TEACHING ATTITUDES AMONG TEACHERS AT THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE, UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

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ABSTRACT: This paper involves the obtained results of an "Elective Program" project which was carried out by Phase I Medical Students of the 1998-1999 academic year at the Faculty of Medicine (FOM), University of Malaya (UM). A questionnaire was designed to survey the attitudes of teachers at FOM-UM, the subject of choice of a 4-student group who were supervised by a faculty member. Students obtained a list of faculty members (teachers) of all academic departments from the Dean's Office and rehearsed their interviewing skills prior to collecting the data of the questionnaire, within a 1-week period. Respondents were 146 out of 275 in total (53%), which included all academic ranks and clinical and non-clinical teachers. Results showed that respondents were well qualified, have enough teaching experience and teach in a variety of forms. All teachers liked to teach and were motivated; however, 15% felt unhappy about their teaching and 6% did not think that their teaching was effective. The majority (96%) of teachers liked their teaching to be evaluated and many revealed several means to assist and motivate students. Teachers felt that there was room for improvement in the aspect of student-teacher interactions. Results of this project revealed that FOM-UM is well endowed by qualified, motivated and caring teachers who wish for better interactions with their students. (JUMMEC 1999; 1:51-57)

KEYWORDS: Elective program, Faculty of Medicine, questionnaire, medical teachers, new integrated curriculum, teaching attitudes, teaching methods, University of Malaya

Introduction

The Faculty of Medicine (FOM) at the University of Malaya (UM) started implementing a new integrated curriculum (NIC) with the beginning of the 1998-1999 academic year (1). Among the components of this NIC for Phase I Medical Students (first year) is an "Elective Program". In this component; a group of 4 students select a project, locate a supervisor and carry out such project within two weeks during one of their academic breaks (2). Such a project is to take place on the UM campus and/or its vicinity and without any major financial expense. The idea of such an Elective Program is to allow students to select any ideas or fields of interest (whether medical or otherwise) and have the opportunity to work as in teams to carry out their projects and the freedom to conduct such in various methods: e.g., interviews, field research, experimental work, questionnaires...etc. Also, in this Elective Program, students are required to make an oral presentation for 10 min to their fellow students and interested faculty members about their project and to submit a report about their project some time later.

We have chosen to study the attitudes of teachers in our FOM-UM about teaching as our project. We learned that our Faculty has 275 faculty members; 39 Professors, 89 Associate Professors and 147 lectures - the majority of them were assumed to be teachers (3). Thus, we felt that this project is of interest to both students and to faculty members, especially that we were not aware that a similar project was carried out in our FOM previously. The objectives of our project were:

1. To gain information about the teacher population in our FOM.
2. To learn about the teaching done by faculty members.
3. To study the attitudes toward teaching in our FOM.
4. To bring out problems related to teaching done in the Faculty.
5. To make students aware of how their teachers are concerned about them?

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We were required to submit a report about our project to the Coordinator of the Elective Program, which we have done. However, we also felt that the information obtained from our project is of general interest to the whole faculty — thus this article in the Journal of the University of Malaya Medical Centre (JUMMEC).

Material and Methods

We chose a topic for our project and sought a supervisor for our group: Professor Farouk El-Sabban, Department of Physiology, FOM-UM. We have confirmed our project and arrangement with our supervisor in writing by the 31st of October 1998. Our project was to begin and to be concluded between 4th –15th January 1999. We, with the help of our supervisor, designed a 2-page questionnaire to provide information relevant to our objectives. Our questionnaire (below) consisted of 21 questions. We divided the questions into 3 parts:

1- Information about the teachers, questions No. 1 – 11.
2- Attitudes toward teaching, questions No. 12 – 17.
3- Student-teacher interactions, questions No. 18 – 21.

Additionally, we included a space for any comments which teachers wished to make. We started working on our questionnaire earlier, in December 1998, as we were warned by our supervisor about how difficult is it to construct a questionnaire.

