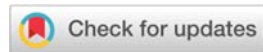


ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Student Satisfaction Among Transitional Doctor of Physical Therapy Students in Lahore, Pakistan: A Cross-Sectional Survey

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ABSTRACT

Background: An important measure of educational experience satisfaction is student satisfaction, which may offer institutions valuable information to help in determining strengths and areas for improvement. Transitional Doctor of Physical Therapy (tDPT) programs were created for advanced study by physiotherapists, but there is little data regarding student satisfaction with various aspects of a tDPT program in Pakistan.

Objective: To assess satisfaction among the Transitional Doctor of Physical Therapy students in Lahore, Pakistan.

Methods: A cross-sectional observational study was carried out on the students of Doctor of Physical Therapy transitional programmes in Lahore. Convenience sampling was used to select participants. A structured questionnaire, that follows the student satisfaction framework developed by Elliott and Shin, was employed for data collecting. The measure of satisfaction was for a five-point Likert scale of very dissatisfied to very satisfied. The data were analyzed descriptively by frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations.

Results: The total number of students was 76. The satisfaction levels were stepped up high as 69.7% of the students were very satisfied and 19.7% very satisfied with teaching and supervision. Likewise, 75.0% expressed satisfaction or very satisfaction with the curriculum, and 88.2% expressed satisfaction or high satisfaction with the supervisor's knowledge of research procedures. By contrast, the admissions policy was very uncertain with 56.6% of students choosing the undecided category. The overall satisfaction rate for students was 73.6% very satisfied or satisfied.

Conclusion: The majority of students experienced positive experiences regarding the curriculum, teaching and supervision, research assistance, and infrastructure and professional skills development. On-going student feedback, along with exploratory, qualitative research, may assist institutions in pinpointing areas of administrative and assessment practices that need improvement.

Keywords: Student's satisfaction, physical therapy education, post graduate education, curriculum, higher education

INTRODUCTION

Student satisfaction reflects student's perceptions on their educational experiences and how they think that institutions have cared and fulfilled their expectations^{1,2}. It has become regarded as an essential element in institutional assessment as the students may give data

related to the effectiveness of the delivery of learning, the facilities of the institute, learning assistance, and the learning atmosphere^{2,3}. A correlation between student satisfaction and their commitment to the school or college for retention dates back to previous studies^{4,5}.

The education environment has several aspects such as curriculum, quality of teaching, academic support,

educational facilities, educational services, and personal and professional development opportunities^{6,7}. Thus, the satisfaction of the students must not be taken care of only in context of teaching in the classroom. Instead, it is interpreted as the student's sense on a few parallel dimensions of their school experience⁶. A number of higher education contexts have been studied as far as satisfaction of students is concerned. Studies using education environment measures have cited students' degrees of satisfaction with the various aspects including academic assistance, facilities, educational activities and abilities of the tutors^{7,8}.

In a similar fashion, several researchers have created questionnaires with the theme of student satisfaction in education^{1,9}. There is also a current body of research on the factors which affect satisfaction, experience of institutions and retention in other educational contexts^{5,10}. A survey of students in Philadelphia determined which instructional-related issues were most satisfying as well as issues that students were less satisfied with, including lower levels of satisfaction with admission-related services and campus climate-related issues¹¹. The results indicate that student's views on the academic and administrative issues within an education programme might not be similar. Physiotherapy education in Pakistan has evolved from undergraduate, professional-oriented education forward to post-graduate and post-professional education, in line with international standards for physical therapist education^{12,13}. Transitional Doctor of Physical Therapy programs are academic programs designed for physiotherapists who have some previous professional degree in physical therapy¹³.

