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Religious education quality from the Ilam University of Medical Science Students' viewpoints

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Two courses on Islamic thoughts are offered at the Iranian higher medical education system to deepen and enhance religious beliefs of Muslim students. Assessing students' opinion on quality of these courses may improve quality at the higher education system. Therefore, this study aimed to assess students' opinion on the quality of Islamic course 1 and 2 among students at the Ilam University of Medical Science.

Material and Methods: This cross-sectional study was conducted among 296 medical students taking one of the Islamic thought 1 or 2 courses during the first semester of academic year 2015-2016. Data were collected using a self-developed questionnaire to assess students' opinion on three dimensions including content quality, quality of the lecturer as well as planning and effectiveness of the module. We used SPSS version 21 to analyze data using descriptive statistic, t-test and ANOVA.

Results: Finding from this study showed that the highest mean score of the quality dimension was 3.42 (SD= 1.05) for content quality followed by 3.23 (SD+ 1.21) for quality of the lecturer and finally 3.16 (SD+ 1.19) for the planning and effectiveness of the module. In addition, the global mean score of the course quality was 3.26 (SD+1.16). There was a significant difference in the mean score of course quality among students from different faculties ($p<0.05$).

Conclusion: Our findings indicated that students perceived the quality of Islamic thought courses relatively desirable. However, elaborating different dimensions of quality related to the described courses call for further revision into quality of the lecturer and planning and effectiveness of the module.

Keywords: Islamic thought, course evaluation, educational quality

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, cultural belief and traditional values should be transferred to the next generation appropriately in order to maintain these values in a society. The best approach to transfer these spiritual values to the next generation is to promote religious education [1]. Students in the higher education system are considered as the main client that play a critical role in quality evaluation, course planning, teaching method, learning method and quality of lecturer [2]. On the other hand, students are the main outcome of academic system and the main responsibility of the universities is to supply development and deepening of scientific, social, mental, emotional and ethical foundation among students [3].

Educational systems that are directed toward religious orientation are not only responsible for scientific and technologic improvement but also are responsible for promoting religious, spiritual and ethical values. Iran is an Islamic country in which religion is considered as an important value within the society. Therefore, educating Islamic thoughts is an academic approach to establish and develop religious foundation among students. In other words, one of the main important purposes of Islamic courses is to create positive attitude toward Islamic and cultural beliefs [4, 5]. It has been shown that majority of universities across the world offer courses on spiritual and religious thoughts to enhance students' religious awareness and critical thinking. This awareness promotes coping skills among students and help them learn how to live actively in the society [1, 6, 7].

Within the Iranian higher education system, Islamic thought courses are offered as a non-core module for bachelor students. These courses are intended to increase students' knowledge and awareness and to develop positive behavioral changes toward moral, ethical and Islamic values. Previous studies found inconsistent results and had several limitations including content, teaching method, quality of lecturer and effectiveness of the courses [3, 4, 8]. Therefore, this study aimed to assess students' opinion on the quality of Islamic course 1 and 2 among students at the Ilam University of Medical Science. We also focused on three dimensions of quality including content quality, quality of the lecturer as well as planning and effectiveness of the module.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This cross-sectional study was conducted among students at Ilam University of Medical Science during first semester of academic year 2015-2016. We used consensus-sampling method to include entire students taking the Islamic thought courses that yielded to a sample of 296 bachelor students (including clinical and non-clinical students). We adopted a questionnaire from Janati et al [3] study (Mazandaran University of Medical Science) and revised it by the department of Islamic thought and the Education Development Centre (EDC) of Ilam University of Medical Science. The questionnaire contains two parts including

demographic characteristics (5items) and 27 Likert type items with answers ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) measuring students’ opinion on quality of the courses. Three dimensions were measured to assess quality of the courses including content quality (item 1 to 8), quality of the lecturer (item 9 to 17) as well as planning and effectiveness of the module (item 18 to 27). Face validity and content validity of the questionnaire was obtained using panel of experts’ opinion. Then, ten respondents filled out the questionnaire to assess the internal consistency using Cronbach’s alpha. The reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed by obtaining Cronbach’s alpha of 0.92. This study was approved by the ethic committee of Ilam University of Medical Science. Prior to data collection, written consent form was obtained from participants. Upon completion of the course, students were asked to fill out the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Our findings showed that 136 (46%) of the students were male and 160 (54%) were female. Age distribution of participants showed that 34 participants were younger than 19 years old, 183 were between 19-22 years old and 79 students aged older than 22 years old. The mean CGPA of our participants was 15.88 (out of 20). Majority of our students (80) were from faculty of Health Science followed by Faculty of Allied Health Science (75), Medicine (52), Nursing and Midwifery (51) and Dentistry (38), respectively.

Table-1: Mean and standard deviation of items measuring quality of Islamic thought courses

Domains	Items	Mean ± SD	Quality		
			Desirable (3.334≤)	Slightly Desirable (1.668-3.334)	Undesirable (≤ 1.667)
course content quality	Content of the Islamic thought courses satisfied my curious to learn religious issues.	3.46±1.05	*	-	-
	The content was compatible with needs and demands of young generation.	3.21±1.09	-	*	-
	The content was compatible with credited values.	3.44±1.01	*	-	-
	The reference book for Islamic thought was fluent and easy to understand.	3.34±1.05	*	-	-
	The content of reference book for Islamic thought was coherence	3.35±1.07	*	-	-
	Rational and philosophical topics were used appropriately within the books.	3.50±1.08	*	-	-
	Gnosticism and theosophy topics were used appropriately in the book.	3.45±1.08	*	-	-

