



MEDICAL TEACHER'S WORKLOAD AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENTS LEARNING: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Background: Teaching in medical education is considered as one of exigent task, while teaching in medical and allied health institutions the teachers are expected to use innovative and contemporary instructional strategies in order to excel the capacities of students in their education.

Aim: To determine the perspectives of medical teachers regarding their workload and its impact on the students learning.

Material and methods: A qualitative case study design was used to explore the perceptions of medical teachers regarding their workload and its impact on students learning. A tentative sample of 12 teachers from 03 of the constituents' institutes in one of the Medical University of Peshawar was taken, while further 18 students were interviewed in 3-FGDs sessions. Data was examined through thematic analysis for its construal, description and presentation.

Results: The overall findings of the study concluded that majority of the teachers were overstrained in their work. The workload of the teachers was determined as expressively high and was found to affect the overall quality of learning with both the perspectives of teachers and students. While a very minor fraction of the participants considered that it was reasonable among teachers to carry on with the responsibilities and academic activities appropriately.

Conclusion: The findings of the study revealed that workload among medical teachers is a stern and serious concern and has far distressing and demoralizing effects on the students learning and performance. Therefore a mechanism of strategies needs to be planned by the institutions to keep the teachers in a reasonable and rationale meadow to cope up with their work and obligations.

Keywords: Medical Education, Workload, Teachers, Students, Impact, Learning

INTRODUCTION

Workload has been observed as a copiously discussed concern among teachers in educational organizations around the world.⁽¹⁾ Teaching has various paradigms in educational institutions according to the level of schooling and education however reflecting the medical education, workload becomes more of arguable and cast-iron concept when looks into its perspective, circumstances and nature.⁽²⁾

Teaching in medical education is considered as one of exigent task that is not only confined to the classrooms teaching but it also covers an extensive series of using to instruct, supervise and train the students in their research work, laboratories and clinical settings.⁽³⁻⁴⁾ While teaching in medical and allied health institutions the teachers are expected to use innovative and contemporary instructional strategies in order to excel the capacities of students in their education. The aim of using such loom and strategies by the teachers is to shape a consistent society of health care professionals for a better tomorrow and robust production of students. All this could only be possible if the teachers would keep a balance in their work.⁽⁵⁻⁷⁾

Teaching and clinical supervision has been an issue among students in health institutions since long due shortage of faculty and staff. Because of this scarcity, the teaching faculties are getting overburdened in their work that does not affect only the quality of their teaching, supervision and assistance but it also affects student's knowledge, skills and learning capacities.⁽⁸⁻⁹⁾ High workload among teachers may induce to certain effects in terms of even their own personal, professional and social spheres therefore careful delineation of educational workload is needed to foster and reward teaching efforts that in response would help to promote quality in the regulation of learning and academic performance of the students.⁽¹⁰⁻¹²⁾

Medical teachers are not only curbed to teach but they are also supposed to perform various other responsibilities of research supervision, administration and management.⁽¹³⁾ In addition to their teaching roles in different capacities; all these added obligations and errands further make them over influenced and overloaded in their work and duties.⁽¹⁴⁾ This nature of responsibilities and accountability has been explained by certain literature in terms of having an nonconstructive impact of students learning and performance in medical education.⁽¹⁵⁾ This workload is attributed to certain factors including number of the subjects assigned, increased number of students, shortage of teachers, having no mechanisms of retaining the qualified teachers, lack of remuneration, lack of teaching facilities, multiple teaching assignments, lack of non-teaching staff, performing administrative and non-administrative roles.⁽¹⁶⁻¹⁷⁾ Literature has categorized these factors as; learners related factors, teachers' related factors, educational process related factors, inadequate facility factors, and inconsistent administrative assessments as challenges that contribute to increased workload among the teaching cadre employees.⁽¹⁸⁻²⁰⁾

Certain of the studies reflect the perceptions that teachers who come across the problems of workload are not well organized and efficient in their teaching process that leads to poor academic learning and performance among the students⁽²¹⁻²²⁾. Literature further shows that workload among teacher has a direct effect on the students' knowledge, skills, behaviors, learning and academic performance however this phenomenon has not been researched yet in its real essence.⁽²³⁾ Furthermore; the problem of workload among teachers may influence students and they find it difficult to cover their required studies and work well in time. Which does not only affect their course work to be completed

in its framed schedule but it also affects their physical and mental health drastically. They are prone to weight loss, HTN, gastrointestinal complaints, poor eating habits, burnout, insomnia, depression, decreased motivation, lack of concentration and sometimes suicidal tendencies as consequences of academic stress and workload.⁽²⁴⁻²⁵⁾

