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Assessing the Viewpoint of the Professors about Teaching a Course by Several Lecturers in Babol University of Medical Sciences

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Abstract

Background & Objective: Since one of the common methods of medical sciences teaching is teaching by several lecturers, the present study aimed to evaluate the viewpoints of medical science professors on this type of teaching.

Materials and Methods: This cross-sectional, descriptive and analytical research was performed on professors of Babol University of Medical Sciences in 2013. Subjects were selected using convenience sampling, and data were collected using a 14-item researcher-made questionnaire. In addition, data analysis was performed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Results: From a total of 41 professors, about 33 cases (80.4%) had the experience of teaching a course by several lecturers in the previous or current semester. In total, 65.9% of professors believed that this type of teaching increased the diversity and attractiveness of the course and about half of them reported that there was better compliance with the headlines. On the other hand, most of these individuals believed that teaching a course by several lecturers was associated with an unnecessary increase in volume of the course content (68.3%), as well as a decrease in the time required for student assessment (51.2%) and the time needed for establishing relationships between professors and students (46.3%). However, statistical tests showed no significant differences in results in terms of gender and academic rank of professors.

Conclusion: According to the results of the study, about half of the professors opposed to applying the method of teaching by several lecturers or no comments on this technique. However, the other half of the professors had a positive attitude toward this type of teaching. Therefore, considering some of the positive aspects of teaching by several lecturers, it is not possible to provide a definitive opinion about the method and more extensive studies are



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Introduction

Similar to human resources in any organization, university professors are one of the main pillars since they have three key responsibilities of education, training, and research (1, 2). However, the move toward the third-generation universities in the past few years has led to the education of creativity and innovation to students along with other responsibilities of professors (3). Among the various types of roles above, the "teaching of theoretical and practical lessons" is still the main task of the professors, improving the quality of which greatly depends on the extent of the efficiency of professors. In fact, professors provide students with learning opportunities through teaching. Therefore, their desirable performance plays an important role in attaining academic achievement and educational goals (4). In fact, education and its method of presenting in universities are extremely important, and several factors affect the quantity and quality of education in these organizations. In a study by Lim et

al. entitled factors affecting the effectiveness of teaching from the viewpoint of professors, some of these factors were reported to be professor experiences, general teaching knowledge of professors, communication skills of professors and students, knowledge of the content of a subject, and educational method (5).

A type of implementation of curriculum in the universities is teaching a course by several lecturers. In the present study, teaching a course by several lecturers was interpreted as teaching one lesson by several professors, who share the task of training between themselves according to the approved course topic. In this respect, professors attend and teach in the classroom according to their level of contribution. Under such conditions, it is certain that responsibility for designing a course, offering lessons, and evaluating learners will be handled by several individuals. Teaching a course by several lecturers has some strengths and weaknesses that have been less addressed in medical education research. For

instance, in a study by Mir et al. entitled student satisfaction with teaching a course by several lecturers at Babol University of Medical Sciences in 2013, it was found that 8.2% of students expressed their relative opposition to this teaching method. In the mentioned research, it was demonstrated that while students did not have a significant opposition with teaching a course by several lecturers (6). However, in a study by Tirgar et al., 51.1% of students reported teaching a course by several lecturers to be inadequate mainly due to an unnecessary increase in the course volume and presentation of repeated content (7).

Evaluation is essential for different educational methods. Educational evaluation is an official activity implemented to determine the quality of the effectiveness or value of a program, process, goal, or curriculum (8). The main objective of the assessment is to strengthen the effectiveness of activities and methods, decrease or eliminate ineffective and undesirable activities and methods, and help managers make more informed decisions on issues such as improving the quality of education (9, 10). In this regard, evaluating the viewpoint of professors about the content, structure, and quality of teaching is an integral part of the evaluation and is an important source of information for educational policy-makings (8). The quantity of educational content is significantly important in addition to its quality in all educational centers, in particular, higher education institutions.

On the other hand, education and evaluation are the pillars of the education system (11), and education will be worthless without evaluation and feedback since it is crucial to recognize the weaknesses and strengths of teaching methods. Moreover, teaching a course by several lecturers is identified as an educational technique. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the viewpoints of professors about weaknesses and strengths of teaching a course by several lecturers and evaluate its negative and positive features. It is hoped that the foundation would be laid for correcting educational methods and increasing the quality of education by obtaining valuable results.