	Quran quota has been used where appropriate	3.63±0.98	*	-	-
	Domain average	3.42±1.56	*	-	-
The Quality of Lecturers	The lecturers were qualified in accordance with course outline.	3.46±1.19	*	-	-
	Lecturers established an appropriate emotional communication.	3.27±1.17	-	*	-
	Teaching method was suitable	3.30±1.26	-	*	-
	Lecturers actively engaged students in the discussions	3.37±1.27	*	-	-
	Lecturers were responsible to students' religious queries	3.38±1.23	*	-	-
	Lecturers encouraged students to learn effectively	3.10±1.14	-	*	-
	Students were able to make an appointment with lecturers outside the schedule of classes	3.06±1.08	-	*	-
	The teaching method was compatible with the course content	2.81±1.26	-	*	-
	Evaluation was compatible with contents and purpose of the course	3.31±1.25	-	*	-
	Domain average	3.23±1.21	-	*	-
curriculum and course effectiveness	Number of students in each class does not interfere with active engagement in the discussions	3.04±1.19	-	*	-
	Taking the Islamic thought courses effectively enhanced my religious beliefs	3.21±1.07	-	*	-
	Taking the Islamic thought courses effectively enhanced my questioning spirit	3.33±1.09	-	*	-
	Taking the Islamic thought courses effectively enhanced my positive attitude toward religion	3.48±1	*	-	-
	Integrating students with different majors in one class does not interfere with	3.04±1.33	-	*	-

students' engagement in the discussions.				
Educational facility was appropriate	3.28±1.23	-	*	-
It is necessary to offer this course in all of the medical universities.	3.33±1.27	-	*	-
Generally, this course is offered appropriately.	3.11±1.29	-	*	-
The credited values were compatible with the course content.	2.76±1.29	-	*	-
Degree of the course importance considered in the curriculum was in accordance to students' point of view	3.07±1.18	-	*	-
Domain average	3.16±1.19	-	*	-
Total average	3.26±1.16	-	*	-

Students' opinions regarding quality of the courses are described at table 1. As it was shown in table 1, student's perceived quality of the courses as relatively desirable across all its dimensions. There was a significant difference in the mean score of course quality among students from different faculties ($p < 0.05$).

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to assess students' opinion on the quality of Islamic course 1 and 2 at the Ilam University of Medical Science. Findings showed that students perceived quality of the courses as relatively desirable. Furthermore, elaborating the three dimensions of quality of the courses indicated that students perceived quality of the courses as desirable while quality of planning and effectiveness of the module perceived as relatively desirable.

Our findings are consistent with Janati et al [3] study indicated that desirable quality was reported by 80% of students in the course content dimension, 99% in the quality of lecturers and between 78 to 80% in planning and effectiveness of the module. Furthermore, assessing cognitive, emotional and psychomotor objectives of the Islamic thought courses indicated desirable results[9]. Similarly, a study conducted in the Islamic Azad University of Kashan indicated that students perceived Islamic thought courses as desirable and effective [4]. Nevertheless, several obstacles were identified for ultimate effectiveness of these modules including scientific capability of lecturers, personality of lecturers and evaluation approaches. In contrast, Khoshi et al study [10] revealed that existing quality of the Islamic thought courses are far away from ideal situation and require crucial revision in the respective curriculum. The possible explanation for these findings could be underlying differences in quality and criteria of universities offered these modules.

Further elaboration into the tree dimensions of quality indicated that the highest score in quality content was attributed to the use of Quran quote (Item 8). However, the least score belonged to the second item focusing on content compatibility with young adults' needs. Regarding quality of lecturer, we found that the highest score was attributed to scientific knowledge of lecturer

(item 9) while, teaching method (Item 16) was ranked as the least quality of the lecturer. Within planning and effectiveness of the module, Item 21 (the course effectively enhanced positive attitude toward Islamic thoughts) ranked as the highest score. Nevertheless, the least score was for item 26 focusing on lack of compatibility between credit and content of the course (Item 26). Findings from the current study was in line with Omidi et al study [11] which revealed that students were slightly satisfied by teaching method in the Islamic courses. Correspondingly, a study conducted in Tehran University showed that content of Islamic thought courses are not compatible with students' needs [10]. Alwadai [12] concluded that teachers of Islamic education in Saudi Arabia emphasized on traditional education methods and covering the whole content rather than focusing on critical thinking methods.

Yusefi et al [13] study showed that 44% of students were not satisfied about time and venue of classes. Findings from the present study revealed that several factors contributed to the success of Islamic thought course in the Ilam University of Medical Science including course content, lecturers' capability as well as appropriate planning and teaching methods. Another finding from this study indicated significant difference in students' point of view across different faculties which are consistent with Amini study. In contrast, Liaghatdar [14] found that Students' point of view were not significantly different among students in Islamic Azad University, Payame Noor University and Bahonar University. The possible explanation for the significant difference among students in the current study was different field of study including medicine, nursing and midwifery, allied health science and dentistry as well as individual characteristics.

CONCLUSION

Findings from the current study indicated students perceived the quality of Islamic thought courses relatively desirable. In order to improve the quality of such courses, it is recommended to revise course content, teaching methods and re-evaluate planning and assessment approaches. Future researchers may benefit from evaluating quality of Islamic thought courses within the entire medical universities in Iran. This may help policy makers and stakeholders to revise the curriculum according to educational needs.

LIMITATION

There are some limitations in this study which need to be addressed. First, this study was conducted in a single university which does not allow us to generalize the findings to the whole medical universities. Second, we faced limitation in finding similar previous studies because this study evaluated quality of Islamic courses which are only offered in some of Islamic countries.

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