

Perception Of Postgraduate (PG) Students And Teachers On Seminar As Teaching-Learning Tool

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Abstracts: Background: The postgraduate education depends on self learning. Knowledge acquisition among postgraduate students is through seminars which form essential part of their training programme. **Methodology :** This study assesses the role of seminar as a teaching-learning tool amongst students & teachers by recording their perception through a questionnaire based survey. **Results :** The scores for most of the items in an 18 point questionnaire were above 3 indicating that learning from seminar is satisfactory. There were two items where there was significant difference among students & teachers perception. **Conclusion :** We found that both the postgraduate students and the postgraduate teachers feel that the technique is useful amidst lots of suggestion to improve the quality. Thus the postgraduate seminar method is a teaching-learning method that is effective and well-accepted among the postgraduate students and postgraduate teachers alike.. [Gajbhiye S et al NJIRM 2014; 5(2) :98-102]

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Introduction The post-graduate students usually depend on self learning for their skill development and academic activities in medical schools in India. While skills are learnt by guided practice, various programs are organized for imparting academic knowledge. There are many ways in which the subject can be learnt by a postgraduate student. Among them, postgraduate seminars offer a student-centered, independent learning method in which the student is given a topic by the postgraduate guides, and the student has to present the topic in front of his peers and teachers, often using adequate Audiovisual (AV) aids. The topics for such seminars are usually given in advance to the postgraduate students by the concerned teachers. After preparing for the allotted topic, students are allowed to deliver their presentation, and this is followed by an interactive question-answer session. Discussions form an essential part of such seminars, and may be held both during and at the end of the presentation by the student.

Postgraduate training involves rigorous learning of topics by self-reading and self-motivated acquisition of various skills, including soft skills. Unlike in the undergraduate teaching, the onus of learning is on the postgraduate student, and it is the responsibility of the postgraduate student to collaborate with the postgraduate guides and gain knowledge and skills from their experiences.

However, as a result of lack of correlation between teaching methods used at high school and those used at the college, it is often felt that students find it difficult to adjust to the seminar pattern as a student-centered, independent learning method, especially in the beginning. Thus, there is a paradigm shift from the way a student learns in schools and undergraduate colleges to the way in postgraduate courses.

Seminar method of teaching-learning, in contrast to the traditional didactic classroom lecture method, is more effective way of learning, which is relevant to self-development and is also interactive¹. seminars provoke discussions and debates which help postgraduate students to voice their opinion & clear their doubts. According to Medical council of India implementation of the seminars should be part of the training programmes for awarding various Post Graduate degree and diplomas². Also according to Maharashtra University of Health Sciences (MUHS) it is recommended that seminars should be a part of the postgraduate teaching programmes³. Thus most departments have this programme in place but the utility of this programme in terms of knowledge or skills acquired has not been studied previously.

Keeping these facts in mind, we designed this study to assess the perception of the postgraduate

students & teachers regarding the postgraduate seminar as a model for postgraduate teaching-learning. Through these questionnaires, we intended to compare what a postgraduate teacher's & postgraduate student's viewpoint are about this activity.

Thus the purpose of this study is to evaluate the perception and attitude of postgraduate students & teachers towards seminar and to evaluate their perception towards this technique as a teaching-learning tool.

Materials and Methods: A cross sectional study was done at Seth GS Medical College, Mumbai, India, after obtaining the institutional ethics committee approval. Written informed consent was obtained from all the participants. The study involved postgraduate students and postgraduate teachers of preclinical departments including anatomy, physiology and biochemistry, and para-clinical departments including pharmacology, pathology, microbiology and forensic medicine. The inclusion criteria for postgraduate students included in the study were that the students should have delivered and attended at least one seminar to participate in the study. Only those postgraduate teachers who are entitled as postgraduate guides were included in the study as they are involved in deciding the topic of seminar & training of the student for the same.

The postgraduate students and postgraduate teachers (annexure 1) were administered a single questionnaire. Development of a 18 point questionnaire was done & was prevalidated before beginning the study. Each item in the questionnaire was scored on 5 point Likert scale with scores of 5,4,3,2 and 1 assigned for strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree and strongly disagree, respectively. Reverse scoring was used for the negative item. (Item 15)

At the end of the questionnaires, space was provided for the respondents to indicate, from their viewpoints, the advantages and disadvantages of the technique, and to suggest any steps to improve this technique.

The data was collected over a period of 6 months. Mean scores and their standard deviations based on responses from 1 to 5 Likert scale were obtained for each attribute of these components. Group differences were statistically assessed by Mann Whitney test. $P < 0.05$ was considered as level of significance.

Results : A total of 57 postgraduate students out of 70 students (81%) and 30 postgraduate teachers out of 30 teachers (100%) consented to participate in the project. A total of 4/2706 missing data was found during the study which was statistically insignificant. These missing data were replaced by a score of 3 as a neutral response from the study population.