Student feedback can be utilized as a source of data within educational institutions for curriculum review, teaching review, supervision review, review of facilities, admission criteria review, assessment procedures, and training and development opportunities^{1,15}. Measurement of satisfaction also can be used to determine which components of a program might require additional exploration instead of taking it at face value that program components are felt the same by all students^{2,16}. Though some studies exist on student's satisfaction, there is limited evidence studying student's satisfaction particularly among tDPT students in Lahore^{17,18}. Thus, the aim of the study was to find the level of satisfaction of the tDPT Students in Lahore on Academic, Institutional, Administrative and Professional Development aspects of their learning experience.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design and Setting

The cross-sectional, observational study was carried out in the institutes that offer transitional Doctor of Physical Therapy programs in Lahore, Pakistan. The study aimed at exploring students' perceptions of the various aspects of their tDPT curriculum in the academic and institutional areas. The study setting were institutes in Lahore offering the transitional Doctor of Physical Therapy degree.

Participants

The study population consisted of transitional Doctor of Physical Therapy students in Lahore. Graduate Physical Therapy students and those who were not graduating were not included.

Convenience sampling technique was adopted^[19]. The initial sample size for the study was 80 students. The minimum size was calculated to be at 61 using an expected proportion of satisfaction of 80.1%, a margin error of 10% and a confidence level of 95%. Finally, 76 complete questionnaires were analyzed.

Data Collection Instrument

The use of a structured questionnaire for collecting data was done. The questionnaire was designed under the basis of students' satisfaction approach outlined by Elliott and Shin^[1]. This questionnaire covered items for physical infrastructure, curriculum, teaching and supervision, research supervision, leisure activity, degree reputation, networking facilities, admission process, presentation system, assessment system, fee structure, professional skill development, overall university experience and portal/practical facilities. The satisfaction items were rated on a five-point Likert scale from very dissatisfied to very satisfied^[20]. The study determined a Likert scale is suitable for measuring the strength of respondent's perceptions^[20,21].

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through SPSS. Categorical variables were presented as frequencies and percentages, and the age is presented as mean and standard deviation. There were no inferential comparisons made and reported between the demographic subgroups in the study as it was descriptive analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Participants consented to take part; they were informed of this study and that findings would be published anonymously and in reports without their names, as stated on the study consent form.

RESULTS

Participant Characteristics

76 complete responses were analyzed. The average age of the participants was 26.51 ± 1.25 years. The age distribution covered the age of between 25 and 29 years and the age of 25 had the highest percentage (27.6%). The ratio of female to the male in the sample was 59.2:40.8.

Satisfaction With Academic and Institutional Components

Overall, students held positive views of the academic aspects of their programs. 69.7% responded "satisfied" and 19.7% responded "very satisfied" with their satisfaction in teaching and supervision. The same was seen with the rate of the satisfaction levels shown by the supervisors regarding the knowledge on research-procedure, where 64.5% were satisfied and 23.7% were very satisfied. Curriculum was also good with 46.1%

stating they were satisfied and 28.9% very satisfied. Fifty-six percent were satisfied and 7.9% were very satisfied with the physical infrastructure. The percentage of students who felt professional skill building was satisfactory or very satisfactory was 44.7% and 31.6% respectively. The lowest levels of certainty were found to be admission procedures and assessment criteria. The students were uncertain about the admission process (56.6%) and evaluation criteria (38.2%). These results suggest areas in which students' perception of the environment was not clearly as good as that of teaching, curriculum and supervision of research.

Overall Educational Experience

The overall satisfaction of the participants was 44.7% were satisfied and 28.9% were very satisfied. Therefore, people said that they experienced the activity very positively, 73.6%. On the other hand, 17.1% stated that they were unsure and 9.2% were not satisfied.

Table 1: Distribution of satisfaction responses across educational and institutional domains (n = 76)

