Investigating the Influence of Teachers' Characteristics on the Teacher-Student Relations from Students' Perspective at Ilam University of Medical Sciences

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Establishing an effective teacher-student relationship may affect the quality of learning. Such a complex human relationship may be influenced by various factors in addition to teacher and student.

Aim: The present study aimed at investigating the influence of teacher characteristics on the Teacher-student relationship from students' perspective.

Materials and Methods: In this descriptive-survey research, statistical population included 1500 students at Ilam University of Medical Sciences Ilam, Iran. Out of which 281 students were selected by simple random sampling, they received and completed series of questionnaires. Data was collected using a researcher-made questionnaire containing 37 Likert type items from which five items measured demographic profile of participants and 32 items measured impact of teacher's characteristics upon the teacher-student relationship. Data was analysed by SPSS software version 16 using descriptive statistics, t-test and One way ANOVA.

Results: The current study included 281 students (117 (41.6%) male, 164 (58.4%) female) studying at Ilam University of Medical Sciences. The effect of teachers' characteristics on the teacher-student relationship from the students' perspective in three areas (personal, professional and scientific) scored 4.37±0.54, 4.05±0.27, and 3.91±0.44, respectively. The highest score was related to "respect for students" (Mean=4.74, SD=0.55) and the lowest score was dedicated to 'gender' (Mean=2.40, SD= 0.64). Effect of other studied parameters was also higher than the average level.

Conclusion: The findings indicated that teacher-student relationship and consequently the quality of education was overshadowed by the overall characteristics of teacher (namely- personal, professional and scientific). Notably, coupled with the professional and scientific properties of the teacher, his/ her communication skills may also help to provide a favourable learning condition for the students. Therefore, attention to the education of scientific as well as professional skills of the teachers in interaction with students through appropriate workshops and training courses is a matter of great necessity.

Keywords: Communication, Medical education, Quality promotion

INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive world, education process, particularly university education, is one of the significant tools to make considerable changes and fulfill the objectives of the sustainable development. Various factors may play a role in the effectiveness and quality of education process. Unquestionably, characteristics and skills of the university teachers are assumed as the prominent factors. Furthermore, the quality of education can be improved by enhancing teachers' authorization for establishing a suitable teacher-student interaction [1].

Students and teachers, who are in a close relationship, are considered as the fundamental elements in the teaching-learning process [2]. An appropriate platform for communication may prepare the way for the better transmission of concepts to the learners and may provide the opportunity for their educational progress as well. Therefore, investigating and evaluating such an interaction as well as its influencing factors may be integral to educational planning and quality promotion [3,4].

Educational activities and teaching may be effectively carried out in a place where there is a serious interaction between the teacher and the learner and teacher may act as a manager, leader and instructor. In addition to the remarks outlined above, various studies have also indicated that interaction between teacher and student in the university environment and classrooms may undeniably affect the quality of teaching and learning process. A variety of factors may influence such an interaction including mental and psychological characteristics of a teacher, teaching styles and the students' purpose of education. Personal, professional and scientific characteristics of the teachers, are considered as the most influencing factors which are able to eliminate or exacerbate other shortcomings [3,5-8].

Establishment of an appropriate relationship between teacher and student may lead to increased self-confidence and motivation in student. On this basis, educational instructors, particularly teachers, are required to familiarize with the factors influencing the establishment of educational relation and teacher-student relation to facilitate the teaching-learning process. In fact, effective education may depend on the communicative skills of the teacher, the supportive and positive relationship of teachers with students not only stimulate them for learning, but also may put students on the path to success in a safe learning environment [3-9]. A suitable teacher-student relationship depicts future pattern of health-care professional- relationship with clients. Therefore, promoting teacher-student relationship is a necessity in medical education [10]. Hence, the present study aimed to identify the most important factors (factors related to teacher) influencing the teacher-student relationship from students' perspective. Identification of such factors may help teachers to improve their existing relations, which subsequently can lead to a more effective teaching-learning process.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present descriptive survey was conducted from February 2014 to July 2014. The statistical population in this study included 1500 students at Ilam University of Medical Sciences, Ilam, Iran. Simple random sampling method was used to reach participants Sample size was determined by Cochran's formula. Accordingly, a sample of 305 individuals was studied using series of questionnaires (at the confidence level of 95% and error level of 5%).