Materials and Methods

This cross- sectional and descriptive study was conducted on faculty members working in schools of medicine, paramedics and rehabilitation at Babol University of Medical Sciences, Babol, Iran in 2013. In total, 41 subjects were selected through simple

sampling. Data were collected using a questionnaire made by the researcher proportional to the goals of the study and encompassing 14 items (2 items related to individual information and 12 items related to the strengths and weaknesses of teaching a course by several lecturers). Each item had three alternatives to agree, disagree, and no comments. The primary items of the questionnaire were determined based on the goals and according to the target community, using the opinions of the research team and the opinions of five faculty members of the department of social medicine of the university. The questionnaires were sent to the professors involved in teaching a course by several lecturers after approval.

During the evaluation, the questionnaires were delivered to the professors in envelopes in an anonymous form containing a return address. The subjects were required to fill and send back the questionnaires within a maximum of one week. It should be noted that the questionnaire applied in this research was used by the research team in a previous study (7). The content and face validity the questionnaire was determined through the participation and receiving the opinions of five faculty members of the department of social medicine. In addition, the reliability of the questionnaire was estimated at Cronbach's alpha of 0.71. Data analysis was performed in SPSS version 22 using descriptive and inferential statistics, including the sign test and Kruskal-Wallis test.

It is notable that the present study was approved by the ethics committee of the university with the code of MUBABOL.REC.1392.10 and confirmation of professors regarding participation in the study.

Results

The processing of the data collected from 41 subjects showed that most of the professors (N=27, 65.9%) were men. In terms of academic rank, the majority of the participants (N=19) were assistant professors. Table 1 provides additional information on the demographic characteristics of the faculty members participating in this study.

Regarding the teaching, a course by several lecturers, 36 (87.8%) of the faculty members experienced teaching a course by several lecturers in the previous semester, whereas 33 (80.4%) professors experienced this type of teaching in the current semester. However, five subjects (12.2%) had no experience in this regard. In total, 65.9% of the subjects considered this type of teaching to be more diverse and increase the attractiveness of educational

materials when asking about their opinion about the negative and positive points of teaching a course by several lecturers. Nevertheless, 68.3% of the professors reported that teaching a course by several lecturers led to an unnecessary increase in the

volume of educational content. Table 2 contains more information about the other positive and negative points of teaching a course by several lecturers.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the faculty members on teaching a course by several lecturers (n = 41)

Variable	Level	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	27	65.9
	Female	14	34.1
Academic Ranks	Instructor	14	34.1
	Assistant Professor	19	46.3
	Associate Professor	5	12.2
	Professor	2	4.9
	Unknown	1	2.4

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Table 2: Views of the professors on teaching a course by several lecturers (n = 41)

	Consequences on teaching a course by several lecturers	Number	Agree		Disagree		No comments	
			Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number
Positive consequences	Improve the quality of education	17	41.5	10	24.4	14	34.1	
	Increase the friendly relationship between the professor and students	7	17.1	19	46.3	15	36.6	
	Decrease chaos in managing the classroom	8	19.5	19	46.3	14	34.1	
	Improve compliance with syllabus content	20	48.8	11	26.8	10	24.4	
	Increase the access to professors	10	24.4	15	36.6	16	39	
Negative consequences	Increase the diversity and attractiveness of the course	27	65.9	3	7.3	11	26.8	
	Better teaching a course by several lecturers	15	36.6	11	26.8	15	36.6	
	Increase the volume of course content	28	68.3	7	17.1	6	14.6	
	Presentation of repeated content	19	46.3	12	29.3	10	24.4	
	Decrease mastery of professor in managing the class	13	31.7	19	46.3	9	22	
	Decrease the logical sequence of educational contents	19	46.3	16	39	6	14.6	
	Decrease in the time required for student assessment	21	51.2	12	29.3	8	19.5	

Evaluation of viewpoints of professors in terms of teaching a course by several lecturers by gender demonstrated that male professors had a more positive attitude toward this issue, compared to female professors. Meanwhile, female professors more believed that this type of education led to

decreased mastery of professor in managing the class, compared to male subjects.

