### Letter to the Editor

# The Dr. Fox effect: A double-edged sword?

Zahra Nouri Khaneghah <sup>1</sup>, Eshagh Moradi <sup>2</sup>, Sohrab Nosrati <sup>1</sup>, Elham Ramezanpour <sup>1</sup>, Elham Karimi <sup>1</sup>, Shoaleh Bigdeli <sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Center of Educational Research in Medical Sciences (CERMS), Department of Medical Education, School of Medicine, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.

<sup>2</sup>Education Development Center(EDC), Urmia University of Medical Sciences, Urmia, Iran.

#### **Article Info**



#### Article history:

Received 11 Feb. 2023 Accepted 9 Nov. 2023 Published 16 Apr. 2024

#### \*Corresponding author:

Shoaleh Bigdeli. Center of Educational Research in Medical Sciences (CERMS), Department of Medical Education, School of Medicine, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.

Email: shb555@yahoo.com

#### How to Cite This Article:

Nouri Khaneghah Z, Moradi E, Nosrati S, Ramezanpour E, Karimi E, Bigdeli Sh. The Dr. Fox effect: A double-edged sword? J Med Educ Dev. 2024; 17(53): 101-102.

faculty performance is essential for promoting effective education in academic environments. This process faces significant challenges due to factors such as the diversity of faculty roles, the subjectivity of evaluations, and potential biases (1). Various evaluation methods have been developed to address these challenges, including administrator observations, student academic progress, teacher portfolio, self-evaluation, and peer- and student evaluation (2). However, controversies still arise from differences in the evaluation process, attitude and characteristics of raters, methods, and tools used in the evaluation process (3, 4). To overcome these challenges and provide a more comprehensive picture of teacher performance, studies using multiple evaluation simultaneously, which can reduce errors and increase the validity and reliability of the collected results during the evaluation process (1).

Students and peers play a significant role in evaluating professors' performance (2). There are two main perspectives regarding student evaluations of professors: (a) student evaluations are essential for the official faculty evaluation process, as students have direct experience with the professor's knowledge, skills, and teaching abilities; (b) faculty tenure and promotion committees should not rely solely on students' opinions, as students might favor more popular professors who focus on entertaining rather

than educating (5). It is important to note that younger students may focus on the personal traits of professors instead of their actual performance, leading to a halo effect in teacher evaluations. This effect can also be seen in peer evaluations, as personal relationships may influence the evaluation scores (6-8). This cognitive bias, the halo effect, affects evaluations by students and peers, and can be considered as the "Dr. Fox Effect."

The Dr. Fox Effect, first identified by Naftulin et al. in 1973, occurs when a charismatic speaker despite low-quality content, receives evaluation scores. In their study, a professional actor, Myron Fox, posed as an invited professor and delivered a lecture filled with contradictory statements, fake words, and irrelevant content. Surprisingly, he received high scores from the audience, who were unaware that it was an experiment (9). Later studies addressing the initial study shortcomings confirmed the Dr. Fox Effect. These studies found that an engaging speaker using enthusiasm, varied voice and tone, humor, and other teaching techniques could create a halo effect on evaluation scores, even when the content quality is poor (10-12).

Students and peers are essential resources in the faculty member evaluation process, and to prevent the "Dr. Fox effect," an appropriate evaluation tool is required. Additionally, it is recommended to educate

faculty members through faculty development programs and inform students about the Dr. Fox effect as a prerequisite to the faculty member evaluation process. Professors should aim to deliver their content expressively without compromising quality. In this regard, we offer four types of content coverage and teacher expressiveness (Figure. 1): Type A represents the best mode, in which the professor presents highquality content with engaging expressiveness. Type B occurs when the professor is an expert in the relevant content but has weak expressiveness. Type C (Dr. Fox Effect) refers to situations where the professor presents poor content with engaging expressiveness. Lastly, Type D represents the worst possible mode for the teacher, which consists of both vague content and weak expressiveness.

In conclusion, it is essential for faculty and student development programs to educate stakeholders about the Dr. Fox Effect. The faculty promotion and recruitment committees should consider teacher expressiveness, content knowledge proficiency, and the potential impact of the Dr. Fox Effect when making decisions about teacher promotion, tenure, and recruitment policies.

 Table 1. Four types of content coverage and teacher

 expressiveness

|                                  | Rich Content<br>Coverage | Poor Content<br>Coverage   |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Strong Teacher<br>Expressiveness | Type A                   | Type C (Dr. Fox<br>Effect) |
| Weak Teacher<br>Expressiveness   | Туре В                   | Type D                     |

#### References

1. Ahmady S, Changiz T, Brommels M, et al. Contextual adaptation of the personnel evaluation standards for assessing faculty evaluation systems in developing countries: The case of Iran. BMC Medical Education. 2009; 9(1): 1-10.

#### [https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6920-9-18]

- 2. Almutairi T, Tymms P, Kind P, editors. The tools of teacher evaluation: what should be used in teacher evaluation from the teachers' perspective. 2015 international business and education conferences proceedings; 2015: The Clute Institute.
- 3. Hatfield CL, Coyle EA. Factors that influence student completion of course and faculty evaluations.

- American journal of pharmaceutical education. 2013; 77(2). [https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe77227].
- 4. Hornstein HA. Student evaluations of teaching are an inadequate assessment tool for evaluating faculty performance. Cogent Education. 2017; 4(1): 1304016. [https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2017.1304016]
- 5. Tran TTT, Do TX. Student evaluation of teaching: do teacher age, seniority, gender, and qualification matter? Educational Studies. 2020: 1-28. [https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2020.1771545]
- 6. Liu S, Teddlie C. A follow-up study on teacher evaluation in China: Historical analysis and latest trends. Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education. 2005; 18(4): 253-72.

## [https://doi.org/10.1007/s11092-007-9029-4].

- 7. Salih ARA. Peer evaluation of teaching or" fear" evaluation: in search of compatibility. Higher Education Studies. 2013; 3(2): 102-14. [https://doi.org/ 10.5539/hes.v3n2p102].
- 8. Thampy H, Bourke M, Naran P. Peer-supported review of teaching: an evaluation. Education for Primary care. 2015; 26(5): 306-10. [https://doi.org/10.1080/14739879.2015.1079020].
- 9. Naftulin DH, Ware Jr JE, Donnelly FA. A paradigm of educational seduction. Journal of Medical Education. 1973; 48(7): 630-35.

# [https://doi.org/ 10.1097/00001888-197307000-00003]

10. Meier RS, Feldhusen JF. Another look at Dr. Fox: Effect of stated purpose for evaluation, lecturer expressiveness, and density of lecture content on student ratings. Journal of Educational Psychology. 1979; 71(3): 339.

# [https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.71.3.339]

11. Ware Jr JE, Williams RG. Discriminant analysis of student ratings as a means for identifying lecturers who differ in enthusiasm or information-giving. Educational and Psychological Measurement. 1977; 37(3): 627-39.

# [https://doi.org/10.1177/001316447703700306].

12. Williams RG, Ware JE. Validity of student ratings of instruction under different incentive conditions: A further study of the Dr. Fox effect. Journal of Educational Psychology. 1976; 68(1): 48. [https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.68.1.48].