

An Odyssey through Medical Students' Life-An International Experience

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Melaka Manipal Medical College (MMMC), India, offers a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) programme of 5 years duration. Majority (98%) of students in this programme are Malaysians. The present study was intended to explore students' perspectives about the academic and non-academic aspects of their life in the campus.

Methods: Students (n=126) of the first year of the MBBS programme, living in the campus for 10 months, were included in the study. They were asked to respond to a questionnaire consisting of 18 items each in the academic and non-academic categories and the responses were analysed.

Results: Students felt that the content of the syllabus in the first year was adequate(85%) and clinically oriented(70%).

They found faculty approachable, accessible outside class hours(92%) and inspirational to achieve higher goals(84%). They felt that their feedback was valued(82%) and assessment methods effective(74%). However, they opined that the work load was too heavy(70%), teaching hours too long and as a result concentration in class difficult(78%). An attendance requirement of 90% for appearing for the final examination was a matter of concern(70%). They also wished they had more avenues (77%) and time (83%), for relaxation after class.

Conclusion: The students were able to appreciate the strengths of the academic programme as well as motivational attributes of the faculty. Guidance regarding time management may be in order to help them manage their workload.

Keywords: Accessible, Approachable, Inspirational, Manipal, Melaka

INTRODUCTION

Melaka Manipal Medical College (MMMC), India, offers a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) programme of 5 years duration. The first two and a half years which includes 2 semesters of preclinical, 2 semesters of para-clinical and a semester of clinical postings, is done at the Indian campus at Manipal, Karnataka followed by the clinical training at the same University's campus at Melaka in Malaysia. Majority (98%) of students in this programme are Malaysians. When the students arrive from Malaysia at the Manipal campus, they are exposed to a new environment in a new country. They come face to face with a new culture and a new learning atmosphere. Manipal has three Indian local languages being spoken, which adds to the complexity of the situation when it comes to interacting with the local population. It is known that, the facilitating atmosphere for learning provided by teachers and their department exert important influences on students' approaches to learning. [1], [2] Medical students' distress is independently related to endogenous factors like personality traits and life events and to their perception of the medical learning environment [3]. The present study was intended to explore students' perspectives

about the academic and non-academic aspects of their life on campus in an effort to understand their needs and fill in any lacunae that may be present.

METHODS

Students(n=126) of the first year of the MBBS programme, living in the campus for 10 months were included in the study. A questionnaire consisting of 18 items each in the academic and non-academic categories was designed. The students had to answer as 'Yes' or 'No' to each one of the statements. The face validity of the questionnaire was assessed by 4 senior medical educationists in the institution. Student responses were analyzed and the data was expressed as percentage.

RESULTS

Students felt that the content of the syllabus in the first year was adequate (85%) and clinically oriented (70%). In addition to PBL, they felt the need for discussing case scenarios in class (87.3%), though they were not in favor of increasing self-directed learning (48.8%). They opined that the faculty were approachable and accessible outside class hours (92%) and inspired them to achieve higher goals (84%). They felt that their

	Academic aspects	*Response (%)
1.	Syllabus in first year adequately covers what a medical student needs to know	85
2.	Syllabus in the first year is clinically oriented	70
3.	It is necessary to have discussions of case scenarios in class in addition to those of PBL	87.3
4.	More time should be given for self-directed learning	48.8
5.	Teaching hours are long drawn out and makes concentration in the class difficult	78
6.	Students get enough time to interact with the teacher during class(lectures/practical classes)	51.5
7.	Students get enough time at the end of the class to interact with the teacher	55.2
8.	Teaching for 45 minutes is optimum for a lecture class of one hour	88.7
9.	Faculty members make adequate use of audiovisual aids while teaching	91.1
10.	Workload is too heavy	70
11.	Assessment methods in first year are effective	75.2
12.	Proper attention and support are extended to academically weak students	51
13.	Faculty members are approachable and accessible outside class hours	92
14.	Faculty members are a source of inspiration to learn and excel in academics	84
15.	Student opinions/feedback (regarding teaching, assessment or any other matter pertaining to academics) are valued	78.2
16.	Additional learning facilities like library and museums are available	98.3
17.	Mentorship scheme is effective	57.1
18.	Prescribed dress code is followed by students in the campus	53.2

* Percentage of students with "yes" responses to academic aspects of life on campus

[Table/Fig-1]: Response to academic aspects of campus life

feedback was valued (82%) and that assessment methods were effective (74%). Teaching time of 45 minutes was considered optimum(87.3%) by them. The heavy workload(70%), along with long teaching hours, made concentration in class difficult (78%). An attendance requirement of 90% for appearing for the final examination was a matter of concern (70%) for most. About 57% said that the mentorship scheme was effective. They appreciated the availability of additional learning facilities like the library and museum (98.3%). They were happy that their feedback on teaching, assessment or any other matter pertaining to academics was valued (78.2%) [Table/Fig-1].