More information on the views of the professors on teaching a course by several lecturers by gender is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Views of the professors on teaching a course by several lecturers by gender (n = 41)

	Consequences on teaching a course by several lecturers	Male professors (27 person)			Female professors (14 person)		
		Agree	Disagree	No comments	Agree	Disagree	No comments
Positive consequences	Improve the quality of education	11	6	10	6	4	4
	Increase the friendly relationship between the professor and students	6	11	10	1	8	5
	Decrease chaos in managing the classroom	7	11	9	1	8	5
	Improve compliance with syllabus content	14	5	8	6	6	2
	Increase the access to professors	9	6	12	1	9	4
	Increase the diversity and attractiveness of the course	23	1	3	4	2	8
Negative consequences	Better teaching a course by several lecturers	12	6	9	3	5	6
	Increase the volume of course content	21	3	3	7	4	3
	Presentation of repeated content	12	7	8	7	5	2
	Decrease mastery of professor in managing the class	8	12	7	5	7	2
	Decrease the logical sequence of educational contents	13	11	3	6	5	3
	Decrease in the time required for student assessment	13	7	7	8	5	1

Assessing the opinions of the faculty members based on their academic rank indicated that associate professors had a higher negative attitude toward teaching a course by several lecturers, compared to

other academic ranks. However, no significant difference was observed between various groups of professors. Table 4 includes more information in this regard.

Table 4: The results of statistical analysis of the views of faculty members of Babol University of Medical Sciences about teaching a course by several lecturers (n = 41)

Variable	Levels	Number	Positive view	Negative view	Total
			Mean \pm SD	Mean \pm SD	Mean \pm SD
Gender	Male	27	9.70 \pm 2.70	4.44 \pm 1.80	14.14 \pm 3.33
	Female	14	8.57 \pm 3.71	5 \pm 1.56	16.57 \pm 4.23
Test result	P*	-	0.1	0.967	0.219
	Academic	14	9.28 \pm 2.84	4.92 \pm 1.59	14.21 \pm 3.16
Ranks **	Assistant Professor	19	8.63 \pm 3.49	4.73 \pm 1.99	13.36 \pm 4.34
	Associate Professor, Professor	7	11.14 \pm 1.95	3.85 \pm 1.21	15 \pm 2.58
	P***	-	0.194	0.408	0.583

P *: Sign Test

**In the Kruskal-Wallis test, the information of a faculty member was omitted because of its unknown

P **: Kruskal-Wallis Test

Discussion

According to the results of the present study, a significant number of professors reported teaching a course by several lecturers could be associated with decreased mastery and power of class management. In a study by Merghati khoii et al. entitled determining the viewpoints of faculty members and graduate students about teaching and learning practices, class management power was recognized by students as one of the indicators required for teacher proficiency in effective teaching (12). Therefore, given the fact that class management is a key variable in creating a suitable environment for teaching and learning of learners, the presence of several professors in the classroom could be a threat to education quality. Obviously, under such conditions, while trying to prevent the harmful effects of such a phenomenon, it sought to design a method for developing styles and management skills in teaching a course by several lecturers.

About half of the professors (46.3%) believed that the presence of several teachers in a class increases chaos in managing the classroom. In other words, when the classes of a professor end another professor must initiate his/her classes, there might be problems in terms of time of the class, which would lead to the changing of the date and time of the class and cause chaos in the classroom and presence of students. However, the lack of coordination between students might lead to chaos in some cases. Based on existing knowledge, several components such as the timely start of class, proper dealing with chaotic behaviors and irregularities in the classroom are required to have effective management and increase the quality of education (13,14). On the other hand, organizing the classroom's environment would increase the quality of classes and lead to presenting teachings based on the needs of learners (15). Therefore, changes in the date and time of classes caused by teaching a course by several lecturers could be recognized as a factor damaging the quality of educational programs. However, more studies are required to confirm this issue.

According to the results of the current study, more than one-third of the professors believed that access to professors is reduced in lessons taught by teaching a course by several lecturers. In a study by Tirgar et al., 28.3% of students believed that teaching a course by several lecturers hinders access to professors (7). In the area of educational regulations, availability was considered by medical students as

one of the extremely important properties of a good professor, reported by Vakili in a research (16). In a study by Haghdoost et al. entitled satisfaction of graduate students at Kerman University of Medical Sciences with the educational services and facilities of the university, access to professors was one of the most important factors for student satisfaction (17). Therefore, it seems that the presence of several professors in class might act as a negative factor for the weakening of their position and popularity among students. However, a definite report cannot be made in this regard since there was a limited number of professors in this study.