The inclination and trends are shifting to the evidenced based practices and research in health professions education in order to bring vivacity in the teaching practices as well as learning among the students. The utilization of effective teaching approaches plays a significant and of the essence role in medical education. Therefore, it is concluded that the learning of students could be excelled enormously by operating and inculcating the best possible teaching as well as other obligatory strategies according to the required need and relevant context of the students.⁽²⁶⁾

Teachers in health professions education could be prepared in a way to manage with their workload and to bring excellence in learning among the students. Highly primed and learned students could be prepared by the application of effective strategies in teaching process by the execution of keeping firmness and balance in the workload among medical teachers in health care educational institutions.⁽²⁷⁾

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case study approach was designed to conduct the study in the three constituent institutes of Khyber medical university Peshawar. The sample was taken through convenience sampling technique. A tentative sample of 12 participants was taken however 11 interviews were conducted based on the data saturation achieved. Data was collected after the approval of Ethical Review Committee, Advanced Research Board and the Directors of the concerned departments. Semi structured interviews were carried out to collect the required information. 15 to 30 minutes time was allocated to each of the individual interviews. To get the perspectives of the students regarding their teachers' workload and its impact on their own learning; 18 of the students were interviewed in 3 Focused Group Discussions format. Around 30-60 minutes time was framed to conduct the FGDs. Students were taken from those classes where the above mentioned teachers were involved in their teaching practices and supervision. Proper informed consent was taken and all ethical considerations were taken care during the process of data collection. All the study participants were conveniently selected based on certain inclusion and exclusion criteria. Teachers who taught undergraduate students in classrooms, laboratories and clinical settings were included in the study and those who were not involved directly in teaching and were working at administrative positions were excluded. Data was examined through thematic analysis for its construal, description and presentation. Braun and Clark framework of thematic analysis approach was followed which is comprised of knowing your data, determining the initial codes, finding the themes, analyzing the themes, explain the themes and writing the findings. Furthermore; Lincoln and Guba criteria was followed throughout the process of data collection and analysis to maintain rigor, excellence and quality in information.

RESULTS

Total (n=11) of the teachers were interviewed with a distribution of 72.72 % males and (27.28 %) females teachers working at various positions of assistant professors, lectures and demonstrators. Majority (54.55 %) of them were having age above than 30 years. Around (37%) were married in their marital status. Only 18.18 % of the participants claimed that they had attended some kinds of session on workload management while rest of the (81.82%) of them had no exposure to any training in this regard. Furthermore; 3-focused group discussion were conducted. Each group had 06 participants including both the male and female students. Total 11 male and 07 female students participated in the focused group discussions from the 3rd year classes of their study programs.

Thematic analysis was carried out to derive the major themes after having a comprehensive construal of the collected data through semi structure interviews among the teachers. Around 22 categories

were extracted from the data in the process of open coding. These categories were classified in five major themes including; perception regarding current workload, perspective on reasons of high workload, effects of workload on teachers, perceived impact of workload on students learning and workload management.

Thematic Analysis 1: Teachers perspective on their learning

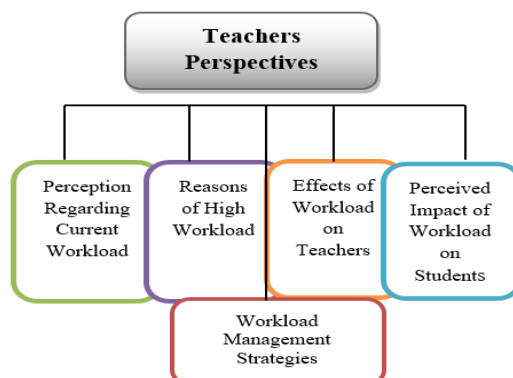


Figure 1 (Main theme 1): Current Workload Perceptions of teachers

Theme-1: Current Workload Perceptions

Following categories were derived based on the participant quotes and reflection regarding their current workload

