



Research Article

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## Student Perceptions of Teaching at the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Pristina

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### Abstract

*In this survey-based research study, we identify student perceptions of the teaching methods used by instructors in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Pristina, Kosovo's flagship public university. Of the 250 student respondents, the majority indicated satisfaction with survey items related to instructional activities such as the content of the lectures, the implementation of the syllabus, and appropriate assessment. On the other hand, the respondents rated technology integration, advanced active learning strategies such as problem-based learning, simulation/role-play, and debates among the lowest. Overall, students disagreed with the statement that their instructors utilized contemporary pedagogical strategies in their instruction. In conclusion, raising student satisfaction with teaching strategies is a matter of strategic importance for strengthening the healthcare workforce both for Kosovo and others around the world. The results of this study suggest that, in Kosovo, student satisfaction with foundational practices, such as active learning, can be expanded through the incorporation of technology mediated and advanced pedagogical strategies. To remain competitive in a global marketplace, both students and instructors will likely need to adopt forward-looking practices that are different from their prior experiences.*

**Keywords:** medical education, students, satisfaction, professional development

### 1. Introduction and Literature Review

Previous studies of health professions education have identified strong links between high-quality instruction and improved patient outcomes, as well as to higher rates of entry and retention within

the field.(Merfat Ayesh Alsubaie, 2016). Following their independence, Kosovo identified the development of a modern health care system as a high priority (Buwa & Vuori, 2007), which led to high demand for trained health care professionals; a demand the faculty of medicine has worked to address. That said, previously persistent shortages had been fueled by high levels of burnout and attrition among existing staff, challenges which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic(van der Veen et al., 2015) (Neziri et al., 2022)

The purpose of this paper is to identify student perceptions of new and emerging teaching methods used by instructors in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina”, the flagship public university in Kosovo. Active learning methods have a long pedigree in medical education, with the majority of studies indicating the efficacy of these methods in improving cognitive student learning outcomes.(Waltz et al., 2014) (Telang, 2014) (Podvorica et al., 2020) Subsequent studies have suggested further links between pedagogy and non-cognitive learning outcomes, such as professional identity formation, self-directed (also known as agentic) learning, and emotional wellness.(Dubovicki & Jukić, 2017) Taken collectively, the existing evidence suggests that the teaching methods used by medical faculty can significantly influence both retention and resilience of future health care professionals.(Gary D. Borich, 2016)

The majority of those previous pedagogical studies have, however, been conducted, in socio-political contexts that differ markedly from those in Kosovo. The higher education system had been restored in 2008, after a lengthy period of isolation and/or suppression, which had effectively cut the teaching faculty off from opportunities to engage in professional development related to pedagogy. To address this gap, the (*Kosovo's Agency for Accreditation*) was founded in March 2008 as an independent authority which accredits and reaccredits public and private higher education institutions, guarantees the quality of educational and scientific research work and supports quality improvement in Higher Education Institutions. In cooperation with this agency, the institution has taken numerous steps to improve instruction across all faculties, including the establishment of a center for teaching and learning in 2015, but efforts to transform teaching remain constrained by infrastructure (e.g., limited internet access) and relatively high teaching loads for health professions faculty, the latter a reflection of a persistent shortage of qualified professors to serve in these roles.

While the collective trauma of war and ethnic conflict remains a factor for much of the teaching staff, the generation of students currently matriculating at the institution are among the first who have little to no direct experience with this tumultuous period in the country's history. Institutional research conducted by the institution suggests that these students have a strong interest in transforming traditional teaching methods, with a particular emphasis on hands-on, technology-forward, and career-ready learning experiences.(Ali et al., 2018) The institution has a vested interest in responding to this student feedback, especially with the rise of for-profit institutions of career-ready post-secondary education in the country, which provide direct competition for both faculty and students.

The present study was developed to assess student perceptions of the pedagogy used by their instructors in the Faculty of Medicine, with the intention of identifying gaps between student perceptions and current practice. Bridging these gaps will enable leaders within the faculty of Medicine to direct professional development efforts in those areas most likely to strengthen career pipelines into the health professions in Kosovo.

### 1.1 The Study

Student perceptions of teaching practice were captured via an electronic survey, sent to all students enrolled in courses offered through the Faculty of Medicine in the Fall semester of 2020.

