

Postgraduate Formative Assessment: Student Perspective

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Abstract: Introduction: Assessment drives learning. It serves as a tool for student motivation, retention & transfer of learning. At our institute we have started postgraduate formative assessment as a part of improvement in teaching learning in postgraduate study. **Method:** Present quantitative, cross-sectional study was conducted at Government Medical College, Bhavnagar. During 2013-14, 75, third-year post graduate students of different 20 department of the Government Medical College, Bhavnagar had been assessed in this manner. The instrument (questionnaire) was distributed to all of these students. **Result:** The majority of students (92.96%) are of opinion that exam was well organised, 90.14% felt that it has gave confidence in them for their subject. More than 85% agreed that formative assessment has motivated them to learn subject more (88.73%) either by stimulating learning (87.32%) or by identifying the deficiencies in learning (85.92%). Regarding content of assessment, students were of opinion that assessment were focused on leaning objective (87.32%) and having broad coverage of subject (85.32%) leading to increase competence in respective subject. **Conclusion:** Feedback was pivotal in establishing important dialogue between students and teachers, creating a student-supported learning environment. Emphasis has been placed on front loading formative approaches in the first semester to ensure that students actively engage with feedback and act on it to feed forward, and develop transferable and metacognitive skills to facilitate both transition and academic progression. [Dalvani V NJIRM 2015; 6(1):77-80]

Key Words: Postgraduate Student, Formative, Assessment

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Introduction: Assessments are an integral part of medical education, enabling us to make decisions about the trainees - whether and how much they have learnt and whether they have reached the required standard.

Assessment drives learning¹. It serves as a tool for student motivation, retention & transfer of learning. Rowantree² suggested six purposes of assessment: Selection of candidates for educational opportunity; maintenance of standards, particularly in relation to the final output from the system; motivation of students so that they are encouraged to learn; provision of feedback to students so that they know how they are performing; provision of feedback to teachers so that they know the strengths and weaknesses of their students' learning (and their teaching); and preparation of the students for 'real life'. While most teachers are well-versed with the summative or certifying purpose of assessment (assessment of learning), using assessment as an educational tool (assessment for learning) is a relatively recent phenomenon³.

The current assessment of post graduate students by a traditional end of three year examination is a test of student's knowledge and rote learning with little assessment of their competency and there is no room for feedback or improvement. Feedback can play an integral role in helping students identify and respond to their own learning needs.

The learner is an active partner in the process of learning, teaching and assessment. S/he selects, perceives, interprets, and integrates new information to form a coherent and meaningful whole with her/his prior knowledge and former experiences⁴. This belief in the active role of the learner and Entwistle's⁵ finding that it is the student's perceptions of the learning environment that influence how a student learns.

The Medical Council of India has specified that the postgraduate curriculum shall be competency based, learning autonomous & self-directed and a combination of both formative & summative assessment is vital². Thus formative assessment procedures should be integrated within the

curriculum and preferably also be an integral part of routine practice⁶. Evidence exists that formative assessment can contribute to the support and development of students' learning and understanding^{7,8,9,10} and is pivotal in the context of life-long learning¹¹

From year 2013-14 we have started formative assessment of the post graduate student at college level in the form of prelim examination (both theory and Practical) before 3-4 month of appearing for university examination.

In this study, the post graduate Medical Students were the main stakeholders. Data on students' perception about formative assessment yield important information that may be helpful for the driving force supporting a change with regard to assessment of post graduate students in Medical Colleges.

Research objectives: The purpose of this research was to explore and describe the perceptions of final year post graduate medical student with regard to formative assessment.

Contribution to the field: The benefit of this study will be on a practical level as the results will be used during curriculum planning meetings in order to motivate the continuation, discontinuation or adaptation of the current practice being followed at Medical Colleges.

Material and Methods: Present quantitative, cross-sectional study was conducted at Government Medical College, Bhavnagar during year 2013-14.

Population and sampling: The population consisted of all those Post graduate students who had been undergone for formative assessment. During 2013-14, 75, third-year post graduate students of different 20 department of the Government Medical College, Bhavnagar had been assessed in this manner. The instrument (questionnaire) was distributed to all of these students; a total of 71 completed questionnaires were received, indicating a 95% response rate.

Data collection methods: A questionnaire (self-report) was devised. This questionnaire focused on

the perceptions of student with regard to formative assessment, in particular, with regard to aspects such as execution, development of confidence, generative learning drive, alignment with learning objectivity, coverage of the subject, stress and fairness of formative assessment.

An ordinal type of questionnaire was used with scale ranging between 1(Strongly disagree) to 5(strongly agree) was used, with the ratings grouped together for the purposes of data analysis. This meant that three 'groups' were possible, with ratings of 1 and 2 being regarded as the opposite of ratings 4 and 5, whilst ratings of 3 were regarded as being neutral.