Subjects Assignment

“I get assigned with more than three subjects in a semester that sometime are not linked to my interest area and I need to cover it in a 4 to 5 months’ time span. (P2)”

“Every time, I find a new subject to teach which doesn't suit and possible for me to prepare the lectures well in time with all the new contents and assignments. (P3)”

Prolong Teaching hours

....It's difficult for me sometimes to take two classes each of 03 hours on daily basis the whole week. (P1)”

Supervision in Limited Resources

...Sometime I supervise around more than 50 students with one anesthesia machine that overloaded me in my work (P-6)

“We do not have sufficient supplies in labs to entertain all students at once therefore we make their groups and give more time to them to teach their skills.(P-7/11)”

Shortage of Faculty Members

We have shortage of faculty and because of this shortage we are supposed to supervise 50 to 100 students in the specified two days times at their clinical which become difficult for us to supervise all the skills of the students. (P-4 & P-9)

Research Work & Administrative Tasks

Apart from taking classes I am signed to supervise for their research at both graduate and post graduate level students (P-6) Its becomes difficult for me sometimes to carry out with the non-teaching tasks e.g. Doing scrutiny in admission process, meetings and preparing for extracurricular activities (P-10)

Theme-2: Reasons of High Workload

Managing Increased Number of Students

It is expected from each of the teacher to train more than 100 students' which is manageable to some extent in classroom however logically it becomes almost difficult for us to train them in labs and at clinical side in its real essence. (P11)

Increased Number of Teaching Tasks

Preferably one task at a time is carried out effectively by a teacher however we are expected to teach the students in all the three areas of learning include in classes, laboratories and bed side capacities. Further we are expected to supervise research studies of the student. (P10)

Evaluation/Conducting Frequent Exams

Apart from teaching it is the assigned duty of a teacher to make papers and to conduct various exams to evaluate the course assignments and students' academic performance. (P-8)

Non-Teaching Tasks Assignment

We are also assigned in different administrative committees including admission committees, discipline, clinical, internship and scrutiny committees to add us for additional responsibilities in continuation of our teaching practices. (P-5)

Theme-3: Workload Effects on Teachers

Impact on Professional Career

"I do not get sufficient time even to think for my own professional growth, career and development because of the heavy workload of teaching and non-teaching tasks assigned to us at my department." (P-3)

Effects on Teaching and Supervision

"Teaching many students in scarce resources is an issue that needs to be addressed properly as it influences the teaching and supervising skills of a teacher towards the production of quality graduates" (P-5)

Effects on Personal and Social Life

To fulfill the objectives of the students we give an extra time to prepare lectures and check the assignment at home that does not only affect our health as well as it puts some depressing effects on our personal and social life. (P-4)

Theme-4: Impact on Students Learning

Effects on Students Cognitive Abilities

"I think as a teacher we cannot give quality time to the students for enhancing their analytical capacities because of the workload issue and the conventional practices just to cover the syllabus on time"(P-5)

Impact on Psychomotor Skills

Due to faculty shortage, supervision of more than 50 students in labs and clinical setting on regular basis is impractical for one teacher that does not only overburden the teacher as well as it affects the training of the students for their skills. (P-10)

Students Professionalism

"We try to inculcate knowledge and the professional attributes and to prepare the students in the available resources however when they don't get enough time and facilitation they detract and lose their motivation, interest in their learning and practices" (P-11)

Theme-5: Workload Management

Work for Additional Hours

"I prepare the lectures and teaching materials at home and spend time at my office other than the working hours to complete my tasks timely" (P-6)

Taking Help of Other Faculty Members

"It is challenging to supervise every student individually in lab and bed side teaching therefore we divide students in groups and assigned them either with other colleague teachers or with the senior staff working in hospitals" (P-8)

Appropriate Instructional Strategies

"I try to use multiple teaching strategies as per the students need however I mainly focus to prepare slides that help to cover the whole unit in one session" (P-5)

Students Perspectives on their Learning

Following themes were derived from the students focused group discussion to know their perspectives on teachers' workload and its impact on their learning.