Inclusion criteria were students enrolled in at least one field at Ilam University of Medical Sciences at the time of completing the questionnaires. Incomplete questionnaires were excluded from actual analysis.

The questionnaire that was made by the researchers of this study constituted 37 questions including five questions associated with demographic profile of participants and 32 questions related to the impact of teacher characteristics (questions 1-15 were dedicated to personal characteristics, 16-27 to teaching characteristics, and 28-32 to scientific characteristics) upon the teacher-student relationship. This questionnaire was prepared according to Likert scale before implementing the main test; a primary questionnaire was distributed among five experts of medical education. After including the comments made by the aforementioned experts, the formal validity and content validity of the respective questionnaires were confirmed. Following a pilot study (15 students out of the final sample), and estimation of Cronbach's alpha, the reliability of the respective questionnaire was confirmed (r=0.86). Given the fact that Cronbach's alpha obtained was higher than 0.7, representing the appropriate reliability of the questionnaire, no change was made to the questionnaire.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

SPSS software version 16, descriptive statistics, T-test and ANOVA were used to analyse the collected data.

RESULTS

In the present study, 305 questionnaires were distributed and finally, 281 complete questionnaires were returned. Demographic profiles of participants are presented in the following table [Table/Fig-1]. In general, our samples were mainly (58.4%) female and nearly half of the sample (58.72%) studying bachelor degree while, 30.6% studying medical degree. As indicated in [Table/Fig-1], number of female students was always higher than male counterparts across different faculties.

[Table/Fig-2] demonstrates items description of the self developed questionnaire intended to measure teacher-student relationship. As indicated in [Table/Fig-2], total average of personal, professional and scientific area was 4.05, 3.91 and 4.37, respectively. The highest mean quality in the personal aspect was attributed to the respect for students (Mean= 4.74, SD= 0.55). Besides, the most important professional aspect belonged to Fairness in dealing with students (evaluation, verbal communication, etc.,) with mean score of 4.63. Students perceived Mastery on scientific concepts and materials (Mean= 4.43±0.76) as the most important quality of teachers in the scientific aspect.

Series of independent sample t-test was conducted to compare teachers' characteristics (across three different aspects) in male and female students. Our findings indicated that there was a significant difference (p<0.05) in professional characteristics of teachers between male and female. Narrowing down into the results showed that mean score of professional characteristics was significantly higher among female students (Mean= 3.97, SD= 0.428) compared to their male counterparts. Nevertheless, there was no significant differences (p>0.05) in personal and scientific characteristics of teachers between male and female students [Table/Fig-3].

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of living arrangement on teacher-student relationship in these three conditions: native students, dormitory residents and living in rented houses. As shown in [Table/Fig-4] there was a significant effect of living arrangement on teacher-student relationship at the p<0.001 for these three conditions. Narrowing down into the results indicates that, students living in rented houses (4.32) reported the highest mean score followed by dormitory residents (3.87) and finally native students (3.82) had the lowest mean score of teacher-student relationship.

A One-way ANOVA between subjects was conducted to compare the effect of student's grade on teacher-student relationship in these four conditions: associate bachelor, bachelor, master and PhD level. As shown in [Table/Fig-4] there was a significant effect of living arrangement on teacher-student relationship at the p<0.05 for these four conditions. Narrowing down into the results indicates that, studying in associate bachelor degree (4.05) was attributed to the highest mean score of student-teacher relationship, followed by PhD students (3.91), bachelor students (3.83), and finally master students (3.82) had the lowest mean score.

