

Students' Feedback of Written Examination: A Public Sector Medical University Experience

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To determine the students' perceptions regarding the examination in a public sector medical university.

Methodology: This cross-sectional study was conducted at Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Medical University Islamabad. An examination feedback proforma was developed to collect the feedback from students appearing for the written exam for MD/MS/MTA during 2015. Multiple variables were assessed and descriptive analysis was done.

Results: The feedback proforma was distributed to 98 candidates with response rate was 68.36%. Overall feedback from students about the examination was positive. Majority of the students were satisfied with the process and arrangements of the examination. However a large number of students did not comment on some important issues.

Conclusion: Collecting students' feedback about examination was a good effort to identify our deficiencies and indication for areas of improvement. This study revealed a positive response from students regarding overall management of the examination process.

Keywords: Feedback. Examination process, Students.

Introduction

Audit and feedback is widely used as a strategy to improve the practice, based on the belief that the professionals are prompted to modify their practice when given performance feedback showing that their procedure is inconsistent with a desirable target.¹ Feedback is one of the management tools that should be considered in every intervention, to review and revisit the efficacy, quality and appropriateness of the intervention or that process in question. Evaluation of any process or intervention through obtaining feedback can be termed as the process of reviewing the delivery of any process/ procedure to identify its deficiencies so that they may be remedied. Audit and feedback generally lead to small but potentially important improvements in professional practice.²

National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) defines feedback system as "the systemic, critical analysis of the quality of processes under-taken including the procedures used for assessment and evaluation, the use of resources and the resulting outcome of the overall system".³ These audits undertaken to assess quality of 'Examination Process' are an essential requirements to the delivery of excellence in the quality of overall examination system, and provide opportunity to improve communication between various groups involved in this process, increase the level of professional satisfaction and achieving objective evidence of the criteria being met, but at the same time these audits may also pose a potential threat or apprehension to the organizers of the process under study (Examination Process) whereby the organizers of the

examination may take these evaluations as limitation to their freedom, or there may take these audits as a source of policing or dictation in their area of authority.⁴

Summaries of the students' feedback about the examinations from the surveys have subsequently been used to inform the examination bodies in order to develop examinations and improve if required.^{5,6,7} So the aim of the study is to determine the students' feedback about the conduct of the examination in a public sector medical university.

Methodology

This performance audit was conducted at Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Medical University (SZABMU), Islamabad. An examination feedback proforma was developed to collect the feedback from students appearing for the written postgraduate exam for MD/MS/MTA during 2015. It was designed to assess the efficiency of the examination department which included: overall arrangements, invigilation, ease of language and clinical terminology used in question papers, time allocation for that paper, attitude of invigilators, views about the meal/refreshments offered and lastly comments were asked if any.

The proforma was distributed among 98 candidates appearing in the written examination and were collected after the examination before leaving the examination hall. The data obtained through this feedback form, includes number of students responded to the feedback and was analyzed by SPSS version 20. Descriptive analysis was done and the variables assessed are represented by frequencies and percentages.

Results

The feedback proforma was distributed to 98 candidates appeared for 18 specialties in the written examination. Response rate was 68.8%. Specialty-wise distribution of students is shown in table I.

Overall feedback from students about the examination was positive. Majority of the students (88%) were satisfied with the process and arrangements of the examination. Students were asked to comment on seven topics as indicated in table II.

Regarding overall arrangements from examination department, 46.2% rated as good, 35.7% rated from good to excellent for question paper, 35.9% rated good to excellent for time allocation, 25% rated from good to excellent for clinical terminology used in question paper. However, 38.8% students gave positive response regarding language, 49% were satisfied from invigilation system and 40.3% were not satisfied with the refreshments provided during the exam. Surprisingly about 35% did not comment on the language and invigilation. Further a large number of students did not bother to comment question paper, time allocation, language and clinical terminology used in the question paper and this remained a concern for the authorities to investigate it.

Table I: Specialty-wise distribution of students (MS, MDS, MCCM, MTA, Dip, M Phil)

S.No	Specialty	Number of students (n=98)
1	Ophthalmology	03
2	General Surgery	05
3	ENT	03
4	Accident & Emergency	08
5	Pediatric surgery	08
6	Orthopedic surgery	09
7	Oral and maxillo-Facial surgery	05
8	Urology	02
9	Cardiology	03
10	Nephrology	08
11	Pediatric Medicine	09
12	Gynae/Obstetrics	11
13	Critical Care Medicine	04
14	Histopathology	05
15	Hematology	02
16	Dermatology	02
17	Gastroentology	04
18	General Medicine	07

Discussion

Students' feedback is regarded as a key indicator for successful implementation of the process and also provides an impulse for improvement.^{8,9,10} There is considerable evidence about the effectiveness of audit coupled with feedback for provider behavior change.¹¹ This study was aimed to evaluate