Thematic Analysis 2 -Students Perspectives on their Learning

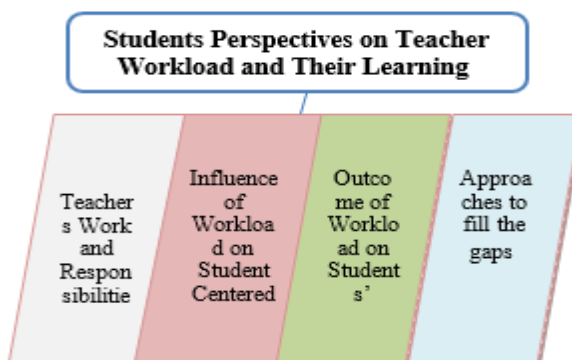


Figure 2 (Main theme 2): Students perspective on their learning

Theme-1: Teachers Responsibilities

Students perceived and reflected that their teachers execute multiple duties and obligations regarding academic as well as non-academics tasks within a sphere of limited resources. One of the participants responded that;

"I think a teacher performs various roles in my department. They teach the students, conduct exams, evaluate the students' papers, assignments portfolios and presentations, attend meetings and do work other than teaching therefore there must be a proper way to plan duties of teachers to bring quality in learning". (P6 FGD1)

Theme-2: Student Centered Learning Course Curriculum

'Our teacher are trying to cover the course curriculum on time however they are busy sometimes and they took additional classes at the end which become difficult for us to retain all the concepts at once.' (P1FGD3)

Deprivation in Quality of Learning

"If a teacher is involved in so many tasks then he or she may not be able to give a quality time to each of the students in class to build their base of knowledge to the required standards. (P4FGD3)"

Lack of Proficiency in Practical Skills

“One teacher takes around more than 50 students to the skill lab as well as clinical rotations where it is not possible for him or her to give time to each of the students for supervising their skills. Therefore they are sometimes assigned in groups or with other seniors’ students in the hospitals for their practical training”. (P3FGD2)

Theme-3: Training and Professionalism

To excel medical and allied health students for their training and professionalism is one of the foremost intentions of teachers in medical education. However the current study findings reflected that if teachers would not give ample and quality time to the student then it may prone the learners to lack of attention, motivation and interest in the learning process. Furthermore; it was noted during student focused group discussion that issues of conduct, behaviours and attitude, delays in assignments submission and lack of competence among would result during the busy schedules of their teachers.

“Workload of a teacher is interrelated to the student learning. When a teacher is not giving his maximum in the subject area due to high workload we students take it easy and loose our confidence to do the things in the right direction that creates gaps in our knowledge and skills.” (P1FGD3)

Theme-4: Fill Up the Gaps in Learning

When the study participants were inquired that how did they manage with the missing parts of their learning and training they shared their experiences that we use library books, e-books, journals, internet resources, YouTube videos, and websites. Further the participants verbalized that assistance was taken from the senior colleagues and previous notes and learning materials. As one of the participants reflected that;

‘Majority of us use library, internet websites and relevant resources specifically the YouTube videos and taking previous lecture notes from our senior students to get clarify with our concepts and to get proficiency in our skills.’ (P2FGD1)

CONCLUSION

A heavy workload is a widespread concern and uneasiness that causes mental and physical stress, leading to poor performance and diminished productivity. At the same time, it affects employee morale and increases the risk of other problems, such as burnout, stress and higher turnover rates. The current study findings concluded that increased workload has some very serious, radical and unconstructive effects on the teachers’ physical, intellectual and social life while being to teach in the health professions education. Similarly lack of keeping balance in the workload by the teachers put the students on risk for their productive learning and health concerns. Further students shared that workload among teachers has off-putting may lead the students towards negative consequences in their cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains of learning.

Many of the aspects were found to contribute to the increased workload among teachers. Some of these were having no alignment in the assignment of subjects as per area of their teachers expertise, regular and long hour’s classroom teaching session on daily basis, multiple teaching and assessment tasks for all the three domains of learning, record keeping, lack of equipments, instruments and facilities in labs for students demonstrations, shortage of assistance in clinical training of the students, multiple research supervisions and involvement in office, non-teaching and administrative work. Based on the findings the study concluded that medical teachers had the stern problems of workload in their teaching capacities. These concerns do not only affect the teachers in their teaching practices but it also has some demoralizing effects on their personal, professional and social spheres of lives. Therefore a strapping system of strategies is required to be implemented by the institutions to keep

the teachers in a reasonable and rationale pasture of work to cope up with their teaching responsibilities productively and to bring quality in students learning.

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