We obtained the name list of teachers from all academic departments in our FOM-UM (3). We divided the departments among the four of us and each had four or five departments to collect information from. We rehearsed interviewing skills with our supervisor and conducted personal interviews with as many teachers as we could in about 1-week period (4 – 12th January 1999). Each interview lasted between 10 – 15 minutes and each student filled out the answers to the questions being asked. Obtained data were entered on a spreadsheet (Microsoft Excel software program), were counted, grouped and analyzed. Results of our data analysis are expressed herein in a tabular form, from which our conclusions were drawn. Comments made by teachers were grouped into categories, dependent on their frequency. Results of our project were presented to fellow Medical Students and interested Faculty members in 10 min on 15th January 1999. We have submitted a report on our project to the Coordinator of the Elective Program in February 1999 – on which this article is based. A diary of our activities and involvement into this project is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Diary of the project.

Date	Activity
30/10/98	Discussed the selection of a topic and a faculty member to be our supervisor.
	Chosen a lecturer for his consent to serve as our supervisor.
31/10/98	Members of the group and our supervisor discussed:
	a) The title of our project.
	b) Objectives of the chosen project.
	c) Methods that would be used for our project.
	The Elective Program form was submitted to the Elective Program Center.
7 – 30/12/98	Constructed a draft of the questions for our questionnaire.
4 – 12/1/99	Questions of our questionnaire were refined.
	Questionnaire was finalized and every member of the group had an original copy.
	Interviewing skills were practiced.
	Interviews were conducted.
	Transparencies were prepared for our oral presentation.
	Our presentation was rehearsed.
12 – 13/1/99	Each member entered all data from teachers into computer.
	All individual files were combined into one master file.
	We analyzed data from the master file and made tables from our analysis.
15/1/99	We made our oral presentation.
5/2/99	A rough draft of our report was prepared.
8/2/99	First version of our report was prepared.
9 – 26/2/99	Report was edited several times and a "final" version was ready for submission.
26/2/99	Report was submitted to the Elective Program Center.

Results

Information about the teachers

The population of the interviewed teachers consisted of 146 lecturers (Table 2). Seventy eight of the teachers were clinical and 68 were non-clinical teachers – 83 were males and 63 were females. Our population also consisted of 80 Lecturers, 54 Associate Professors and 12 Professors. The teachers possessed a variety of qualifications such as M.B.B.S., M.S., Ph.D. and others, which included: membership of Royal Societies of different specialties. The year in which teachers earned their last degree or qualification ranged from 1966 to 1999. Number of years of teaching at FOM-UM by our teachers ranged from 0.2 year to 35 years. The range of hours of teaching at our faculty was from 1.5 hour to 42 hr per week. These teachers do many forms of teaching; but most of them give lectures, followed by practicals then clinical scenarios and self-directed learning sessions. The form of teaching that the teachers do the least of is that of computer-assisted learning.

Attitudes toward teaching

Results of attitudes toward teaching are shown in Table 3. All teachers (100%) indicated that they like to teach.

Table 2. Information about interviewed teachers.

Item	Number (%) / Average (SD)	
Total number	146	(100)
Males	83	(57)
Females	63	(43)
Clinical	78	(53)
Non-clinical	68	(47)
Academic rank		
Professor	12	(8)
Associate Professor	54	(37)
Lecturer	80	(55)
Qualifications*		
Ph.D.	52	(36.7)
M.S.	49	(33.6)
M.B.B.S.	82	(56.2)
Others	106	(72.6)
Year of last degree earned	1988	+ 7.0
Years of teaching at FOM	9.3	+ 7.7
Hours of teaching/week	9.3	+ 7.4
Form of teaching done*		
Lectures	144	(98.6)
Self-directed learning	84	(33.1)
Computer-assisted learning	15	(10.2)
Practicals	115	(78.8)
Clinical scenarios	90	(61.6)

Numbers and percentages are of all obtained responses.

