



Eliciting the Malaysians Undergraduate Dental Students' Perceptions on Elective Research Projects (ERP): Strength and Weaknesses

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Abstract

Dental schools are challenged to develop student centred learning approach to prepare future dental practitioners. This approach includes the community-based learning (CBL), problem-based learning (PBL), clinical-based reasoning (CBR), clinical management of patients and elective research project (ERP). ERP is implemented in year four of the study and assessed at the end of one year as part of dental student's requirement for undergraduate programme. The result of ERP experience during the one-year period by 58 final year dental students evaluated through 40 questions given to them confirmed of knowledge gained in problem-solving, communication, analytical skill, basic statistic handling, and research report. Strength of ERP included publication opportunities for students and supervisors, collaborative work output, however the lack of guidance from supervisors was found to be a weakness in this study.

Keywords: Dental students; Research culture; Perceptions; Strength; Weakness

Short Communication

Dental schools are challenged to develop student centred learning approach to prepare future dental practitioners. This approach includes the community-based learning (CBL), problem-based learning (PBL), clinical-based reasoning (CBR), clinical management of patients and elective research project (ERP). A study conducted on these learning experiences provides an educational strategy to facilitate the personal and professional development of future dentists. ERP is implemented in year four of the study and assessed at the end of one year as part of dental students' requirement for undergraduate programme. Their research experience is an important feedback for future improvements in dental curriculum and the institutions, and would help to harmonious the teaching and assessment of research skills.

Although quantitative methods and experiences have been documented, very few studies have been employed on examining the students' views of their research experiences. The study that

was conducted on eliciting the Malaysians undergraduate dental students' perceptions on ERP, strength and weaknesses involved forty questions which were distributed to fifty-eight (58) final year dental students in Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia, University of Malaya and National University of Malaysia.

The students' responses were then categorized into several key features. The findings from this evaluation showed 80% of students believed that knowledge was gained through the research experience. Problem-solving, communication and analytical skills of the students improved in 75% of them. About 77.9% students thought that supervision was helpful in their research programme. Approximately 63.2% students stated supportive working environment including financial support by the faculty. Necessary resources were provided by the faculty to facilitate their research (70.9%). Some 58.2% of students were satisfied with their research, however, 17.5% students stated otherwise. ERP programme should be continued and has been part of the university curriculum across the public and private universities in Malaysia in dental undergraduate programme. The strength is on



the ERP as research output for staff key performance indicator (KPI), publications, even source of products and patents. Inclusion of student's name in the publications would carry weight in their future career and job undertakings. Collaborative group work in carrying the ERP is beneficial in many ways, though it is not without its challenges. Some noted weaknesses were lack of guidance from supervisors and funding of ERP that might affect the outcome and progress of the project [1-7].

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