DISCUSSION

The current study investigated possible effect of teacher-related factors on teacher -student relationship from student's perspectives at Ilam University of Medical Sciences. Previous evidences reported that quality of teacher-student relationship is highly affected by learning, performance and subsequently students' satisfaction [11,12]. Present study showed that all personal characteristics studied except two, had higher-than-average effect, representing the effect of these characteristics (factors) on teacher-student relationship. Correspondingly, the highest and the lowest levels related to teachers respect for students and gender of teacher, respectively. Our findings are consistent with previous studies [12-14] conducted at different University of Medical Sciences [14] in which respect for students had the highest effect and gender had the lowest effect. Mobashery M et al., revealed that teachers' behavior play an effective role in teacher-student relationship while, other variables, namely gender, age, and physical appearance of the teacher, had lower effect [15]. Furthermore, another study [16] conducted in Birjand University of Medical Sciences emphasized on effectiveness of teachers' personal characteristics on teacher-student relationship in which the highest and the lowest effect attributed to teacher fairness in dealing with students and gender, respectively. Consistently, Hamre BK et al., conducted a study at the University of Virginia and found that personal characteristics (demographic, psychological, and developmental) of both teachers and students affect their relationship [17]. Thus, teacher's personal characteristic is one of the important factors affecting teacher-student relationship which need to be taken into account in the process of recruitment.

Our findings showed that the global score of professional characteristics was moderate (score= 3.9, possible range of score= 1-5). In addition, our findings are consistent with Abedini MR et al., that found the highest and the lowest effects were attributed to the teacher's fairness in dealing with students (evaluation, class-related relations) and course outline template provision for the students, respectively [16].

No.	Faculty	Gender		Grade			
		Male	Female	Associate degree	B.Sc** Students	M.Sc* students	PhD students
1	Para-medical	31 (11.03)	49 (17.44)	13 (4.62)	67 (23.84)	-	-
2	Midwifery	15 (5.34)	33 (11.74)	8 (2.8)	40 (14.23)	-	-
3	Medical	42 (15)	47 (16.72)	-	-	2 (0.7)	87 (30.96)
4	Hygiene	29 (10.32)	35 (12.45)	-	57 (20.28)	7 (2.49)	-
5	Total	117 (41.6)	164 (58.4)	21 (7.47)	164 (58.36)	9 (3.2)	87 (30.96)

[Table/Fig-1]: Profile of participant students based on faculty, gender, and grade.
*Master of science **Bachelor of Science