### 1.2 The Instrument

This study utilizes a student survey, created by the researchers, to gauge their perceptions of current

pedagogical practice in the Faculty of Medicine. The researchers considered using existing validated surveys of active learning, but found that none were appropriate for their context. Most often, these prior surveys had issues with construct validity in the Kosovo context, as neither students nor faculty were likely to have had experience with certain pedagogical approaches and/or to have knowledge of certain pedagogical terms in either English or Albanian.

The survey used consisted of three demographic questions: gender, field of study, and grade point average; followed by a series of 25 5-point Likert-scaled items asking students to rate either their agreement or satisfaction with a series of statements about teaching practice. The scaled items were determined by a team of instructors and students based on current practice in the Faculty of Medicine. The research team conducted a field test of the survey with a small group of current students in order to establish face validity. Based on their feedback, the survey was revised and then disseminated to all students in the Faculty in the Fall of 2020.

### 1.3 Participants

Students were recruited through their institutional email address and participated in the survey using an electronic Google form. It should be noted that Kosovo does not have a formal ethical review process for research on teaching and learning. The study did receive approval from the Medical Faculty Council. The researchers chose to follow further guidelines for ethical research voluntarily, especially in the consent process, which was conducted in a private setting without involvement from professors in the Faculty. In addition, the survey data was collected without identifiers and each of the participating students were informed that their answers were confidential, had the right to stop the survey at any time, and were not required to answer any question they did not wish to answer.

A total of 250 students completed the survey, 50 students from each of the existing branches at the Faculty of Medicine: General Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Nursery and Physiotherapy at the University of Prishtina.

Of those who participated, 169 (67.6%) were female and 81 (32.4%) were male. This gender distribution is consistent with overall enrollment in the Faculty of Medicine. The average GPA of the surveyed students was 8.45 on a scale from 5-10.

## 2. Results

Table 1 provides a summary of student responses to the survey of teaching and learning practices at Medical Faculty.

### 2.1 Teaching Practices

As the table reflects, the highest percentage of students agreed with and/or expressed their satisfaction with survey items related to fundamental instructional activities including the content of the lectures, the implementation of the syllabus, and appropriate assessment. They also positively identified the presence of a number of baseline pedagogical strategies, including the fostering of class discussion, connections between theory and practice, and the integration of concrete examples.

On the other hand, they also noted the predominance of traditional lecturing and the persistence of constraints such as infrastructure, large class sizes, and limited professional development for instructors. Survey items related to technology integration rated among the lowest; as did advanced active learning strategies such as problem-based learning, simulation/role-play, and debates. Overall, students clearly disagreed that instructors in the Faculty utilized the most current pedagogical strategies in their instruction.

## 2.2 Student Satisfaction

While the items reported above refer to the presence of teaching practices, survey items related to student satisfaction with these practices garnered more mixed results. Students expressed primarily neutral responses to questions about whether or not their instructors integrated simulations at a sufficient level or whether the application of teaching methods used during a lesson was adequate.

There were some differences in satisfaction by discipline and gender. Students in Physiotherapy and Nursing were more likely to be satisfied compared to other branches; and females were (slightly, but significantly) more likely to be satisfied how they were being taught than males (see Table 2). These differences may be inter-related. Like nursing programs in other countries, the Nursing program at Medical Faculty attracts mostly female students. That said, the Pharmacy program also has a majority of female students, albeit with a lesser margin than Nursing, but did not register higher satisfaction rates with current teaching practices.

## 2.3 Student Success

A linear correlation coefficient (Pearson coefficient) was calculated between student success (measured by GPA) and satisfaction. Across all items, the correlation between student success and satisfaction was weak (see Table 3). It would appear that student perceptions of teaching practice do not vary significantly between high and low performing students.

## 3. Discussion and Implications for Future Research

For the past six years, the Faculty of Medicine at University of Prishtina has engaged in a process of continuous improvement that includes attention to fundamental pedagogical practices, such as assessment or syllabus design, as well as basic engagement approaches, such as discussion. The results of this study suggest that these baseline efforts have been largely successful, as the majority of students, across all four programs within the Faculty, reported that these practices have characterized their education. That said, the finding suggest that there remains considerable room for improvement, particularly in regard to the integration of student-centered and technology-forward approaches; the former constrained by large class sizes, the latter by limited infrastructure. Kosovo is not the only context in which such similar constraints have influenced health professions education; whether that context is geo-political, such as other emerging democracies, or socio-economic, such as rural or remote regions within high-income countries such as Australia or the United States (Supe & Burdick, 2006) (Azad et al., 2020) (Burdick, 2007)

Indeed, studies of health professions education in other low- and middle- income countries suggests that infrastructure is a primary factor inhibiting the implementation of new curricula and/or teaching approaches. Kosovo is, however, classified as high-middle income, with levels trending upward over the past ten years. This suggests that the challenges experienced by the students and professors may be attributed less to structural issues, such as lower income levels, and more to the relatively short time frame in which both the health care and university systems have been in operation under the current regime. Infrastructure takes time to build; and there is evidence, both in these survey responses and on campus, that University of Prishtina is investing heavily in both the physical and human infrastructure of the Faculty of Medicine.

