

Original Article

An exemplar university professor from students' perspective in Tehran University of Medical Sciences: A qualitative studyMohammad Ali Cheraghi¹, Shahrzad Ghiyasvandian^{2*}, Maryam Esmaeili³¹ Department of Critical Care, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Tehran University of Medical Sciences AND Nursing Care Research Center, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran² Department of Medical Surgical, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran³ School of Nursing and Midwifery, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

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ABSTRACT

Background & Aim: Universities should play an important role in education commensurate with the expectations of stakeholders and of the community as well. The university professors and teachers have critical positions in education. This research aimed to explore the perspective of students in Tehran University of Medical Sciences (TUMS) about characteristics of a model teacher.

Methods & Materials: Inductive qualitative content analysis was used to explore students' perspective based on naturalistic philosophy. The participants in this study were 19 students who were enrolled in various courses at TUMS. To collect data, semi-structured in-depth individual interviews were used. Findings were analyzed using conventional content analysis approach.

Results: The results of the study led to the identification of three main themes: teacher's science, moral imperatives in education, and communication with students. The first and third theme had a subtheme called science and oration and flexibility of classroom atmosphere.

Conclusion: Based on the findings of the present study, it can be concluded that students observe all characteristics of teachers. Hence, university professors and teachers not only are responsible for educating students through teaching skills, but also impact students' thoughts and lifestyle through their moral characters and personality and play an important role in the educating future generations.

Introduction

Higher education institutes and universities are responsible for different roles and tasks, but most experts have highlighted three primary roles for universities that include education, research, and services (1, 2). In other words, education consists of basic efforts to empower people with knowledge in order to prepare them for future and to provide an infrastructure for lifestyle in human society (3). In addition, universi-

ty is considered as one of the most important environments for learning and gaining education. In fact, universities play an important role in providing training services, which suits the expectations of society and consequently in producing educational services. In this regard, teachers play an important role in students' learning and obtaining academic achievements. Effective learning is greatly dependent on the teachers and their actions in the classroom (4). Teachers are particularly important in cycle of teaching-learning activities. Teachers should be able to educate capable workforce in all aspects of knowledge, attitude, and skill. To reach this goal, they must have some criteria to be able to meet systematic (university) expectations and

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meta-systematic (society) expectations, as well. Thus, each of the meta-system and system stakeholders has expectations. Moreover, they provide meeting their expectations through a well-defined set of criteria. The literature review shows that teachers should have the highest standards in education, research and management (5-7). Similarly, one of the most basic and the most important beneficiaries of teachers are students who have expectations of the faculty with determined criteria. A review of the literature shows that in addition to knowledge, the teacher's personality, as well as their behavior is important for students because experiencing the proper pattern of behavior is an incentive for educating students. Furthermore, student-teacher communication affects students' attitudes (8). Studies have reported different views on the characteristics of a model teacher such as teaching skills, teacher-student communication, teacher's characteristics and their outward features (3, 6, 9). Several quantitative studies have been conducted on the characteristics of a model teacher which pointed out teacher's mastery over course content, their general knowledge and their teaching skills (10-12). It seems that the demands and expectations of students from teacher are changing with regard to age and educational condition. Thus, obtaining perspective and perceptions of students may lead to developing considerable data. Therefore, this study aimed to clarify the standard characteristics of a model teacher from the view of students of Tehran University of Medical Sciences (TUMS).

Methods

This qualitative descriptive research used content analysis approach to identify and describe the characteristics of a model teacher from students' perspective at TUMS.

The participants of this study were 19 students (12 females and 7 males) who were studying at various disciplines at TUMS. All participants were selected through convenience sampling. Thus, the researcher interviewed the students who were willing to participate in the study. In order to achieve maximum variation,

samples were selected from different academic disciplines, and from both genders.

Data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews which were performed face-to-face and individually. Interviews lasted an average of 40 min and were held at participants' schools. Main interview questions were as follows: "Please give an example of your experiences about dealing with a model teacher"; "In your experience, what are the most important characteristics of a model teacher?"; and "In your opinion, who is a model teacher?" In addition, probing questions were used in case more clarification and resolution of study subjects were needed. The literature review was helpful in the selection of interview questions.

Approval to conduct this study was granted by the Ethic Committee of TUMS of Iran. Goals and methodology of the study were explained to the students. Furthermore, they were informed that participation in the study is voluntary and they could withdraw at any time and their confidentiality would be maintained. To record interviews, permission was taken from the students. They were insured that their responses would remain confidential. In the end, those students who were inclined to participate signed a contestation form.