Area	Under-scrutiny factor	Quality[1]					Mean (SD)
		Very low	Low	Moderate	High	Very high	
Personal area	Age	1 (0.4)	32 (11.4)	104 (37)	37 (104)	40 (14.2)	3.53±0.88
	Gender	1 (0.4)	184 (65.5)	88 (31.3)	-	8 (2.8)	2.40±0.64
	Physical appearance	-	16 (5.7)	104 (37)	89 (31.7)	72 (25.6)	3.72±0.89
	Self-confidence	-	8 (2.8)	41 (14.6)	72 (25.6)	160 (56.9)	4.37±0.83
	Flexibility	-	-	8 (2.8)	112 (39.9)	161 (57.3)	4.54±0.55
	Modesty	-	-	33 (11.7)	80 (28.5)	168 (58.7)	4.48±0.69
	Popularity of the teacher among students	16 (5.7)	8 (2.8)	80 (28.5)	72 (25.6)	105 (37.4)	3.86±1.12
	Intimacy with students	-	8 (2.8)	33 (11.7)	88 (31.3)	152 (54.1)	4.37±0.80
	Observing ethical norms and social values	-	16 (5.7)	105 (37.4)	64 (22.8)	96 (34.2)	3.85±0.96
	Discipline and timely attendance at classes	-	8 (2.8)	96 (34.2)	112 (39.9)	65 (23.1)	3.83±0.81
	Open to criticism	-	8 (2.8)	16 (5.7)	80 (28.5)	177 (63	4.52±0.73
	Respect for students	-	-	16 (5.7)	40 (14.2)	225 (80.1	4.74±0.55
	Attempts at solving students' problems	-	56 (19.19)	24 (8.5)	32 (11.4)	169 (60.1)	4.12±1.21
	Trustworthiness	-	-	40 (14.2)	136 (48.4)	105 (37.4)	4.23±0.68
	Accountability	-	-	56 (19.9)	112 (39.9)	112 (40.2)	4.20±0.75
	Total average of personal area	4.05±0.27					
Professional area	Commonality in discipline	24 (8.5)	-	112 (39.9)	56 (19.9)	89 (31.7)	3.66±1.17
	Involving the students in subject debates		8 (2.8)	88 (31.3)	96 (34.2)	89 (31.7)	3.95±0.86
	Motivate students to learn and study more			48 (17.1)	113 (40.2)	120(42.7)	4.26±0.73
	Fairness in dealing with students (evaluation, verbal communication, etc.,)			16 (5.7)	72 (25.6)	193 (68.7)	4.63±0.59
	Timely use of incentive tools in students	-	8 (2.8)	56 (19.9)	121 (43.1)	96 (34.2)	4.09±0.80
	Offering course outline template to students	8 (2.8)	41 (14.6)	120 (42.7)	56 (19.9)	56 (19.9)	3.40±1.05
	Ease of access to teacher outside the class	16 (5.7)	33 (11.7)	72 (25.6)	120 (42.7)	40 (14.2)	3.48±1.05
	End-of-class summary	8 (2.8)	33 (11.7)	112 (39.9)	56 (19.9)	72 (25.6)	3.54±1.08
	Taking advantage of a variety of teaching methods and teaching aids	-	24 (8.5)	88 (31.3)	113 (40.2)	56 (19.9)	3.72±0.88
	Clear conveyance of content and the ability in making students understand	-	8 (2.8)	40 (14.2)	64(22.8)	169 (60.1)	4.40±0.83
	Using examples appropriate to the lesson topic	-	8 (2.8)	88 (31.3)	105 (37.4)	80 (28.5)	3.91±0.84
	Presenting the material through a logical and applicable process and observing the content consistency		16 (5.7)	72 (25.6)	112 (39.0)	81 (28.8)	3.92±0.87
	Total average of professional area	3.91±0.44					
Scientific area	Academic rank of Teacher (Instructor, Assistant Teacher, Associate Teacher)	48 (17.1)	57 (20.3)	96 (34.2)	56 (19.9)	24 (8.5)	2.83±1.18
	Mastery on scientific concepts and materials	-	8(2.8)	24 (8.5)	88 (31.3)	161(57.3)	4.43±0.76
	Research activity experience of the teacher	16 (5.7)	32 (11.4)	145 (51.6)	64 (22.8)	24(8.5)	3.17±0.94
	Educational activity experience of the teacher	16 (5.7)	24 (8.5)	106 (37.8)	94 (33.4)	41 (14.6)	3.43±1.02
	Science up-to-datedness of the teacher	-	-	40 (14.2)	96 (34.2)	145 (51.6)	4.37±0.72
	Total average of scientific area	4.37±0.54					

[Table/Fig-2]: Items description of the questionnaire measuring teacher-student relationship.
1-Based on Likert scale, quality property was divided to five levels from the least effective to the most effective respectively: 1- very low 2- low 3- moderate 4- high 5- very high.

Mean (SD)		Subject	p-value*	
Male	Female			
4±0.294	4.60±0.284	Personal characteristics of the teacher	0.096	Perspectives of studied population towards the factors influencing teacher -student relation
3.86±0.409	3.97±0.428	Professional characteristics of the teacher	0.029**	
3.69±0.557	3.60±0.538	Scientific characteristics of the teacher	0.195	

[Table/Fig-3]: Comparison of the perspectives of male and female students towards the factors influencing teacher-student relationship (student's t-test, mean equality based on gender equality).
** denotes the average difference of the two groups is significant (p<0.05)

Mean (SD)	No.	Residence condition	p-value	
3.82±0.346	152	Native	<0.001*	Perspectives of studied population towards the factors influencing teacher -student relation
3.87±0.288	113	Living in dormitory		
4.32±0.001	16	Living in rented home		

[Table/Fig-4]: Students' perspective on teacher-student relationship according to their living arrangement.
* denotes the average difference of the two groups is significant (p<0.05).

