



## Students' Perception of Effective Teaching Practices in a Medical School

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### ARTICLE INFO

Received : 02/01/2014  
Accepted : 13/05/2014  
Published : 01/09/2014

### KEYWORD

Effective teaching,  
Lectures,  
Student learning  
environment,  
Student perceptions,  
Medical students

### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** It is often portrayed in literature and academic settings that effective teaching is the cornerstone of student learning environment in large classes; but the characteristics of effective teaching is rather mysterious. **Objective:** To delve more into this aspect, the student perceptions of effective teaching practices were analysed to derive certain principles which could contribute to teaching effectively. **Method:** Medical students in first year, second year and clinical batches (n= 451) were enrolled. The study was done in three phases. In the first phase of the study, data was gathered from 128 students of a batch, individually, about the core qualities of effective teaching during a lecture. In the second phase, the class of 198 students was divided into small groups of 5 students each, worked together, discussed about effective teaching practices and then listed five qualities that are required to qualify for effective teaching. In the third phase, based on the responses of phase 1 and 2, a questionnaire was prepared. The questionnaire was peer validated and administered to 125 students. **Result:** The student responses of the phase 1 and phase 2 of the study clearly fell under the following five themes which include a. Clarity and easy understanding of the subject b. Interactivity in the classroom c. Motivation factor d. Making topics fun to learn e. Dedication and patience exhibited by the teacher. **Conclusion:** Majority of the students perceived that a teacher who gave clear explanation, simplified the subject for easy understanding; and made the topic fun to learn, very effective.

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### Introduction

"Effective teaching" is indeed hard to define. It is often portrayed in literature and academic settings that effective teaching practices are clearly important for raising student achievement, and characteristics of the same are rather mysterious. The reality is that there is no single factor, nor consensus in literature, about what is, or what are the components of effective teaching. Teaching evaluations, excellence

awards, student ratings, informal discussions and formal workshops on teaching methodologies are just different means of achieving a common goal.

University of Tennessee Professor William Sanders and his colleagues found that the effectiveness of teachers has more of an influence on student achievement than any other schooling factor (1). But, teaching and its effectiveness of teaching are highly debatable

subjects of medical education. Nevertheless, defining and measuring teaching effectiveness plays an important role in many of the decisions made in higher education. Typically, teaching effectiveness is measured through some forms of student questionnaires that have been specifically designed to measure observed teaching styles or behaviors (2). In many universities, student ratings are used as one (sometimes the only and often the most influential) measure of teaching effectiveness (3). Since student ratings are used as the primary measure of teaching effectiveness, active participation and meaningful input from students are critical factors in the success of a teaching evaluation system. Several studies in the educational area have observed a significant link between student attitudes towards the evaluation of teaching effectiveness and the success of a teaching evaluation system (4-8). However, very few studies have analysed the factors that influence students' attitudes toward teaching evaluations and the relative importance of these factors.

This paper does not attempt to define effective teaching, rather it attempts to investigate how students in general perceive effective teaching practices. What could be the factors that would contribute to effective teaching practices from the students' point of view? From the data obtained, the paper attempts to derive some of the most important principles that would enable every teacher to adopt these principles in the classroom. To delve more into this aspect, a study was undertaken at the Melaka Manipal Medical College, Manipal University, Manipal, India.

## **Method**

To better understand the perceptions of effective teaching practices, medical students in first year, second year and clinical batches (n= 451) of Melaka Manipal Medical College, Manipal campus were enrolled in the study. The study was done in three phases. In the first Phase of the study, data was gathered from 128 students of a batch, individually, about the core qualities of good teaching. The students had to list out three most important criteria they would consider

essential for effective teaching. In the second Phase, the class of 198 students was divided into small groups of 5 students each. The students in each group worked together, discussed about good teaching practices and then listed five qualities that are required to qualify for "effective teaching practices". Student responses were analysed qualitatively, by narrowing down the responses to major themes, five in number. A questionnaire was designed based on these themes. In the third Phase, based on the responses of Phase 1 and 2, a questionnaire was prepared. The questionnaire contained open - ended and closed type of questions regarding the qualities of teaching in large classrooms. The questionnaire was peer validated and administered to 125 students.

## **Result**

### ***Phase 1 and Phase 2:***

In these two phases, the responses of students clearly fell under the following five themes namely: a) Clarity and easy understanding of the subject, b) Interactivity in the classroom, c) motivation of students, d) Making topics fun to learn, and e) Dedication and patience exhibited by the teacher. The other responses received by the students include: Teaching does not mean giving notes or handouts; Availability of the teacher outside the class hours to clarify their doubts and Questioning skills of the teacher to stimulate their interest in subject. Some of the students felt that teachers should encourage active involvement of students without just passively passing on information in order to facilitate learning.

