions about scholarship aspects, teaching methodology, and new approaches to teaching. The results of their study revealed that there is no significant relationship between the students' personality traits and the ability to prioritize the efficacious teaching indicators.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, some studies have revealed that students' assessment of the lecturers' teaching efficacy is an inefficient method and this can affect the validity of this type of assessment as a means of evaluating the quality of teaching. Considering the students' assessment of their lecturers as the only means of evaluation might lead to entirely improper results.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, some studies conducted in Iran criticize this type of assessment. For example, Hajiaghajani in 1998 in his survey of the lecturers' attitudes toward this type of assessment revealed that the students are used to subjectively involving their personal attitude when assessing their lecturers' quality of teaching.<sup>14</sup>

Considering the discrepancy in the results of the students' assessment of their teachers in the university and the lack of a study in this field in Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, we aimed to conduct this study on our population to examine the students' opinions as to their instructors' teaching effectiveness and approaches in Shiraz University of Medical Sciences. In other words, there was an attempt to find the factors contributing to effectiveness in teaching in the university. The recognition of the students' attitudes as to the efficacy of teaching will help the instructors to improve their teaching in their classes. Therefore the following research question was posed:

Is there any gap between what the student expects and what he/she experiences in his/her classes?

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

This is a descriptive cross-sectional study performed in 2010. The subjects of this study consisted of all the students of medicine, dentistry and pharmacy studying in Shiraz University of Medical Sciences. 100 students were selected to participate in the study through random sampling.

To collect the data, a researcher-made questionnaire consisting of 3 parts with 23 questions was designed and utilized. Its reliability was confirmed using Chronbach  $\alpha$  ( $r= 0.72$ ) and its validity was approved by expert opinion.

Two efficiency indicators were considered in the questionnaire: 1) the lecturer's characteristics , such as style of teaching and personality features; 2) the lecturer's methodology and assessment

styles. The first part of the questionnaire contained 5 demographic questions, the second part had 16 questions on the lecturers' methodology, and the third parts contained 3 open questions on the students' criticism and suggestions for improvement of the teaching quality. To determine the validity of the questionnaire, expert opinion was sought and 5 academic staff of medical school commented and approved its validity. Then the questionnaires were distributed and collected after they were filled in. The questionnaire was distributed at the end of the term.

Data were analyzed in SPSS, version 15, using Chi-square test for comparing the groups. P value less than 0.05 was considered significant.

### 3. RESULTS

The obtained results revealed that 43.6% of the participants were medical students, 39.6% pharmacy students, and 16.8% dentistry students. 59.2% of them were first year students and 39.8% second year students. 49.5% of the participants were 17-19 years old, 47.3% were in the age range of 20-22, and 3.3% were 23-25 years old. 60% of the participants were female and 40% male. The students' responses as to their preferred teaching method were analyzed. Table 1 displays the frequency and percentage of the subjects as to their preferred methodology

**Table1: Frequency and percentage of the participants based on the methodology**

Methodology	Frequency	Percentage
Individual teaching	43	43.4
Team teach	29	29.3
Combination	27	27.3
Total	100	100

48% of the students preferred the use of Persian power points, and 52% were in favor of the use of English ones for presentation by the teachers for effective teaching. Also, 40% of the participants considered English texts as a reference for learning scientific points and concepts as effective while 60% of them preferred to study Persian texts. ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) 82% of them considered the teachers' energetic activity in class while teaching as essential; however, 82% believed that it is best if the teacher sits while teaching. Moreover, 59% of the subjects believed that the teachers' emphasis on the students' presence and recording it is effective but 41% believed that it is futile ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).

62% of the subjects under the study approved of giving some quizzes in class to be considered as a part of their score for the course by the teachers. As to this point, 80% preferred announced quizzes and 20% unannounced ones ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).

61% of the subjects under the study considered doing homework, research and extra-curricular activities and considering their scores as a part of the course score as well as using educational CDs and online teaching (5) as effective while 39% of them believed that the above-mentioned approaches are not effective ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). 92% of them believed that during the course, multiple choice tests are better and 8% were in favor of essay type exams ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).

As to the assessment methods, the students preferred continual assessment compared to a single final test ( $p \geq 0.05$ ) or even two midterm and one final exam ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). 45.5% of the participants considered teaching in small groups of 10 students and holding the classes by the group under the supervision of the instructors as the best method for better learning and establishing previously learned materials; the rest of the students believed that this method is not beneficial.

Finally, 27% of the subjects stated that students' motivation and interest are essential for learning the instructional points. 31% stated that obtaining high scores and 42% the combination of these two factors as their motivation.

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As every teacher knows, students do not function in a standard manner and teaching is not something routine. Teaching requires deep knowledge of how students learn differently and a sophisticated repertoire of skills deployed through professional judgment. Standardized teaching can never produce high levels of learning for all students. For students to be well served, teaching must become a real profession. To measure something broad like teaching requires breaking the activity down into discrete components that together represent a theory about the instruction that supports student learning. Developers of student perception surveys often refer to these components as "constructs"-different aspects of teaching and the learning environment, the quality of which are indicated by responses to multiple related questions about students' observations and feelings.

In the recent decade, interest has been centered on lecturers' assessment by the students since this is a justification for the functioning of teachers contributing to improvement in the quality of teaching.<sup>15</sup> Using the students' viewpoints to assess the teaching efficacy of the university lecturers is the only tangible source of information in the universities around the world.<sup>16</sup>

Based on the results of this study, it was concluded that 43.4% of the students prefer individualistic teaching methods like lecturing while 29.3% of them are in favor of active team teaching and the remaining 27.3% stated that a combination of these two methods is favorable. Also, the majority of the students considered their native Persian language as the preferred

language of delivery for teaching ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). It seems that the obtained results are due to the fact that the majority of the participants are the first year students of different medical majors who are used to the school and high school's method of teaching, i.e. the teacher as the sole speaker; in fact, they are not accustomed to the teaching methods commonly used in university. Moreover, the results of this study indicated that most of the students believed that multi-exam approach including two exams and continual assessment during the course is a more effective approach than a single exam..

The results of the study conducted by Aultman on the lecturers' assessment by students are in the same line with the findings of the present study. He believed in the lecturers' assessment during the course since the immediate feedback given through this approach will provide an opportunity for the lectures to improve the teaching method, thereby promoting the curriculum and the students' learning<sup>1</sup>.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the lecturers should consider the students' viewpoints as a basis for their functioning if they want to teach efficaciously; however, other follow up studies are necessary to see if the faculty members change either their course or their teaching strategies if they know what the students believe about their classes. Also, these viewpoints are not sufficient to be used for assessment of the academic staff. It is recommended that other assessment methods, particularly those methods which can determine the students' learning as the result of teaching should be used. Also the colleagues' views and self assessment are other ways to be used in the academic staff assessment.

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