Ghadami A et al., revealed that the highest and the lowest effect belonged to respect for student and timely use of encouraging tools, respectively [18]. However, Ghadimi A et al., failed to investigate teacher's professional, personal and scientific characteristics independently and the reported mean score of fairness in dealing with students was lower than results of this study [18]. This inconsistency might be explained by a 10 years' time lag between

two studies and changes eventually may occur in the current students' perspectives. A possible explanation for the lower score of course outline template provision by teacher obtained in this study could be as a result of inadequate students' knowledge regarding objectives and necessity of providing course outline template by the teachers.

Results obtained from the current study revealed that the highest and the lowest effect was related to teacher's mastery of scientific concepts and materials, and the academic rank of teachers, respectively. Yajhen S et al., showed that the highest effect of scientific teacher's characteristics is dedicated to the mastery of scientific concepts, materials and up-to-date teacher's knowledge while the lowest impact is dedicated to the research activities followed by academic rank [14].

Mirzaei A et al., indicated that teacher's mastery of scientific concepts and materials are integral characteristics of a teacher [19]. In addition, provision of new and up-to-date materials has also been considered as a prominent feature for a good teacher [20].

Generally, according to the results of this study as well as that of similar studies [1,4,8,12,16], mastery of scientific concepts and materials had the highest effect on the teacher-student relationship compared to other scientific properties. In contrast, academic rank of teachers had lower effect in teacher-student relationship. Findings from this study revealed that students considered some of teacher's characteristics including specific morale, age-related features, and intellectual growth more important than teacher's academic rank. Banidavoudi SH et al., revealed that quality of teaching depends on teacher's communication ability as well as personal characteristics [4]. Morover, Ya'ghubinia F et al., revealed that appropriate teacher-student relationship in the clinical setting promote students' progress and increase their satisfaction [21].

Education may lead to positive outcomes for students and increase their level of satisfaction [21]. Consistently, Sun Z believes that students, who are respected and valued by their teachers, demonstrate their ultimate capabilities [22].

The results presented indicate that effect of teacher's characteristics on teacher-student relationship may significantly vary based on students' residence condition (p<0.05).

Accordingly, students living in rented houses presented positive attitude compared to native students or dormitory residents [Table/Fig-4]. These findings are consistent with previous study by Yajhen S et al., conducted among nursing students at Sabzevar University of Medical Sciences in which, the highest score attributed to native students followed by dormitory residence and finally students living in rented houses. Consistently, Navah AR et al., also found that students' perspective towards teacher-student relationship was significantly differ according to the type of residence (public dormitory, autonomous dormitory, and private house) [23]. In contrast, Abedini MR et al., reported no significant difference in the perspectives of students according to their residence condition [16]. In conclusion, this inconsistency might be explained by level of intensity and the status of groups, which seems totally natural due to differences in the characteristics and condition of under-scrutiny students.

Our Findings demonstrated that average score of students' perspectives was significantly different according to their grade (CI= 95%, p=0.019) [Table/Fig-5]. Consistently, Abedini MR et al., reported a significant difference in students' perspective according to their level of education (Associate degree, B.Sc., M.Sc., and PhD) [16]. Nevertheless, Yajhen S et al., reported no significant difference in students' perspective according to their level of education [14]. It can be concluded that this difference is predictable and can be explained by the different students' characteristics and universities conditions. It is of worth to mention that [Table/Fig-6] lists relevant studies and their characteristics to provide a platform for comparing our findings with previous evidences.