Satisfaction domain	Very dissatisfied, n (%)	Dissatisfied, n (%)	Undecided, n (%)	Satisfied, n (%)	Very satisfied, n (%)
Portal/practical facilities	0 (0.0)	9 (11.8)	14 (18.4)	42 (55.3)	11 (14.5)
Physical infrastructure	0 (0.0)	2 (2.6)	25 (32.9)	43 (56.6)	6 (7.9)
Curriculum	2 (2.6)	4 (5.3)	13 (17.1)	35 (46.1)	22 (28.9)
Teaching/supervision	0 (0.0)	1 (1.3)	7 (9.2)	53 (69.7)	15 (19.7)
Research procedure knowledge of supervisors	0 (0.0)	2 (2.6)	7 (9.2)	49 (64.5)	18 (23.7)
Leisure activities	4 (5.3)	7 (9.2)	25 (32.9)	39 (51.3)	1 (1.3)
Degree reputation	0 (0.0)	5 (6.6)	21 (27.6)	37 (48.7)	13 (17.1)
Networking facilities/portal	3 (3.9)	7 (9.2)	18 (23.7)	32 (42.1)	16 (21.1)
Admission procedure	0 (0.0)	2 (2.6)	43 (56.6)	23 (30.3)	8 (10.5)
Presentation system and knowledge/confidence	0 (0.0)	10 (13.2)	12 (15.8)	51 (67.1)	3 (3.9)
Assessment criteria	0 (0.0)	5 (6.6)	29 (38.2)	32 (42.1)	10 (13.2)
Fee structure	2 (2.6)	0 (0.0)	27 (35.5)	35 (46.1)	12 (15.8)
Professional skill development	0 (0.0)	9 (11.8)	9 (11.8)	34 (44.7)	24 (31.6)

Percentages are based on n = 76. Values are reproduced from the frequency distributions reported in the study.

Table 2: Overall satisfaction and selected areas of comparatively favorable or uncertain responses

Domain	Satisfied/Very satisfied, n (%)	Undecided, n (%)	Dissatisfied/Very dissatisfied, n (%)
Teaching and supervision	68 (89.4)	7 (9.2)	1 (1.3)
Research procedure knowledge of supervisors	67 (88.2)	7 (9.2)	2 (2.6)
Curriculum	57 (75.0)	13 (17.1)	6 (7.9)
Professional skill development	58 (76.3)	9 (11.8)	9 (11.8)
Physical infrastructure	49 (64.5)	25 (32.9)	2 (2.6)
Admission procedure	31 (40.8)	43 (56.6)	2 (2.6)
Assessment criteria	42 (55.3)	29 (38.2)	5 (6.6)
Overall university experience	56 (73.6)	13 (17.1)	7 (9.2)

For this table, "satisfied/very satisfied" combines the satisfied and very satisfied categories, while "dissatisfied/very dissatisfied" combines the corresponding negative categories.

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to assess the satisfaction level of students of Doctor of Physical Therapy (TPT) program in

Lahore and it revealed generally positive perception of the various aspects of the program. The best answers were related to Teaching and Supervision, Research

Support, Curriculum and Development of professional skills. The procedures and criteria for admission, however, did show relatively more uncertainty with regards to assessment. As a whole, just about three-quarters were satisfied or very satisfied with their university experience.

The teaching and supervision received the maximum favourable response with 89.4% stating satisfactory or very satisfactory. This result is in line with the literature that focuses on the quality of the performance by faculty and tutors in influencing students' learning experiences^[11-18]. In a medical education context, academic support, educational pursuits and the performance of tutors were found to be crucial factors for the satisfaction of students^{7,15-19}. As with the above studies, faculty engagement (and academic support) has been a focus of previous research for students' satisfaction and retention rates^{4,10}. Therefore, it is assumed that from the results obtained in the present study that students perceived interpersonal and instructional aspect of the tDPT learning environment as good.

The next most highly rated component was curriculum, at which 75.0% of students were satisfied or highly satisfied. This was consistent with the findings in the literature review that showed academic activities as being an important aspect of satisfaction in other educational groups^{8,16}. The current study was a mere descriptive study that however, failed to study the particular components of the curriculum that had led to satisfaction. Therefore, this finding is not a reflection of the effectiveness of specific course materials but of an overall impression about a course.

The student's satisfaction with the knowledge of the supervisors about the research procedures was also rated favourably with 88.2% rating as quite satisfied and very satisfied. This could be important in a post-professional program as research related learning is a part and parcel of the advanced educational experience^{14,21-23}. Similar high satisfaction with research supervision has been reported in satisfaction surveys of physical therapy students elsewhere^{18,22}.