Content analysis approach was used to analyze the data. In fact, qualitative content analysis is used for analyzing textual data (classification of words in this text) to deal with the subject in the natural context based on naturalism (13). To analyze the data, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and then read several times to gain a general impression. The resulting text from the interviews was divided into meaning units, which were then condensed, abstracted, coded, and labeled. These codes were then arranged into themes and subthemes according to their similarities and differences. Based on the similarities and differences between initial codes, the categories and then the themes constant comparative analysis of the study were achieved. In this study, the third author performed the data coding, and all co-authors supervised the coding process. In the event of a disagreement over the coding, the authors nego-

tiated and discussed the codes until a consensus was achieved.

Similar to other qualitative approaches, content analysis finding should be as trustworthy as possible, and every study must be evaluated in relation to the procedures used to generate the findings (14). Peer checking was done to confirm the credibility of the data analysis. Data were coded and categorized independently by authors and analyzed themes were compared. Peer checking is using colleagues' experiences and opinions during data analyses (15). In disagreement situations, discussion and clarifications continued until a consensus was achieved. In addition, the participants were also contacted after the analysis was completed to verify the interpretations of researchers. For the dependability of the data an audit trail was maintained from the initial data collection through the determination of categories.

Results

Findings of this research were the result of interviews and their analysis until data saturation. There were 475 initial code. To obtain rich information, 19 students of TUMS (12 female and 7 male students) enrolling in different disciplines of medical sciences (nursing, midwifery, medicine, pharmacy, toxicology, and rehabilitation) were interviewed. Participants' demographics are shown in Table 1. Three themes were derived from the data analysis as following: scientificity, moral imperatives in education, and teacher–student communication (Table 2). In the following, each theme that is associated with quotes from participants is represented.

Teacher's scientificity

Participants in this study paid attention to teachers' knowledge and scientificity in the teaching process. Moreover, they mentioned up-to-date knowledge as a feature of a model teacher. In fact, teacher's knowledge is a key factor in answering questions posed by the students. In addition, students suggested that they were aware of teacher's efforts for providing up-to-date information and that they noticed this fact from the first sessions.

"I think teacher's knowledge is very important. Teacher should have enough knowledge to answer any question or to help students." (Nursing student, Semester 6).

"We have a teacher that says she sleeps at 9 pm and wakes up 3 am to prepare the lesson or says that she reads new subjects today and she tells us about them or says that from this issue I figured this out, well ... it can be easily understood from what she says. As soon as the teacher walks in the class and open her mouth, students will understand what's going on." (Midwifery student, Semester 5).

Table 1. Participants demographic characteristics

Demographic characteristics	N (%)
Sex	
Female	12 (63.15)
Male	7 (36.84)
Field of study	
Nursing and midwifery	4 (21.05)
Medicine	4 (21.05)
Pharmacy	3 (15.78)
Dental	3 (15.78)
Rehabilitation	3 (15.78)
Basic sciences	2 (10.52)
Age (mean ± SD)	21.7 ± 0.9

SD: Standard deviation

Science and oration

According to participating students, teacher's erudition and up-to-date knowledge is not enough. They believed that the power of speech and ability to convey content to students are characteristics of a model teacher. Some students mentioned the presence of prominent teachers in the class who were not able to convey the lesson to students although they were highly educated/knowledgeable. In fact, students considered teacher's mastery, which accompanies with oration as an important factor. On the oration of teachers, a pharmacy student of the 6th Semester said:

"I think teachers should have teaching talent. We have professors with great knowledge but they do not have the power to lecture, well then, they can go through research or do other things."

Table 2. Themes and subthemes of students' perspective from an exemplar university professors

Theme	Subtheme
Teacher scientificity	Science and oration
Moral imperatives	-
Communication and interaction with students	Flexibility of class atmosphere

Another participant, emphasizing the power of speech, put the focus on teaching conceptually and stated:

"In my opinion, a model teacher is the one who has speech power. I mean he should have the power to illustrate the case he had seen in the hospital for us or teach in a conceptual way in order to make me as a student understand that lesson not just memorize it." (Medical student, Semester 8).

Teaching in a way that can be understood for everyone is described as a good characteristic:

"In such lessons that should be understood as well as memorized, you should understand it first to be able to memorize it. In this kind of lessons, a teacher that has the power of speech can represent herself. I mean, literacy is not that important, even if she had studied in Tehran or in the UK, the degree is not the matter. It is important to have power of speech. I mean she should teach in a way that everyone understands." (Midwifery student, Semester 4).