Mean (SD)	No.	Grade	p-value	
4.05±0.224	21	Associate degree		Perspectives of studied population towards the factors influencing teacher -student relationship
3.83±0.352	165	B.Sc.Students	0.019*	
3.82±0.229	9	M.Sc. Students		
3.91±0.308	89	PHD Students		

[Table/Fig-5]: Comparison of the perspectives of students towards the factors influencing teacher -student relationship (One-way ANOVA, mean equality based on the grade equality).* denotes significant value

Author name	Reference no.	Dateline	Place	Important results
Ghadami A et al.,	[18]	2007	Arak University of Medical Sciences	The results of this research were collected from 162 participants. Results were 68 to 80 percent of students considered pedagogical skill, knowledge and experience of a teacher were the most important characteristics and gender, age, and religious beliefs of the teacher were the least important ones.
Vakili MM et al.,	[1]	2008	Zanjan University of Medical Sciences	144 teachers and 425 students were asked about four aspects of a good teacher's characteristics and the results showed that the most important characteristic of a good teacher is: 1. Academic rules: to students, availability; to teachers, punctuality 2. Scientific skills: to both, the teacher's mastery of the subject 3. Evaluation: to students, ability to answer the questions; to teachers, ability to raise good questions Behavioural: to both, fluency of the teacher in elaborating the subject.
Bahador H et al.,	[13]	2013	Semnan University of Medical Sciences	147 students of medical sciences completed questionnaires about the relationship skills of teachers. In addition to these human relationship factors, a questionnaire consisted of 24 questions were completed about the educational environments. The results showed that fairness was the most decisive factor and religious beliefs of the teacher the least.
Ya'ghubinia F et al.,	[21]	2013	Mashhad University of Medical Sciences	Eight students and 10 teachers participating in this qualitative study were interviewed. They believed that a good student-teacher relationship could lead to the development of learning in students and meeting their expectations in the educational environment. This kind of relationship consisted of reciprocal understanding and respect, listening to students, and charm. Also, they emphasized a teacher's non-verbal relationship and appearance.
Bahadori M k et al.,	[12]	2014	Tehran University of Medical Sciences	105 MSc students of allied medical sciences of Tehran University participating in this study showed that the teacher's mastery of the subject and his ability to communicate were the most important factors. The least important one was the evaluation of students in every single session. The study was done only in one faculty.
Yajhen S et al.,	[14]	2014	Sabzvar University of Medical Sciences	165 students of nursing completed questionnaires on three aspects of scientific, individual, and vocational abilities of a good teacher. Respecting students, intimacy, and fairness showed the highest influence. Presenting a good curriculum design, gender and age showed the lowest influence.
Mirzaei A et al.,	Present study	2014	Ilam University of of Medical Sciences	The current study included 281 students (117 (41.6%) male, 164 (58.4%) female) studying at Ilam University of Medical Sciences. The effect of teachers' characteristics on the teacher -student relationship from the students' perspective in three areas (personal, professional and scientific) reported at 4.37±0.54, 4.05±0.27, and 3.91±0.44, respectively. The highest score was related to "respect for students" (Mean=4.74, SD=0.55) and the lowest score was dedicated to 'gender' (Mean=2.40, SD= 0.64). Effect of other studied parameters was also higher than the average level.

[Table/Fig-6]: List of some studies similar to our study and their characteristics.

LIMITATION

Due to the fact that the present study was merely done in Ilam University of Medical Sciences, generalization of the results to other universities may face some limitations. Therefore, a similar study is required to be done in other universities to overcome the limitations. A further limitation is related to data collection only through using questionnaires. More comprehensive results could be obtained if other complementary methods such as interview were also used in the process of data collection.

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that teachers' characteristics (namely, personal, professional, scientific) may considerably affect the quality of education as well as teaching quality. Moreover, the communicative skills of the teacher may help to provide a favourable learning condition for the students in addition to professional as well as scientific properties. Therefore, attention to the education of scientific and professional skills of teachers in interaction with students through appropriate workshops and training courses is a matter of great necessity. Furthermore, regarding the fact that interaction and relation of teacher may also be overshadowed by various factors (e.g., traits of student, the changing process of knowledge and IT and, factors related to the interior and exterior environments of the university) in addition to the characteristics of the teacher, performing an in-depth study investigating all factors influencing this very subject, is highly integral. A point that should be clarified here is that, due to a number of limitations and the specific objectives of the present study, all influencing factors could not be taken into account.

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