Table 3. Attitudes toward teaching.

ITEM/Question	Number	(%)
Do you like to teach?		
Yes	146	(100)
No	0	(0)
What motivates you to teach?*		
Promotion	14	(10)
Salary	12	(8)
Interest	129	(88)
Student-teacher interaction	105	(72)
Environment/facilities	49	(34)
Others	38	(26)
What form of teaching do you prefer?*		
Lectures	42	(29)
Self-directed learning	26	(18)
Computer-assisted learning	5	(3)
Practical	32	(22)
Clinical scenario	21	(14)
Others	84	(58)
Are you happy with your teaching?		
Yes	123	(85)
No	22	(15)
If not, why?*		
Do not like the topic	1	(0.2)
Student(s)	12	(8)
Environment/facilities	12	(8)
Promotion/professional aspect	7	(5)
Others	11	(8)
Do you feel your teaching is effective?	131	(94)
No	9	(6)
Do you like your teaching to be evaluated?		
Yes	140	(96)
No	6	(4)
If yes, by whom?*		
Peers	90	(62)
Administrators	22	(15)
Students	133	(91)
Others	13	(9)
How do you attract student's attention?*		
Make jokes	87	(60)
Speak louder	49	(34)
Keep quite for a while	33	(23)
Go on teaching	20	(14)
Others	97	(66)

* Numbers and percentages are of all obtained responses

The majority of these teachers were motivated about their teaching mainly because of their interest in teaching itself as well as because of enjoying the student-teacher interactions, followed by environment and facilities that the faculty provided. Neither promotion nor salary seemed to be the main factors that motivated them. Most of teachers whom we interviewed prefer lectures as a form of teaching – which was followed by practical sessions, self-directed learning sessions and clinical

scenarios. The least preferred form of teaching was the computer-assisted type. Examples of other forms of teaching teaching that they prefer are: tutorials, ward rounds and debates. When asked whether they are happy about their teaching, 85% said Yes. Those who said No indicated that the students are the main cause of their unhappiness, as well as the environment and the facilities, followed by not being satisfied with the promotion or because of some other professional aspects. Other factors that make them unhappy included not having enough time to prepare and deliver their lectures.

Out of 146 interviewees, 121 felt that their teaching is effective. When asked about if they like their teaching to be evaluated? 96% of them said Yes and the majority of this portion said that they would like the students to make the evaluation, followed by their peers, then by administrators. Other evaluators of teaching included the external examiners and visiting professionals. When asked about how do they attract the students attention when they teach, most would make the effort to crack jokes, followed by speaking louder, keeping quite for a while and the rest would just go on with their teaching. Other ways to attract the students attention included asking questions and sometime tell a story that relates to their teaching.

Student-Teacher Interactions:

Results on the aspect of student-teacher interactions are presented in Tables 4 and 5. About 56% of teachers were satisfied with their interactions with the students, but the remainder (44%) were not satisfied (Table 4). Dissatisfaction about this aspect was mainly because the students do no ask questions, followed by coming late to class, not coming to class at all, as well as talking in class. Students who fail in the teacher's topic or sleep in class were not sources of dissatisfaction for teachers. Another reason was that the students do not make an early preparation before coming to class. When asked about if students come to see them about what they have taught?, most of teachers said Yes and majority who said Yes said that the students come to see them sometimes (i.e., not at a specific time during the academic year), followed by near examination time and only a small number of interested students come to see them "most" of the time (Table 4).

When asked whether they have ever failed to answer any of the students questions, most of teachers said Yes. The majority who said yes, admit to the students that they do not know the answer, followed by promising to provide an answer when they are sure. Telling the students to look up the answer in the library came up next and giving away and answer even when they are not sure received the least response. Another way to respond to this situation was to refer students to another colleague (Table 4).

Table 4. Student-teacher interactions.

