

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: TWO STAGES OF THE MBBS COURSE

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Learning takes place in a complex reality in which both the characteristics of the person and of the situation operate simultaneously to influence the student's learning process. Thus, educationists put the learner's perception of the situation in the center of these processes and stresses its moderation function on shaping the learning processes.

This study assessed the students' perceptions of the learning environment in the first year and the fourth year of the MBBS course in Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

Data were obtained by means of the inventory, "Course Experience Questionnaire", developed by Ramsden and his associates in 1998. The respondents were the students in the fourth term of the second MBBS course (group I) and those in the third term of the third MBBS part II course (group II). The original English version of the inventory was administered to group II while the inventory that was administered to group I also contained the Sinhalese translation of each item. Respondents were instructed to reflect on the learning environment that prevailed during the previous academic year of the course up to the point of completing the inventory and respond on a five point Likert scale, *i.e.* disagree entirely (1) to agree entirely (5). This inventory was administered during the curriculum time with the permission of the respective Heads of Departments in 2001. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The responses for each item per batch were analyzed using the statistical package SPSS.

Based on the responses of 170 (94% of the total) from group I and of 122 (74% of the total) students from group II following observations were made in respect to their learning environment. Highest numbers of students in both batches disagreed for the most part (2 in the Likert scale) with the inventory items, (a) It was always easy to know the standard of work expected, (b) I usually had a clear idea of where I was going and what was expected of me in this course, (c) The staff put a lot of time into commenting on my work, (d) I was generally given enough time to understand the things I had to learn, and (e) The staff made a real effort to understand difficulties I might be having with my work. Interestingly, the highest number of respondents agreed for the most part (4 in the Likert scale) with the inventory items, (a) Too many staff asked questions just about facts, (b) Workload was too heavy, (c) The staff seemed more interested in testing what I had memorized than what I had understood, (d) It was often hard to discover what was expected of me in this course and (e) To do well in this course all you really needed was a good memory.

It is recommended that the Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya addresses the issues highlighted above in order to facilitate meaningful learning among its undergraduate students.