Table II: Response of students on activities of Examination department (n=67)

	Overall Arrangement		Question Paper		Time allocation		Language		Clinical Terminology		Invigilation		Refreshment	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	n	%	n	%
Excellent	18	27.5	7	10.4	10	15	5	7.4	5	7.4	7	10.4	0	0
Good	31	46.2	17	25.3	14	20.9	13	19.4	12	17.9	17	25.3	0	0
Satisfactory	10	14.9	20	29.9	10	14.9	8	12	13	19.4	9	13.4	22	32.8
Not satisfactory	4	5.9	12	17.9	16	23.8	17	25.3	15	22.3	11	16.4	27	40.3
No comments	4	5.9	11	16.4	17	25.4	24	35.8	22	32.8	23	34.4	18	26.8

postgraduate students' perceptions regarding written assessment to be used as a feedback to find the lacunae of services provided from examination department and to improve in future examinations. Positive feedback identifies what is right about the subject of evaluation? On the contrary, negative feedback serves to indicate what is not working or is failing to achieve the desired result.^{12,13} There is an important difference, however, between negative feedback and criticism. While criticism is typically intended as an adverse judgment, the purpose of negative feedback is to help pinpoint what needs correcting. While the feedback itself may not be favorable, it is delivered in a constructive manner with the purpose of encouraging improvement.

Response rate in this study was 68.38%. Other studies also reported the similar response rate.¹⁴ Reason for this response might be that students were not explained in detail about the filling of feedback proforma, it was the understanding of distributors as well as the candidates (respondents) that filling of the feedback form could not be explained and it was not mentioned that all students have to comment on all questions and submission of proforma is mandatory. The distributor/collector of proforma was not appropriately trained. Further it was observed that as the exam finished students tried to leave the examination hall without taking time to fill the feedback forms properly. Students should be briefed before the start of examination about filing the forms. Poorman & Mastorovich stated that "the best time to review the test with students is immediately after the students have completed the examination".¹⁵

The current study showed that majority of students was satisfied from overall arrangements by examination department, invigilation system and papers made by external examiners (language, clinical terminology). They agreed that construct of the question papers were uniform and covered the curriculum, examination time allocation was appropriate, and examination was well organized. These results were consistent with a study by Saed AM et al that majority of students were satisfied with the examination instruction and arrangements.¹⁶

Regarding students' perceptions about question paper, study revealed that >65% students agreed that question papers were well developed by the examiners and covered the subject curriculum. While 18% were not satisfied and found the question paper as difficult for the said subject or out of the syllabus. A study from Turkey also showed the same results with students' satisfaction over question paper construction and randomized questions order.¹⁷

This study showed that 50% of the students were satisfied with time allocation in the examination, whereas 25% didn't comment on this variable. Vladimir found in his study that that time allocation varies significantly across cultural settings, students' demographic and academic backgrounds, and students' skills and values. Regarding students' personalities, he found that students who reportedly typically check their answers before submitting them indeed take more time to finish exams. Students who attribute more importance to grades also spend more time on exams.¹⁸

Surprisingly more than 60% of students were either not satisfied with the language of the paper or didn't bother to answer the question. So this area needs investigation that why students were not comfort with the language and what are the barriers in understanding. Similarly results revealed that >55% of students were not happy with the clinical terminology used in the written paper. This reflects the deficient preparation of the students towards their exams. Students and supervisors need to work hard for final exams and require deep learning of the subject.

Examinations are very important to students and inappropriate conduct of invigilators can be cited as grounds for complaint if it adversely affects students' performance in any way. It is also true that summative assessments are often high stakes assessments; thus, there is wariness about imposing additional risks and anxieties. Our study showed that 44% of students rated satisfactory to excellent regarding invigilation process of the exam but again 35% didn't responded this variable while 19% were not satisfied with the invigilation. James concluded that many students have substantial challenges with the idea of major stakes examinations and studied the online invigilation and found it challenging under secure, proctored conditions.¹⁹

Changes in eating or drinking in response to a real life stressor like exams is a reported tendency.²⁰ This study also reported >40% students were not satisfied with the refreshments provided during the exams and 27% didn't responded the question, reflecting that either students were either stressed to the exams or quality of the food provided was poor. Both factors need exploration to lessen this tendency of changed behavior of eating during exams.

Conclusion

It was a good effort to identify our deficiencies and indication for areas of improvement. However, it would have been better if all students would have given feedback on all the aspects and filled it completely and returned. Mandatory feedback from candidates, examiners, other managers of examination process

would be more revealing and would definitely be able to identify more gaps and lead to improve transparent and efficient examination process.

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