Also, infrastructure and skill development of professionals were seen with a positive perspective. The proportion of students who reported satisfaction or high satisfaction with physical infrastructure was about 2/3 of the students and 76.3% of students reported satisfaction or high satisfaction with professional skill development. The results of this study are generally consistent with similar research in both literature and earlier studies which indicated that institutional facilities and educational activities influence student's education^{8,17}. Student satisfaction is complex and multi-dimensional and favorable ratings in multiple aspects might have been a

contributor to a favourable overall sense of satisfaction seen in this sample^{6,16}.

Conversely, the area of most uncertainty was the admission process. Over half of the students (56.6%) chose the undecided answer, with only 2.6% saying they were dissatisfied. The review of the student satisfaction survey that was conducted on Philadelphia Students is described as a similar pattern, in which the effectiveness of the admissions process is mentioned as having low satisfaction when compared to other areas of the survey¹¹. While the data in this finding cannot be used to establish why there is a lack of clarity, further research into the area of students' understanding of admission requirements, communication, transparency or administration procedures may be warranted.

Similarly, assessment criteria revealed a similar trend with a lesser degree of significance. There was a positive response from 55.3% of the participants, with half stating that they were satisfied or very satisfied, while the other half (38.2%) were not sure. This indicates that assessment was not generally perceived as a negative experience but that there was a significant sub-group which did not have a strong positive perception. The importance of assessment and the educational environment have been acknowledged in the literature as elements they can impact students' learning experiences^{7,21}. Additional qualitative studies can help determine if the uncertainty is due to unclear or inconsistent assessments, communication of criteria, or other factors.

73.6% of all participants felt satisfied or very satisfied with their university experience. This general positive feedback mirrors the positive feedback received across curriculum, teaching, research supervision, infrastructure as well as professional development. Still, it is important to keep in mind that even though some domains of satisfaction were higher than others, there were some areas of uncertainty that were not camouflaged in overall satisfaction. Student satisfaction questionnaires are most helpful when the results of individual responses are utilized as a feedback mechanism for program improvement, not just one of global program quality judgement^{1,15}.

Strengths and Limitations

One strength of this study is that it wasn't confined to teaching and curriculum but addressed several dimensions of the DPT educational experience. Factors within institutions and academia also received a relatively widely spread coverage as part of the study. A few limitations must be noted, however. Convenience sampling may reduce sample representativeness and have selection bias¹⁹. Because of the cross-sectional design, perceptions can only be examined at a single point in time

and the assessment of changes in satisfaction or causal relationships is not possible. Responses to questions were self-reported and may be subject to some response tendency or expectation by the individual. Apart from this, the study provides just descriptive analysis, and so cannot be examined for association with demographic characteristics and their satisfaction. Lastly, the motivation behind the structure of the questionnaire was that developed by Elliott and Shin in their student satisfaction studies, despite the lack of a formal psychometric validation of the adapted questionnaire in the study.

CONCLUSION

Most of the transitional DPT students in Lahore expressed being happy with teaching & supervision, research support, curriculum, infrastructure and professional skill development. Most also said they were pleased with the overall university experience. For the admission procedures and assessment there was a higher degree of uncertainty and this could be seen as a priority for reviewing at the institutional level. Further research with larger, representative samples, as well as with qualitative research, would help elucidate the reasons behind such perceptions^[16,17].

RECOMMENDATIONS

Structured student feedback on academic and administrative services could be taken by institutions with transitional Doctor of Physical Therapy programs on a regular basis^[1,15]. Specific emphasis might be placed on outlining admissions policies and making information on criteria available. Qualitative interviews or focus group discussions with students and academic staff may help to give extra information on the basis of why uncertainty occurs in these areas were identified. The study also stated a need for expert advice and qualitative research to be undertaken in the areas mentioned by the students.

DECLARATION

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Author's Contribution: All authors contributed equally in the complication of current study.

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Data Availability Statement: The data that supports the findings of this research are available on request from Corresponding Author.

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