Table 1 represents mean scores of perception of postgraduate students & postgraduate teacher. As most of the scores are above 3 it indicates that learning from seminar is satisfactory. There were 2 items where the scores were below 3. These are the aspects of the seminar that could be enhanced or requires investigation and possible intervention. Out of the items which scored below 3 were, where learning of clinical application of the topic being presented through seminars & lot of time is required for preparation of seminar was asked.

There is statistically significant difference in perception between students & teacher in the item where collaborative efforts taken by the guide & student during preparation of the topic was asked, where teachers gave a positive response as compared to students. Also there was a statistically significant difference in perception amongst students & teachers when asked if good understanding was achieved with seminar. The advantages, disadvantages & comments written by the respondents are discussed in discussion.

Discussion: In this study respondents felt that the knowledge acquired via seminar will help the student in the future and that the pattern should be continued amidst lots of suggestions in modifying it accordingly. As most of the items scored above 3, seminar programme as a learning & self development tool can be considered satisfactory. The results show that in almost all the aspects of learning that were included in the

Table 1: Comparison of mean scores of perception of postgraduate students & postgraduate teacher

Items	Score (mean \pm SD)		P-value
	Postgraduate students (as speaker) n=57	Teachers (n= 30)	
Collaborative efforts are taken by the guide & the student during preparation of the seminar	3.35 (1.14)	4 (1.12)	0.006*
Time allocated for seminar is adequate	3.94 (0.58)	3.58 (1.11)	0.26
Results in development of skills to use audiovisual aids effectively.	4 (0.98)	4.29 (0.59)	0.13
Improves communication skill of the student	4.18 (0.71)	4 (0.63)	0.25
Has inculcated critical reasoning skills in student	3.65 (0.74)	3.45 (0.93)	0.37
Results in improvement in student's abilities in conducting literature search.	4.18 (0.63)	4.17 (0.79)	0.87
Enhances confidence in speaking in public	4.30 (0.57)	4.23 (0.76)	0.90
Encourages student's thinking in a broader angle about the given topic.	4.21 (0.59)	4 (0.93)	0.21
Good understanding of the topic is achieved with this technique	3.83 (0.68)	4.19 (0.70)	0.02*
Clinical applications of the topic are learnt better	1.87 (0.97)	2.58 (1.18)	0.01*
Postgraduate students are given an opportunity to clear their doubts	3.64 (0.76)	3.35 (1.30)	0.37
Discussion during the seminar brings clarity in the concept of the topic	3.89 (0.77)	3.93 (0.89)	0.64
Encourages students intellectual curiosity	3.77 (0.83)	3.80 (0.90)	0.84
This technique encourages self reading in students	3.84 (0.97)	4.09 (1.01)	0.18
Lot of time is required for collection of suitable material for presentation	1.85 (0.54)	2.68 (1.16)	0.0001*
Students can reproduce the topic better in exams	4.15 (0.70)	4.09 (0.74)	0.82
The knowledge acquired during seminar will help students in future	3.84 (0.90)	4.13 (0.88)	0.14
This pattern of learning should be continued in future	4 (0.80)	4.13 (0.84)	0.41

* $p < 0.05$ using unpaired t test

questionnaires, the viewpoints of the postgraduate teacher and the postgraduate students correlate closely.

From the student's viewpoint, in addition to imparting to the postgraduate student subject knowledge in an impressive manner, the technique resulted in the improvement of soft skills such as communication, critical reasoning, self-reading interest and confidence as a speaker. The students also opined that they expect to score better in the exams; this may be due to the increased confidence as a result of successful resolution of queries raised by their peers and seniors, and also because of the allayed phobia of viva-voce pattern of examination. The ambiguity with respect to the seminar being able to adequately explain the clinical applications of the topic can be allayed by the postgraduate teacher who can step in and

improvise the content by explaining the clinical applications of the topic. Also as suggested by students problem based learning can be included in such presentations so that the clinical application of the topic is highlighted. There were few suggestions given by post graduate students which include that topic chosen for seminar should be challenging to speaker & listener and that teacher should also conduct seminars on challenging topics for students in order to understand the topic. Shortcoming of postgraduate seminar as pointed out by many students was that their routine studies get affected as a lot of time is required in preparing seminar & thus seminar becomes more of an academic responsibility than a teaching learning tool. If library and technical facilities such as computers and internet are inadequate, it is more difficult and more time consuming for students to find suitable material for

preparation of quality presentations⁴. Also there is an associated fear of performance that makes the postgraduate students give more time than usual. Students also opined that they expect more encouraging comments from faculty members to relieve the stress.