Moral imperatives in education

Some participants highlighted the importance of ethics in education and mentioned a teacher's morality as one of the characteristics of a model teacher. Considering ethics in answering students' questions, speaking nicely, avoiding wasting students' time, and respecting students' personality are examples of ethics in teaching.

"Classes should be stress-free to make it possible for me as a student to talk without stress and simply ask my question. It often happens that you don't dare to ask a question. When you ask a question, the teacher makes fun of you: 'Is your knowledge that little to ask a question like this?'" (Nursing student, Semester 2).

Students pointed out tolerance and openness as morals of a teacher. In this regard, to some students, observing some of the essence of the moral is superior to any other characteristic.

A medical student of the 7th Semester expressed about accepting students in answering questions by one of his model teachers:

"On the other hand, he accepts the questions from students; he doesn't answer it with another question. When a student asks a question, he doesn't say go ask other students because a student asks a question when he and his friends really couldn't reach the answer."

Another factor that was mentioned by students was teacher's attention to questions and answering them correctly. In fact, students expect a model teacher not to make fun of their questions and respond them with respect and courtesy. In fact, they believed that not answering students' questions are a kind of disrespecting. To them, a model teacher is the one who develops confidence followed by creativity in students. In this case, a nursing student of 3rd Semester stated:

"For example, when we ask a question, [you should know] we were all first-semester students. Clearly, you should consider us as a first-semester student. For instance, when we asked a question he humiliated us in front of others, he humiliated boys and girls in front of each other, and this was too bad."

According to our participants, respecting students' personality by paying attention and understanding him, respecting time of the class and time of the students and supporting students are moral characteristics of a model teacher. In fact, to students, a teacher who is of high academic degree but does not consider students, class, and request of students is not a model teacher.

"We had a professor who valued his class so much. Well, some teachers didn't even come to class after passing half an hour of class time. When the teacher doesn't care about his class, how could he expect students to attend his class enthusiastically. That certain teacher always came on time, left on time and he was so strict about his class. He asked us to respect the class as he did and to respect the presence of one another as well." (Nursing student, Semester 5).

"Some of our teachers are of high academic levels, they respect students too much. For example, when a student comes in the class, he just stands up. Moreover, he is so strict about his

meetings with students. If he says he will come to a certain class at a certain time, he always comes on time.” (Student of toxicology, Semester 8).

According to students, the moral characteristics of a teacher play an important role in making them a model teacher in educational environments. They observe his behavior and apply it as a reasonable pattern in their lifestyle.

“In semester 3, we had a teacher who was really perfect. His teaching, his behaving with students was great. He respected all students and students respected him, too. I never forget him and always try to be just like him. He was a great model for me.” (Midwifery student, Semester 6).

Communication and interaction with students

One of the characteristics, which were mentioned by students several times as a characteristic of a model teacher, was friendly communication and interaction with students. In other words, while entering class, greeting students, knowing them, answering their questions, and guiding them are indicators of communicating with students and are good behavior of teachers. In their opinion, a teacher who just enters the class just to teach the targeted content and leaves class without any familiarity or interaction with students could not be a model teacher.

“Now, we have a teacher that all students like. He becomes a model teacher because of his good communication with students, he talks to students and even answers our questions that are out of the subject lesson; he even talks to us individually. This is the characteristic of a good teacher.” (Midwifery student, Semester 4).

About teacher–student communication and interaction, one of the second term students of pharmacy stated:

“If we want to consider this issue at university setting, it is better to use teachers who have more communication with students not to shock students when entering the university.”

Through the process of teacher–student communication a number of students mentioned non-academic education by teachers during break times. Actually, they believed that teaching life skills and knowledge is important. To them, teachers have an important role in this regard as educational models for students.

“Our teacher brings some articles about life skills to class and reads it; actually he teaches students how to live. During short breaks, he reads us things that are so effective.” (Nursing student, Semester 4).

Flexibility of class atmosphere

Students participating in the study mentioned creating an intimate atmosphere, filled with vitality by model teachers. In other words, they believed that despite the need for a disciplined framework for class, a model teacher should be flexible and should prevent from students’ boredom. They thought that engaging students in a classroom, in answering questions and giving opportunities for short breaks between classes are such instances that help creating a happy and friendly atmosphere.

About the atmosphere of the class, one nursing student of 3rd Semester said:

“His class was so boring and we weren’t allowed to even move or laugh. In my opinion, a class needs flexibility as well as management which makes students relax in the class and not to think that there is an obligation which makes them reluctant.”