Results: Questionnaire collected response from 71 students, representing 95 % of those who have successfully completed the formative assessment. The majority of students (92.96%) are of opinion that exam was well organised, 90.14% felt that it has gave confidence in them for their subject. More than 85% agreed that formative assessment has motivated them to learn subject more (88.73%) either by stimulating learning (87.32%) or by identifying the deficiencies in learning (85.92%). Regarding content of assessment, students were of opinion that assessment were focused on leaning objective (87.32%) and having broad coverage of subject (85.32%) leading to increase competence in respective subject. Regarding process of formative assessment 80.28% students were comfortable through the process contrasting 73.24% student felt stressed during when they are facing assessment per say. 77.46% have considered formative assessment as a fair examination method. 69.01 % student were of opinion that such examination should be conducted more frequently during three year of postgraduate course

Discussion: In this study, students gave their feedback about formative assessment tool by responding to a questionnaire. The high student response rate obtained (95 %) helped to ensure that the results presented were a valid representation of student opinion. In addition, this high student response rate is perhaps an indication of students' strength of feeling and their perceived need for formative assessment. In general students' feedback about formative assessment

was positive regarding its broad coverage of the intended learning objectives, helping students to identify the gaps in their knowledge, and

motivating them to learn. Post graduate students perceived a need for such assessments frequently

Graph -1: Showing student Perception on different aspects of Formative assessment

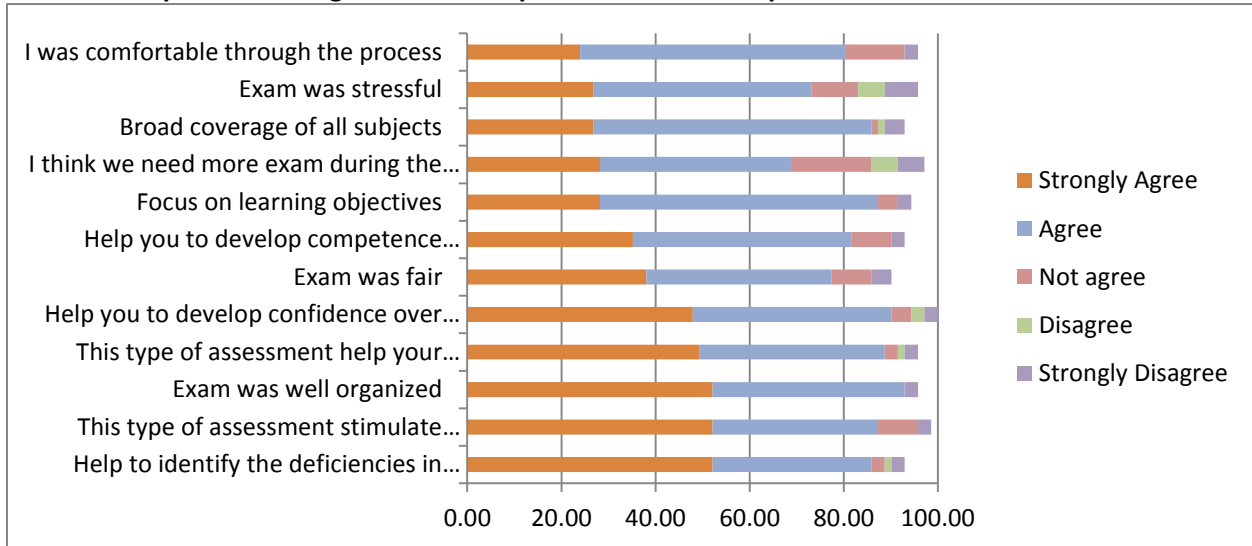


Table 1: Showing student Perception on different aspects of Formative assessment

Questions	SA/A	D/SD
Exam was well organized	92.96	2.82
Help you to develop confidence over the subject	90.14	5.63
This type of assessment help your learning	88.73	4.23
This type of assessment stimulate your learning in the future	87.32	2.82
Focus on learning objectives	87.32	2.82
Help to identify the deficiencies in learning	85.92	4.23
Broad coverage of all subjects	85.92	5.63
Help you to develop competence related to the subject	81.69	2.82
I was comfortable through the process	80.28	2.82
Exam was fair	77.46	4.23
Exam was stressful	73.24	12.68
I think we need more exam during the 3 year	69.01	11.27

Though there was resistance observed amongst them initially. They also reported that, this had improved their knowledge, Built confidence in their clinical skills and helped in personality development. It has also guided them in self-directed learning.

Though our experience is short and we have not been able to compare formative score with summative score, study has helped us to convince administrator and faculty member,

effect of formative assessment and involve more and more faculty during formative assessment in all 20 departments of College.

The Postgraduate student and during formal discussion faculty too, were satisfied with formative assessment and felt that it should be extended to all three years of postgraduate tenure. Some stakeholder felt that it should contribute to final grades, such that the postgraduate student would attach more

seriousness to the assessment. All faculties were willing to continue with formative assessment as they perceived improvement in knowledge and clinical skills during summative examination.

Limitation: This study was limited in its design by the facts that, the sample size was small and taken perception of students only. Therefore, increasing sample size, including all stakeholder can be done in future with second study targeting effect of formative score on final grade can be designed.

Conclusion: The results suggest that students felt that their effort in engaging with the process accrued benefits, particularly with respect to academic expectations and learning enhancement. Feedback was pivotal in establishing important dialogue between students and teachers, creating a student-supported learning environment. Emphasis has been placed on front loading formative approaches in the first semester to ensure that students actively engage with feedback and act on it to feed forward, and develop transferable and metacognitive skills to facilitate both transition and academic progression.

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