From the knowledge point of view, students agreed that they were benefitted, since it has been observed that learning from a peer is more effective than learning from a teacher, since peers often tend to connect well, and also can understand the difficulties of learning better than a teacher can. It is said that students learn a great deal by explaining their ideas to others and by participating in activities in which they can learn from their peers⁵. We found that the postgraduate seminar model was well-accepted by the students, who found it useful and beneficial, and felt that the method should continue in the future. Few observations recorded by students were that they benefitted from the seminar taken by peers better if they came with preparation of the seminar topic. It was also felt by students attending seminar taken by peers that utility of seminar depends on speaker & a well read person with good presentation can help in understanding the topic better. One more suggestion was that the power point presentation can be sent along with references to student delegates attending the symposium. A list of questions can also be circulated at the end so that student delegates get idea of their understanding & speaker gets an idea about effectiveness of his presentation.

Finally, from the postgraduate teachers' viewpoint, the seminar was accepted as a useful teaching-learning method for postgraduate education by most of the postgraduate teachers. Among the drawbacks listed by teachers with this teaching technique were that only few selected residents interact more & majority in the audience remain passive. Also if the speaker himself is not enthusiastic audience can easily miss out on some important information. According to teachers most postgraduate students presenting the seminar do not take it seriously. They often take it because it is necessity of curriculum & is told by guide & head of the department.

Suggestions from teachers were that the selection of topic for seminar must be good & relevant. Topic of seminar should be displayed well in advance so that all students & teachers prepare the topic & take part in discussion. While preparing the presentation there must be fewer contents on slides. Focus should be more on elaboration of the points rather than speaking sentences. Time limit should be adhered to strictly, seminar must be over in 35-40 min & 20 min should be kept for discussion. Preferably seminars should be scheduled in morning hours. An appropriate expert must be invited for the seminar & there must be one facilitator for each seminar amongst teacher other than guide.

Many teachers felt that the faculty biases like student-guide target occur at the time of discussion of the seminar which disturbs healthy discussion. Also more than judging presenter's abilities discussion should be focused on the content. After presentation feedback on content, organization, presenting skills, use of AV aids, ability to reason & understanding of the topic must be obtained from students & staff members so that the presenter can focus on the concerned issue. An adequate question answer session in the form of brief answer questions or MCQs must be incorporated & circulated. The student presenting the seminar should summarize the discussion, record it & circulate like minutes of meeting. Unnecessary gossips, glitches among the participants may deteriorate the scope and objectives of symposium. Passive observation without interaction makes a seminar dull⁶.

A seminar is designed to be led by a student who prepares and presents the topic and initiates the discussion. For a seminar to be fully useful and beneficial to all the participants, it is the responsibility of the other students to contribute their ideas, opinions and questions. Also, it is essential that the topic be well-researched and prepared in advance, both by the presenter and the audience. The aim of the postgraduate teacher in seminars is not to give a lecture on the topic, but to try to encourage contributions from all those present by asking questions that stimulate further discussion. At the end of the seminar they may sum up and draw some conclusions⁷. Thus, a

seminar is an activity that depends on contributions from all the participants.

The limitations of this study are that only non-clinical departments were involved. We did not incorporate clinical departments, because in post graduate teaching in clinical subjects, more emphasis is given on bed side teaching in wards, OPDs and OTs and there is more emphasis on skill development. Whereas learning in the non clinical departments are mostly through seminar. Another limitation was that no questions were asked regarding the stress that the postgraduate seminar have on the participants.

Conclusions: To conclude, both the postgraduate students and the postgraduate teachers opine that the technique is useful and that it should be continued in the future. Thus the postgraduate seminar method is a learning-teaching method that is effective and well-accepted among the postgraduate students and postgraduate teachers alike.

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Annexure I

Questionnaire to evaluate perception on Post graduate seminars/ symposia as teaching tool administered to students & teachers

1. Collaborative efforts are taken by the guide & speaker during preparation of the seminar.
2. Time allocated for the PG seminar/ symposia is adequate.
3. This postgraduate teaching technique results in development of skills to use audiovisual aids effectively.
4. This teaching technique improves communication skills of student
5. This teaching technique inculcates critical reasoning skills in students
6. This teaching technique results in improvement in student's abilities in conducting literature search.
7. This postgraduate teaching technique enhances the confidence of student for speaking in public.
8. This postgraduate teaching technique has encouraged student's thinking in a broader angle.
9. Good understanding about the topic of discussion is achieved by this postgraduate teaching technique.
10. The clinical applications of the topic are learnt better in this postgraduate teaching technique.
11. Postgraduate Students are given an opportunity to clear their doubts in this postgraduate teaching technique.
12. This postgraduate teaching technique brings clarity in the concepts of the topic.
13. This teaching technique encourages intellectual curiosity in students.
14. This teaching technique encourages self-reading in students
15. Lot of time is required for the student to collect suitable material for presentation.
16. PG student can reproduce this topic better in exams as a result of this teaching.
17. The knowledge acquired about this topic via seminar will help the student in future.
18. This pattern of teaching should be continued in the future.

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