“I think the class should not be so monotonous and dull, now we have some classes that we easily sleep. Class must be made in a way that students can participate. I mean, it should be in a way that we participate in the class, too.” (Physiotherapy student, Semester 6).

From students’ perspective, a model teacher is the one who is not too proud of himself and who is able to understand students. According to them, teacher’s pride is a barrier to class flexibility and a factor that increases stress and anxiety in the class. They demonstrated a proud teacher the one who does not understand students’ condition and distances himself from students.

“Last semester, I had a teacher that I really hated his course. I studied that lesson with too much stress, a lesson which was so easy but I sat in the class full of stress because the teacher was so arrogant.” (Nursing student, Semester 2).

A medical student of the 2nd Semester stated that:

“A model teacher should not be so haughty; he should remember that sometimes in the past he

was a student of semester two. For example, when a question is being asked, you shouldn't humiliate anyone. Everyone has his own personality."

Discussion

The first theme reflects points about a model teacher that were mentioned by students such as: high academic level of the teacher, teacher's mastery over the course content, and paying attention to questions asked by students. According to them, high scientific level of teachers makes it possible to answer questions. Jang et al. (2009) in their study found that rich knowledge and scientificity of teachers is one of the important factors in students' evaluation of teachers (16). Teacher's mastery over course content, which stems from his sufficient up-to-date knowledge, is a factor that has been studied in several researches. In this regard, many researches expressed mastery and knowledge of a teacher over the course content as the most important characteristic of a model teacher (17-19). In addition, Salme et al. (2003), in a study about characteristics of an ideal teacher based on professional competence, emphasized mastery on the subject as a characteristic of an ideal teacher (20). Furthermore, Mazloomi Mahmood Abad et al. (2008) introduced teacher's knowledge about the targeted subject as one of the important issues in teaching (21). Moreover, results of previous studies (2001) showed that power of speech and ability to answer questions of students are the most important characteristic of a capable teacher (22). According to the findings of the present research, scientific information of the teacher, introducing new and up-to-date information and ability to convey information to students were important factors in quality of education (11).

The second and third themes demonstrate moral characteristics of a model teacher that were expressed by students such as dealing respectfully with students and avoid wasting their time. Furthermore, they considered flexibility of class atmosphere and avoiding harsh behaviors. In a study of Sahenk (2010) about the characteristics of an effective teacher in creating a good learning environment, it was demonstrated that communication associated with good behavior is

of characteristics of a model teacher (3). A teacher who has a friendly behavior with students and who applies positive relationship approaches and respects each student highly motivates students to participate (23). A friendly relationship and a good and supportive behavior with students enhances their motivation, their work in the classroom, increases criticism acceptance, better adaptation to stress and paying more attention to the educational content presented by the teacher (24). Emotional support and academic guidance have an important role in increasing academic achievements (25). In addition, the teacher-student relationship protects students from inappropriate professional and academic behaviors (21, 26). Therefore, researches have known interventions focusing on developing academic achievements of students based on developing teacher-student relationship. The results of Ghadami et al. study (2007) showed that building a relationship between teacher and student, teaching rhetorical skills and observing teaching skills, teacher's behavior, his educational level, ability to empathize, solving problems, motivating students and teacher's experience played important roles (27). In addition, the results Dargahi et al. study (2010) on exploring characteristics of a capable teacher for effective teaching indicated a mentioned characteristic by students as following: maintaining dignity and respect for students (28). It should be noticed that firmness and seriousness in handling the class were less important. In the present research, determination and austerity of the teacher cause the students to avoid the teacher and become reluctant toward the course instead of interesting students. Therefore, students know flexibility of class environment an important criterion (24, 29). The results of the study of Zhang (2009) in Hong Kong showed that teaching style of the teacher in class plays an important role in creating an appropriate educational environment. In addition, applying new approaches that suit the class condition could be effective in flexibility of class atmosphere (9).

Conclusion

There is no doubt that fundamental lasting

changes in any society depends on its educational system revolution. The focus of the development and revolution of the educational system is to improve the quality of teachers' work, knowing them and their characteristics, as well. Based on the findings of the present research, it can be observed that students observe all characteristics of teachers regularly. Hence, teachers not only are responsible for educating students by means of teaching skills, but also impact students' thoughts and lifestyle through their moral characters and personality. These play an important role in educating the future generation. One of the limitations of the study was interviewing students of one site, which reduces generalization of the findings. Although the main objective of qualitative research is not to generalize the findings of the study, interviews with non-medical students or other university students could disclose their views. Further study from teacher's perspective about characteristics of a model teacher is recommended.

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