Item/Question	Number	(%)
Are you satisfied with your interactions with students?		
Yes	82	(56)
No	64	(44)
If not, why?*		
Student are late for class	23	(16)
Talking in class	16	(11)
High absenteeism	16	(11)
Sleeping in class	8	(5)
Failing your topic	9	(6)
Not asking questions	55	(40)
Others	34	(23)
Do student come to see you about what you have taught?		
Yes	124	(85)
No	22	(15)
If yes, how often?*		
Most of the time	17	(12)
Sometime	98	(67)
Near examination time	34	(23)
Have you ever failed to answer any of the student's questions?		
Yes	103	(72)
No	40	(28)
If yes, how do you respond to that?*		
Admit that you do not know	92	(89)
Give an answer, even when unsure	17	(17)
Promise to provide answers when sure	87	(84)
Tell them to look up in the library	53	(51)
Others	23	(22)

*Numbers and percentages are of all obtained responses.

For the purpose of enhancing the student's learning, most of the teachers do not mind spending an extra class time with the students (Table 5). Those who responded by either dislike or indifferent were almost equal. The idea of taking the students to the library does not catch the teachers interest. Teachers indicated that the students are "grown ups" who should know how to take care of themselves. There were still teachers who felt indifferent about this and some of them even said they like it. In regard to providing the students with revision questions, most of teachers liked to do so while the rest said they disliked it or were indifferent. The majority of teachers like to loan books and notes to students and those who said dislike and indifferent were almost equal. When asked about being sensitive to student's personal problems?, the majority of teachers (83%) indicated that they like to be sensitive to the student's personal problems. Only a small percentage felt indifferent and a very few teachers disliked it.

Table 5. Information on techniques to enhance student learning

ITEM/QUESTION	Like		Dislike		Indifferent	
	Number	(%)	Number	(%)	Number	(%)
For the purpose of enhancing student's learning, how do you feel about the following ?						
Spend an extra class time	73	(51)	34	(24)	36	(25)
Take student to the library	27	(19)	84	(59)	32	(22)
Provide revision questions	82	(57)	37	(26)	25	(17)
Loan books & notes to students	67	(47)	42	(29)	34	(24)
Be sensitive to student's personal problems	118	(83)	2	(1)	22	(15)

* Numbers and percentages are of all obtained responses.

Comments

Teachers were asked to make comments at the end of the interview. We had a lot of comments and each of the comments has its own point of view and merit. It was enlightening to know that 85 out of 146 (58%) faculty members have made comments. Below are the comments that were obtained, which we have divided into 5 major categories.

1. Student-teacher interactions: We obtained 28 comments related to this category. Most of the teachers said that the students are lacking in discussion, as well as not asking questions. Along with this, there were also comments on the students being not that interactive, i.e., they are being passive and non expressive. Also, teachers hoped that the students would give feedback to them regarding their teaching efficiency.
2. Student-related comments: We obtained 20 comments related to the students. Teachers indicated that the students are not paying attention in the class, not expressing enthusiasm, not being self-learners, not active in discussion, absent from classes and that the students need not be "spoon-fed". There were also teachers who suggested that a student with an exceptional educational performance should receive a bonus.
3. Questionnaire-related comments: We obtained 11 comments regarding our questionnaire. Some teachers felt that our questions were not suitable, difficult to answer, rigid, lack adequate options, and that some questions had no specific objectives.
4. Faculty-related comments: Eleven comments had been made concerning the Faculty. Some teachers wished for a hefty increase in salary. They also felt that the Faculty should be more responsible towards enhancing interactions between the faculty members and the students. Some teachers expressed that Department Heads should have an equal teaching load like others. Other teachers felt that some colleagues need more training in teaching (especially for the self-directed learning and discussion-type sessions). Also, it was expressed that the administration needs to improve teaching facilities and improve the student-teacher ratio.
5. Project-related comments: We obtained 7 comments regarding our Project/Elective Program and the teachers gave both a thumb-up!