Regarding the nonacademic aspects, students appreciated the

	Non-academic aspects	*Response (%)
1.	The weather is tolerable	62.6
2.	The ambience of the campus is good	82.1
3.	Infrastructure in the campus is good	71.7
4.	There was no problem with communicating with the public outside the campus	62.8
5.	Public transport in the area is adequate	89.7
6.	Accommodation in the hostel is comfortable	58
7.	Security in the campus and hostels is satisfactory	72.5
8.	There are enough avenues for relaxation after college hours	23.7
9.	Time for relaxation after college hours is adequate	17.8
10.	Socializing with friends in the campus/hostel is possible	89.6
11.	Food available in the campus is affordable	73.4
12.	Food available in the campus is hygienic	53.7
13.	Frequent ill-health is a matter of concern while meeting the requirements of 90% attendance	71.3
14.	It is difficult to refrain ourselves from the umpteen distractors present in and outside the campus(in order to concentrate more in academic matters)	47.5
15.	Availability of outpatient care for students is quick and easy	26.2
16.	Health care facilities are good	54.5
17.	Talented students(sports and cultural events) are encouraged	87.8
18.	Manipal is truly a home away from home	52.8

*Percentage of students with "yes" responses to non-academic aspects of life on campus.

[Table/Fig-2]: Response to non-academic aspects of campus life

infrastructure (71.7%) and ambience (82.1%) of the campus. According to them, the weather was tolerable(61.1%), public transport in the area was adequate (89.7%) and security in the campus and hostels was satisfactory(72.5%). Socializing with friends in the campus/hostel was possible (89.6%). It is known that management of language barriers is important for academic success [4]. Despite the population speaking 3 different local languages, communicating with the public was not a problem(60.3%) for MMMC students. They said that food available in the campus was affordable (73.4%) though the hygiene was not up to the mark (51.5%). Most opined that frequent ill health was a matter of concern while meeting the requirements of 90% attendance (71.3%). They opined that there were few avenues (77%) and less time (83%) for relaxation after class. Only 26% of students stated that

outpatient care at the University hospital was quick and easy. They felt that students talented in sports and cultural activities were encouraged (85.7%). Almost half the students felt that Manipal was not a home away from home [Table/Fig-2].

DISCUSSION

A successful career is the hope and dream of every student who enrolls in a university and a suitable educational programme is the means to this end. While it is imperative that educational institutions maintain the quality of their academic programme to attract the best students, it is also equally important to provide them with the best possible academic and nonacademic environment. Institutional budgets are developed based on projected enrolments and it is becoming crucial for private institutions to retain the students they recruit [5]. At MMMC, Manipal, students were happy with most aspects of their academic and nonacademic life. However, there were some factors which bothered them. Stress management is an important factor contributing to academic success [4]. Medical education is generally perceived as being stressful. Stress, anxiety and depression are frequent among medical students [6-8] and a high level of stress may have a negative effect on cognitive functioning and learning of students in a medical school [5]. Stress is related to a heavy workload and may prompt students to have a surface approach towards study [9]. It is also known that students' perception of their current learning environment is a stronger predictor of learning outcomes at the university than prior achievement at school [10]. Our study indicates that there is a need for curriculum review to weed out topics which are not relevant. This would decrease the load on the student, helping to relieve stress and help improve the amount of time available for student-teacher interaction especially for weaker students. Time management has been indicated as a key factor for academic success [4,9]. Providing more time for relaxation is bound to make students concentrate better in class. As indicated in [Table/Fig-1], the mentorship scheme is not as effective as it should be. So, strengthening it would serve as a support to all students since positive mentoring has been shown to increase student participation in academics [11]. It is heartening to note that, after this study, many remedial measures to improve the academic and non-academic environment of students at MMMC have been implemented. Among them are remedial activities to cater to the needs of weaker students like discussions and vivas conducted on a one to one basis. Students are also given special assignments which are aimed at revising prior knowledge. To mitigate the stress factor a huge sports center with facilities for indoor and outdoor sports has been commissioned. Health care facilities

for students have been speeded up by instituting a students' clinic at the out-patient department of the university hospital. With all these positive changes the college is taking a firm step towards having idyllic surroundings to enhance the process of knowledge gathering, so that the students would feel at home in the university campus.

CONCLUSION

MMMC has an academic environment with numerous strengths. The students were able to appreciate the strengths of the academic programme as well as motivational attributes of the faculty. Trimming the curriculum, providing activities for relaxation after class and guidance to students regarding time management may be in order to help them manage their workload and achieve higher goals.

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