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Educational Article

Shifting from traditional lecturing to interactive learning in Saudi dental schools: How important is staff development?



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المخلص

أهداف البحث: يشكل تطوير قدرات أعضاء هيئة التدريس أحد أهم التحديات عند التخطيط لإدخال أساليب تعليمية جديدة على المناهج الدراسية. وف هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على آراء وردود أفعال أعضاء هيئة التدريس بكلية طب الأسنان حول ورشة عمل عن التعليم التفاعلي، والتأكد من فائدة إجراء مثل هذه الورشة قبيل تنفيذ أساليب تعليمية حديثة في تعزيز الوعي، وتحفيز المشاركين على تطبيق تلك الأساليب.

طرق البحث: تم إعداد ورشة عمل مكثفة تعنى بطرق التعليم التفاعلية لأعضاء هيئة التدريس بكلية طب الأسنان، بجامعة طبية في المدينة المنورة، وذلك في شهر نوفمبر من العام ٢٠١٤م. وشملت الورشة التعرف على مبادئ طريقة القاعة الدراسية المعكوسة، والتعليم المعتمد على حل المشكلات. كما تخلل الورشة تمارين محاكاة لمحاضرات دراسية فعلية باستخدام هذه الأساليب التعليمية الحديثة وفي نهاية الورشة، طلب من المشاركين تعبئة استبانة خاصة تم توزيعها إلكترونياً. وشملت الاستبانة أسئلة مغلقة وأخرى تسمح بالإجابات المفتوحة.

النتائج: اعتقد ٨٩٪ من أصل ٢٧ مشاركاً أن ورشة العمل كانت تجربة مفيدة بشكل عام ($p > 0.01$). وبالمثل فقد كانت الردود المتعلقة بأهمية، وشمولية، وسهولة الورشة إيجابية بالعموم. وأظهر المشاركون استمتاعهم بالمشاركة والتفاعل في أنشطة الورشة، إلى جانب ذلك، أصبح الحضور أكثر معرفة بالأساليب التعليمية الحديثة ومع ذلك، فقد عبّر بعض المشاركين عن مخاوفهم من إمكانية تطبيق هذه الأساليب التفاعلية على أرض الواقع، وذلك بسبب ضيق الوقت المخصص للمحاضرات الدراسية.

الاستنتاجات: أظهر أعضاء هيئة التدريس بكلية طب الأسنان بجامعة طبية ردود فعل إيجابية، فيما يتعلق بورشة عمل التعليم التفاعلي. كما ارتفع وعيهم بالمبادئ الخاصة بأساليب هذا النوع من التعليم. ولكن لوحظ كذلك قلق بعض المشاركين من القدرة على تطبيق تلك الأساليب على أرض الواقع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تعليم طب الأسنان؛ التعليم المعتمد على حل المشكلات؛ المملكة العربية السعودية؛ تطوير أعضاء هيئة التدريس؛ التعليم.

Abstract

Objectives: Staff development is one of the main challenges when planning to introduce new educational methods into existing curricula. The aim of this study was to ascertain whether conducting a workshop prior to the implementation of new educational methods would help to enhance the participants' awareness of new educational strategies and motivate them to use those strategies.

Methods: A comprehensive workshop was developed and delivered to staff members at the Taibah University College of Dentistry, Almadinah Almunawwarah, KSA, during November 2014. The workshop explained the concepts of the flipped classroom and problem-based learning methods and provided exercises and simulation of actual classroom sessions. A questionnaire including closed- and open-ended questions was electronically distributed to participants after the workshop.

Results: Of the 27 participants, 89% thought that the workshop was a useful experience ($p < 0.01$). Similarly, responses to questions concerning the relevance, comprehensiveness and ease of the workshop were

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generally positive. The staff was now aware of these new methods and enjoyed the participation and interaction the workshop provided. However, concerns arose about the applicability of the proposed methods in real-life settings. This was mainly attributed to time constraints.