Discussion

In this Elective Program, there are various titles for students to choose from and to carry out under the guidance of supervisors. Our group chose to research the attitudes of teachers towards teaching in our FOM-UM and selected a supervisor by ourselves. We felt that this project is unique, of a general interest, especially that a similar project has not been done before. Through this study, we were able to reveal how our teachers felt about their teaching. We wished to share our results and thoughts about our project and the Elective Program with those who are in our academic environment.

Besides having an outlet to do something different and of interest, we felt that the spirit of cooperation among our group was both emphasized and enforced. Additionally, we learned about the different thoughts and processes involved in the design and completion of their project. The required oral presentation gave us an opportunity to public speaking and to learn about what is involved in preparing for an oral presentation? Thus, such an elective program allows students, in that early stage of their medical education, to work cooperatively and to get the feel for what their future profession entails.

We designed the questionnaire and conducted personal interviews with as many teachers as we could within the allowed duration for our project. We collected information from 146 respondent teachers, which accounts for 53% of the total number of faculty members. Responding teachers were balanced between both sexes and between clinicians and non-clinicians. However, respondent Professors were under represented (8 vs. 14% of faculty members), perhaps

because of heavy academic and clinical duties which made them unavailable for our interviews. On the other hand, Associate Professors were over represented (37 vs. 32%), for which we have no specific explanation. Meanwhile, percentage of interviewed Lecturers matched their percentage in the Faculty, 54 vs. 55%. It must be pointed out that because such interviews were conducted during the first 1/3 of January 1999 and during an academic break, we felt lucky to collect information from those 146 teachers.

All interviewed teachers were found to be qualified and earned more than one degree. Many of them earned other qualifications than the options given. For instances, Masters in Public Health (MPH) and Bachelor of Science. The M.B.B.S. holders are the second highest followed by Ph.D. and M.S. The percentages of Ph.D. and M.S. degree holders were almost equal. On average, teachers have earned their last degrees about 10 years ago and have had that length of time as experience in teaching at our FOM. Most teachers are busy with their teaching and a few pointed out that they have a packed teaching schedule. Lectures and practicals constituted most of the medical student teaching. Clinical scenarios came next, followed by self-directed learning. The least practiced method was the computer-assisted learning, perhaps because there are not enough computers being available to students.

All teachers liked to teach but not all (15%) were happy with their teaching. Responses given by unhappy teachers were mainly because of students as well as because environment or facilities. Students were said to be passive-learners, non-interactive and non-prepared while the environment and facilities were not sufficiently conducive for teaching. Almost all teachers (88%) were motivated to teach because of their interest. This is not surprising, as all liked to teach. Another good motivating factor of teaching was the student-teacher interactions. We realized that teaching would be ineffective unless there are interactions between students and teachers, as through such interactions teachers would be able to know how well their students comprehend their subject matter and would be in a better position to determine how students can be helped. We noticed that only less than 10% of teachers chose salary as one of the motivating factors; however, we feel that teachers should know that salary is not supposed to be a major motivating factor. We were surprised to note that promotion was not a highly motivating factor, as it is generally understood that good teachers ought to be rewarded for their good performance.

As to the preferred form of teaching, the majority of teachers put 'others' apart from the options given. Examples of the 'others' were: tutorials, ward rounds and bedside teachings. A common notion was expressed, which was: "the easiest way of teaching is to give a lecture". There was almost an equal number of teachers who preferred self-directed learning and clinical scenario sessions. However, very few of our teachers seemed not to prefer computer-assisted learning. However, it was indicated that some teachers have good knowledge of computers and possess skills. Perhaps, this form of teaching will be prevalent when more computers become available to students.

Almost all teachers felt that their teaching was effective. This was hinted at by referring to the years of teaching in this Faculty. Only a few of them (6%) did not feel so. This could be because none of students came to see them to ask questions or because they were not being promoted for such a long time. A small group of teachers (4%) did not like their teaching to be evaluated, possibly because this small portion was confident enough with what they teach and did not require any feedback from others. Teachers felt that students are the best to evaluate their teaching. We were happy to learn about this fact, as students are the recipients of their teaching. There were also teachers who liked peers and administrators to be evaluators of their teaching. They may have felt that this can be considered as their technique, mechanism or strategy to be promoted.