### ***Phase 3:***

The student responses to the questionnaire have been tabulated in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Questionnaire response on qualities of good teaching shown in the Fig 1, revealed very high rating (85.6%) for clear and easy understanding of the subject. While the other qualities such as making the topic fun to learn (73.6%), student friendliness (58.4%), not monotonous (56%),

motivating the students (53.6%), interaction with students(52.8%), willingness to explain repeatedly(47.2%), had average rating (73.6% - 47.2%). However attributes such as legible

writing (27.2%) and giving handouts in class (36%) had very low rating as qualities of good teaching.

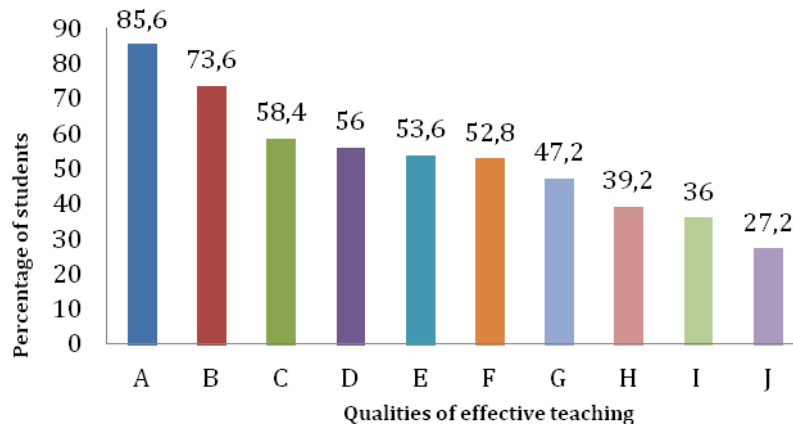


Figure 1: Student responses expressed as percentage about the qualities of good teaching. A-Clear & easy understanding of the subject B- Makes the topic fun to learn C-Student friendly D- Not monotonous E- Motivates the students F-Interacts more with the students G-Willing to explain N times H- Handouts are given I- Make sure that writing is legible.

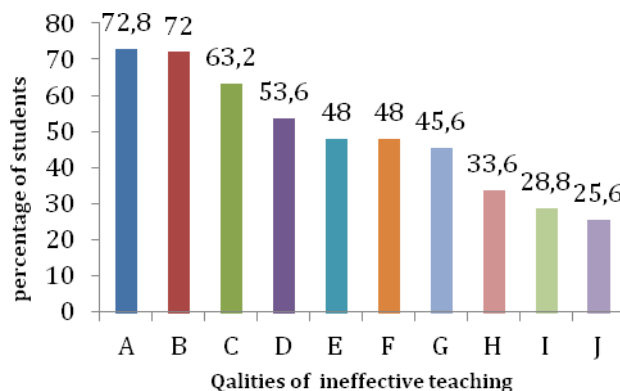


Fig 2: Student responses expressed as percentage about the qualities of ineffective teaching. A- Monotonous style of teaching, B- Not clear explanation/ less explanation, C- Reading from the slides, D- Not able to understand the class, E- Long confusing explanation, F- Slow voice cannot hear G- Too less time for copying, H- Too fast teaching I- Handouts are not given J- Lack of interaction with students.

## Discussion

Lorin W. Anderson (9) suggested that effective teaching is one that produces demonstrable results in terms of the cognitive and affective development of the students and hence it is an important component in every teaching professional. Effective teaching involves progressively refining our courses based on reflection and feedback. Our study showed some

of the good qualities of teaching which could be used by medical teachers to improve their teaching methodology. As shown in the result majority of the student liked their teacher to give clear and easy understanding of the subject as well as to make the topic fun to learn. The negatives in the feedback given by the student included monotonous style of teaching and not clear explanations given by the teacher. We feel by improving our teaching methods by preparing

well for class so that explanation given to students is simple and clear and also inculcating humor in our classes to make the topic fun and interesting for the students could perhaps nullify the negative feedback and bring out the best in our teaching.

Teaching requires adapting. We need to continually reflect on our teaching and be ready to make changes when appropriate, which is in concordance with our objective of the study. Porter & Brophy (10) in their study on the synthesis of research on good teaching identified that effective teachers are clear about their instructional goals, are knowledgeable about the content, communicate well, monitor students' understanding, are thoughtful and respectful about their teaching practices. The authors have suggested that research would help identify more elements of effective teaching and the themes arrived by the students are almost similar in this study.

### Conclusion

There are a number of methods used to measure teacher effectiveness in higher education. Students' perspectives are considered to be one of the most important one, because they are the primary stakeholders in the process. The innovative processes adopted in this study are valid, reliable and research-based strategies that teachers can use to improve their teaching in the classroom.

Courses in higher education, as in our setting, it is important for teachers to not only know and understand what good teaching is all about, but also to achieve excellence in teaching in order to cater to the needs of national and international students. Postgraduate teachers take up teaching profession without formal education or a degree in teaching. With in-depth research in this area, some broad guidelines can be evolved which will be evidence-based. If this strategy helps us in moving forward in the right direction, it can be implemented on a much larger scale. University policies can be implemented based on such studies where the main stakeholders, namely students are involved in planning measures and

reforms. There is of scope for future work in this direction so that learning outcomes could be improved with effective teaching

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