Conclusion: Dental staff at Taibah University gave positive feedback about the workshop on interactive learning. Although staff awareness of the concepts was increased, scepticism and concerns related to the applicability of interactive learning methods to real-life settings were noted.

Keywords: Dental education; Problem-based learning; Saudi Arabia; Staff development; Teaching

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Introduction

Dental education requires the acquisition of a certain amount of knowledge and skills. Traditional lecturing has been criticized for not being able to hold student's (or learner's) attention throughout teaching sessions and has been associated with relatively low grades and reduced attendance rates.¹ The implementation of interactive learning is well documented in dental curricula worldwide.² Many benefits of this type of learning strategy have been proposed, including but not limited to, the development of problem-solving skills, the promotion of life-long learning and attention to some of the disadvantages of the traditional method.^{3–5}

Several challenges may arise during attempts to shift the teaching/learning method from traditional lecturing to a more interactive learning style. Challenges can be related to the organization, resources, staff and/or the students. As consistently demonstrated, staff development forms an important and integral part of any project that concerns the educational process.⁶ In a study involving 56 North American Dental School deans, 88% considered faculty development to be the most important resource needed to support reforms and changes in educational strategies.⁷ However, the majority of available reports concentrate on educational effectiveness and challenges from the students' perspective.^{1,8} Reports related to challenges facing staff members and their perception regarding the paradigm shift from traditional to interactive learning are relatively rare.^{9,10}

The administration at Taibah University in Madinah, Saudi Arabia has been directing its efforts towards implementing more interactive learning methods in the various colleges, attempting to follow an emerging trend in universities across Saudi Arabia.^{11,12} The majority of courses included in the Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) program are conducted in a traditional manner, with lectures being the primary mode for delivering scientific content. The Academic Affairs Vice-deanship at the Taibah University

College of Dentistry (TUCOD) has recently begun to promote the gradual incorporation of interactive learning methods, such as the flipped classroom¹³ and problem-based learning (PBL),⁵ into the various courses. To initiate the process, the Academic Affairs Vice-deanship designated a number of target areas to be addressed: staff development, student orientation and adequacy of the learning environment and resources. In the final years of the BDS program, two of the currently running courses are already using some form of interactive learning, specifically problem-based learning. However, no form of staff training or formal student orientation has been carried out in advance. The aim of this report is to briefly describe the perceptions of the TUCOD staff regarding a workshop on interactive learning, which was conducted as an initial step in staff development prior to the introduction of interactive learning in the dental curriculum.

Rationale

Introducing and clarifying the concept of interactive learning to staff members will promote their active participation in the development of an interactive curriculum and appropriate methods of assessment and feedback and will decrease overall resistance to the change associated with the introduction of new methods of teaching and learning.

Materials and Methods

Staff members at Taibah University College of Dentistry (TUCOD), Madinah, Saudi Arabia were invited to participate in this study. Participation was open to staff members who were serving as coordinators for courses in any level within the BDS program. Approximately 45 courses are offered by the seven departments at TUCOD, with 49 assigned course coordinators. Some staff members are listed as coordinators for more than one course.

Staff members who accepted the invitation attended a staff development workshop on interactive learning, and subsequent questionnaires were administered to gain insights into their perceptions of the subject and workshop.

The staff development workshop was conducted at the University Conference and Exhibition Centre in the first semester of the 2014–2015 academic year (in November 2014). The 5-h workshop focused on interactive learning methods, particularly on flipped classroom and PBL. The first half of the workshop started with an introductory presentation on interactive learning and problem-based learning, which provided a brief overview of the methods and their benefits. The introduction was followed by a description of the origins and logistics of the flipped classroom method. A simulation exercise of the flipped classroom was performed by providing a previously selected neutral topic and motivating the staff members to interact with each other through peer instruction.¹⁴ The second half of the workshop focused on PBL in two parts. Part 1 consisted of a simulation of a PBL session. A case scenario was used in which all but one of the staff members played the role of active learners; the remaining staff member's role was to facilitate the session. Part 2 consisted of an exercise in which the staff members were asked to develop a case scenario for a PBL session.

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