Teachers use many ways to attract student's attention in class. The majority of teachers put 'others' as one of their options. Examples of 'others' were: giving anecdotes which related to the topic, asking students something about the topic and pointing out that the topic is important and may be asked in the examination. Techniques to draw student attention varied, but the fact is that teachers are interested in the student welfare and success. We feel that making jokes is good since this will make the students not feel bored with the topic or with the speaker. So does speaking louder, in order to make the student listen to the taught subject without falling asleep.

The percentage of teachers who are satisfied with their interactions with students surpassed those who were not by 12%. Teachers who were not satisfied mostly indicated that such was because students are passive and do not ask questions. Through observation, students here like to take lectures or teaching for granted and do not seem to go deeper into a topic. For them, lectures or teaching were totally enough of what they should know. The second cause to teacher dissatisfaction was the late comers for class, who would not only interrupt teaching but also other students. We admit that this is a habit that should be abolished from a medical student's life.

Surprisingly, the majority of teachers indicated that students came to see them regarding what they had taught. However, a busy schedule of students in completing many writing works partially prevented them

from seeing the teachers at most of the time. Instead of that, students felt freer to see them sometimes. Logically, there would be more students coming to see teachers near examination time to get as many tips as possible and to revise the topics with them. However, this did not occur here and the reason for this is unknown.

Approximately one-third of the interviewed teachers had never failed to answer any of student's questions. Perhaps, this shows that they had stronger understanding and wider knowledge in their fields. However, for those who failed to answer, it does not reflect negatively on them – as it is honest to admit that they do not know. The majority of teachers ticked this option, which was followed by promising to give the answer when sure about it. There were also teachers who would give an answer even though they were not sure and tell the students to look up in the library to verify such an answer. The point here is to encourage students to go to the library and to "push" them to be independent learners. Other responses given were to refer them to other colleagues or search for the answer on the spot. No matter what technique or response the teacher has used, it seems that they show willingness to help students.

For enhancing the students leaning, the majority of teachers liked to spend an extra class time, provide revision questions, loan books and notes to the students and lastly be sensitive to students' personal problems. This implied that this faculty has caring and friendly teachers. The average percentage of teachers who liked the above items was almost 59%. From the data (Table 5), we found that the idea of taking students to the library was not the teacher's favourite, as it was felt that students are mature enough to go by themselves.

From the comments made by teachers, the following may improve some of the current inadequacies:

1. The Faculty should organize more programs and activities, which involve both students and faculty members and, perhaps, these can enhance student-teacher interactions.
2. In order to increase the level of students interest's, teachers may include the latest findings from research which is related to the topics they teach.
3. The faculty should provide training sessions for teachers so that they can teach better especially for the self-directed learning, problem-solving sessions and practicals.
4. Technical problems should be lessened when the teaching is on, such as: electricity outage, breakdown of air-conditioning, malfunctioning overhead projectors...etc.
5. Faculty should provide supplies and utilities which are needed by teachers, for example: laboratory tools, equipment and resources for preparing slides and coloured transparencies.

Conclusion

Generally; teachers of our Faculty, who are adequately qualified are happy with their teaching – but they are not that satisfied with their interactions with the students. They hope that there will be more student-teacher interactions in the future and that the students will become more active in their learning process. Teachers expressed willingness to help students in a variety of ways. Therefore the students in this Faculty should feel very lucky that they have both caring and generous population of teachers.

Appreciation

There are many people to whom we would like to express our gratitude. Firstly, to all the teachers whom we interviewed for their full cooperation and support. Secondly, to our families for their support and encouragement. And lastly, but not least, to our fellow students, friends and faculty members for being present during our oral presentation.

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