These historical circumstances also apply to the infrastructure of the primary and secondary school systems in Kosovo, which have only recently begun to adopt active pedagogical approaches, thereby limiting the prior experience of current university students with these teaching methods. It should be noted, too, that students at the Medical Faculty rarely take classes outside of their selected major. Prior studies, conducted in other global contexts, have noted that university students do not always embrace active learning strategies with open arms, and that resistance, especially initially, is common both in disciplines and educational environments where didactic methods have been the norm

(Tharayil et al., 2018)(Marlor et al., 2020) In the case of the current generation of university students in Kosovo, however, the results of our survey are not suggestive of strong resistance, but rather some hesitancy, perhaps even ambivalence, about pedagogical approaches with which they likely have limited experience or knowledge. It may prove to be interesting to compare the results of this survey to that of students in 3-5 years who will have had grown up in a different school environment.

There are further indications that these limiting circumstances may be changing. Kosovo is currently experiencing a population surge, leading to a demographic profile in which college-age young adults are among the largest sub-populations. It seems logical that this state of affairs might contribute to larger class sizes. The correlation is less direct, however, as public institutions such as University of Prishtina must now compete for students with a rising number of for-profit universities. Tuition at University of Prishtina is provided free of charge for citizens, but private institutions emphasize more flexible and often faster degree programs (Baliqi, 2010) (Besa Shahini & Yllka Azemi, 2013), benefits for which students, especially adults and working professions, are often willing to pay. On one hand, this expanding marketplace will likely serve to increase the number of qualified health care professionals in the work force, but it carries the risk of compromising educational standards, especially for for-profit institutions that are not fully accredited. This means that quality of education can be viewed as a competitive advantage for public universities like University of Prishtina, thereby fueling attention to, and investment in, improving instructional outcomes and student satisfaction with those outcomes.

There are other apparent limitations that actually foster opportunities for teaching transformation. Since its founding, citizens of Kosovo have had to withstand significant restrictions on their ability to travel outside of the country. These restrictions have not, however, led to constraints on professional development, as professors in the Faculty of Medicine often have degrees from institutions outside of the country, and the college has received a considerable amount of external funding to support professional development from organizations such as the United Nations, Fulbright foundation, and the Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD). Similarly, the increasing availability of professional development via the web has also contributed to travel restrictions being a non-factor in the teaching transformation process. Perhaps the strongest factor inhibiting change is faculty resistance which has been noted across many global contexts (Petersen et al., 2020) (Tsang & Harris, 2016), but that resistance appears to be changing in the face of increasingly student-centered administrative practices, including the recent adoption of student evaluations of instruction.

The challenge of recruiting, graduating, and retaining highly skilled health professionals remains a matter of strategic importance at the national level in Kosovo. In this context, student perceptions of their teaching and learning experience take on significance beyond the evaluation of an instructor or a program. The standards of health professions education have increased markedly around the world, putting external pressure on countries such as Kosovo to raise the bar. Those standards are based on a growing evidence base which links student-centered pedagogy to learning satisfaction and, by extension, professional success (Ghasemzadeh I, Aghamolaei T, Hosseini-Parandar F., 2015). To achieve these desired outcomes, both students and professors will need to learn how they can be successful under circumstances that may differ from their prior experiences (Densen Peter, 2011); an insight that may apply to many facets of life in one of the world's youngest countries. Indeed, our study suggests that the perception of learning by students at University of Prishtina is strongly influenced by the larger context in which they live and learn. We join the voices of other instructors, practitioners, and scholars who are calling for a body of educational research, including new tools, methods and theories, that are adaptive to a wider range of global experiences.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, raising student satisfaction with teaching strategies is a matter of strategic importance for strengthening the healthcare workforce both for Kosovo and others around the world. The results

of this study suggest that, in Kosovo, student satisfaction with foundational practices, such as active learning, can be expanded through the incorporation of technology mediated and advanced pedagogical strategies. To remain competitive in a global marketplace, both students and instructors will likely need to adopt forward-looking practices that are different from their prior experiences.

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