In terms of the relationship between professors and students in courses taught by several lecturers, half of the professors (46.3%) reported a decrease in the friendly relationship between the professor and students. Given the fact that one of the topics and skills in teaching is the correct and friendly communication between the professor and the student, lack of proper relationship would lead to decreased quality of teaching and lack of meeting educational goals. In this regard, our prediction is somehow consistent with the results of studies where researchers affirmed that factors affecting the effectiveness of teaching in universities (e.g., respectful relationship, providing counseling and guiding the students) are a factor in the relationship between professors and students. However, having access to an acceptable level of this notion is established only through a strong and favorable relation between these two paths (18, 19).

Therefore, the subject teaching a course by several lecturers and shortening of time of the relationship between professors and students in joint courses might decrease the chance of establishing effective relationships, thereby decreasing the possibility of successful education (due to the decreased number of sessions with each professor). Studies have shown that establishing a respectful relationship between students and professors increases self-confidence and motivation of learning in students since the ability to create an effective relationship is one of the important indicators of teaching and could be a function of the personality and scientific characteristics of professors (20). Regarding the ability to establish a relationship between professors and students, results of other studies have been indicative of the importance of preparedness of professors to solve the problems of students and create a relationship with students

where they can freely talk about their issues. In this respect, studies conducted in this field have shown that a positive and respectful relationship between professors and students, attention to individual differences and contacting students regularly and vice versa can improve the educational process (12). In another study, it was reported that the better the relationship between students and professors, the greater their commitment to the university (17).

Assessing students at the end of each class through question and answer or conducting an exam is an important and effective part of the classroom that allows the instructor to evaluate students' understanding of the course and allow students to practice and master the topic before moving on to the next subject (21). In the current research, 51.2% of the professors agreed with the decreased possibility of evaluation of students by professors involved in teaching a course by several lecturers. Considering the importance of this issue, another negative aspect of teaching a course by several lecturers could be a decreased chance of evaluation of students by instructors.

In the present study, 68.3% of the professors admitted that teaching a course by several lecturers leads to an increase in unnecessary volumes of the material. Furthermore, 46.3% of the instructors stated that repetitive topics are presented by professors in the method of teaching a course by several lecturers, which could be a weakness of this teaching technique. One of the causes of repetitive content and unnecessary increase in volume is the lack of knowledge and confidence of each of the professors in the content presented by other instructors. The mentioned factor will definitely reduce the quality of teaching and result in a waste of time and money. In a study in Bushehr University of Medical Sciences, Gashmard et al. evaluated the views of professors and students about the features of a good professor. These scholars reported that the most important properties of a good professor were presenting new contents and having regular scheduling to provide lessons. On the other hand, students believed that mastery of professors, honesty in behaviors and statements, attractive presentation of educational contents and having regular scheduling were the most important characteristics of professors (22). Markert also marked that features such as organizing the contents, eloquence, and having a lesson plan were the most important properties of an efficient instructor (23). Results obtained in the mentioned research indicated that

teaching a course by several lecturers adversely affected the quality of education due to irregularities in classes and decreased logical sequence of educational contents presented.

In terms of gender and academic ranks, no significant difference was observed between the opinions of subjects. However, associate professors reported that teaching a course by several lecturers had more positive aspects. In the research by Mir et al., conducted to evaluate the satisfaction of students with the education provided by several professors (teaching a course by several lecturers), no significant difference was observed between male and female students in this regard (6). In other words, similar to male and female professors, female and male students found no significant difference between the positive and negative aspects of teaching a course by several lecturers. Finally, it should be noted that one of the strengths of this study was assessing one of the effective and less evaluated phenomena in the field of medical education. On the other hand, some of the limitations of the current research were limited sample size, non-randomized data collection, and application of a researcher-made tool. Therefore, it is recommended that further studies be conducted on more extensive aspects, including the number of participants.

Conclusion

According to the results of the present study, while teaching a course by several lecturers has some advantages, such as increased diversity and attractiveness of curriculum and improved compliance with syllabus content, it could result in negative consequences including an unnecessary increase in course content, provision of repetitive content, decrease of logical sequence of lesson content, decrease in the possibility of student assessment (questions or tests) by professors, and difficulties in access to professors by students. Therefore, it is recommended that teaching a course by several lecturers be avoided to increase the focus of students and professors on the content presented. If desired to implement this method of teaching, it is suggested that coordination be increased between professors of a course to eliminate the mentioned problems.

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