

## Original Research Article

# Perception about student-led seminars among undergraduate students of a government medical college in Visakhapatnam: a cross-sectional study

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Teaching in India is still controlled by teacher-centered class room which would make them bored and exhausted. Educators now strive to provide the most productive class room experience for their students by facilitating small group discussions within the larger class such as seminar presentation by the students etc. Hence the present study was done to assess the perception of medical students regarding seminars in the curriculum towards a small group teaching activity. Objective is to assess the perception of medical students regarding seminars as a teaching learning activity.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional observational study was conducted among 4th semester undergraduate medical students of Andhra Medical College, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh in the month of June 2016 to assess their perception regarding seminars in the curriculum. A pre-designed, pre-tested self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data.

**Results:** Total number of study participants were 136. Majority 110 (80.9%) of them agreed that seminar is a good academic activity and is helpful in learning. Around 96 (70%) of the students opined that seminars help students engage in higher order thinking tasks. Majority 93.4% agreed that seminars help students to overcome nervousness. About 91.9% felt seminars improve self-confidence and personality development.

**Conclusions:** Students view that, seminars are more effective in deep understanding of the subject and critical thinking than didactic lectures and helps the students to improve self confidence and communication skills.

**Keywords:** Small group teaching, Student-led seminar, Perception

## INTRODUCTION

In majority of the medical colleges in India, theory classes are being taken by faculty by didactic lectures, which is a passive method of teaching. In this method, there is little retention of memory and students attention decreases after 20 minutes.<sup>1</sup> Most medical college curricula have adopted new methods of teaching and learning to varying degrees.

Facilitating small group discussions within the larger class, incorporating quizzes, using debates, seminar presentation by the students, taking to field trips, role playing, case studies, demonstrations through videotapes, problem based learning (PBL) and several others are the different teaching methods employed at the undergraduate level to appeal to students with different learning styles.<sup>2</sup> The aim of active learning methods is to engage students in higher order thinking tasks as analysis, synthesis and evaluation.<sup>3</sup>

Among them seminar offers an independent method of learning, that is student centered in which the student is given a topic by the guide and the student has to present the topic in front of his seniors, faculty members and guide, often using the audio visual aids.<sup>4</sup>

By definition, a seminar is a lecture or presentation delivered to an audience on a particular topic or set of topics that are educational in nature. It is held for a small group and for the role played by speaker.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to traditional didactic lecture method, seminar method seems to be more effective way of learning, which is relevant to self-development and is also interactive.<sup>6</sup>

Though medical council of India has given guidelines regarding small group teaching, in reality the usual method of teaching is didactic lectures. Seminars are conducted for undergraduate students in colleges routinely, but how appealing and useful is this teaching learning activity needs to be tested. Hence the present study was done to assess the perception of medical students regarding seminars in the curriculum as teaching learning activity.

Objective of the study was to assess the perception of medical students regarding seminars as a teaching learning activity.

## METHODS

A cross-sectional observational study was conducted among 4th semester undergraduate medical students of Andhra Medical College, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh in the month of June 2016 to assess their perception regarding seminars in the curriculum.

The sample size was calculated Using 4 PQ/L<sup>2</sup> with 9% absolute precision, expecting a non-response rate of 15% (p=60% from previous studies). From a batch of 200 students, 136 students were chosen by simple random sampling technique.<sup>7</sup>

The participants were briefed about the study and were instructed that the responses must be unbiased and data will be kept anonymous. A pre-designed, pre-tested self-administered questionnaire was prepared regarding usefulness of seminar in learning process and feedback was taken from all students. Total nine items were included in the questionnaire. The study was conducted after obtaining the permission from the Institutional Authorities. Objectives and procedure of the study were explained and consent was obtained from all the students. Sufficient time was given to fill up the forms.

### Statistical analysis

Statistical results were tabulated and calculated in Microsoft excel and the results were expressed in numbers and percentages.

## RESULTS

In the study, total respondents were 136 medical students. Demographic details of the study participants are explained in Table 1.

**Table 1: Demographic details of the study participants.**

Characteristics	No (%)
<b>Gender</b>	
Males	51 (37.5)
Females	85 (62.5)
<b>Area of residence</b>	
Urban	97 (71.3)
Rural	39 (28.7)
<b>Place of stay</b>	
Hostellers	92 (67.6)
Day scholars	44 (32.4)
<b>Board of schooling</b>	
SSC	94 (69.1)
CBSE	30 (22.1)
ICSE	12 (8.8)
<b>Language of instruction at school</b>	
English	131 (96.3)
Telugu	5 (3.7)

Majority of the students belong to age group of 19yrs with a mean age of 19.147 years and standard deviation of 0.47. Most of the students are females 85 (62.5%). Majority 97 (71.3%) of them are from urban area. Almost 92 (67.60%) of the students are hostellers. Most of the students 94 (69.1%) are from State syllabus.

The Table 2 shows the result of perceptions received from the students. Majority 127 (93.4%) agreed that seminars help students to overcome nervousness and improve confidence and personality development (92%). About 110 (80.9%) of the students agreed that seminar is a good academic activity and is helpful in learning. Almost 116 (85.3%) opined that students interaction with teachers on concerned topic will facilitate more definitive outcome.

Majority 116 (85.2%) of the students opined that it is important to follow pattern like proper selection of seminar topic, giving adequate time for preparation, interaction and facilitation by teachers can bring about a definite outcome. 81.6% opined that discussion is essential/relevant at the end of seminar presentation. Almost 3/4<sup>th</sup> 96 (70%) of the students opined that seminars help students engage in higher order thinking tasks. Only few (63.2%) felt that seminars facilitate small group discussions within larger classes. It was observed that (87%) of the students have participated in seminar presentation till now.

**Table 2: Response of students to various aspects of seminar.**

Si no.	Questionnaire	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Good academic activity	0	110 (80.9)	23 (16.9)	3 (2.2)	0
2	Helpful in learning	0	109 (80.1)	23 (16.9)	4 (3)	0
3	Facilitate small group discussions within larger classes	0	86 (63.2)	32 (23.5)	18 (13.3)	0
4	Help students engage in higher order thinking	0	96 (70.6)	28 (20.5)	12 (8.9)	0
5	Help students to overcome nervousness	0	127 (93.4)	8 (5.9)	1 (0.7)	0
6	Improve confidence and personality development	0	125 (92)	10 (7.3)	1 (0.7)	0
7	Students interaction with teachers on concerned topic will facilitate more definitive outcome	0	116 (85.3)	16 (11.7)	4 (3)	0
8	To follow Pattern in seminar presentation	0	116 (85.3)	16 (11.7)	4 (3)	0
9	Discussion is essential/relevant at the end of seminar	0	111 (81.6)	20 (14.8)	5 (3.6)	0

## DISCUSSION

In the study, maximum students believed that interactive and student centric education methods were more interesting and non-boring which also aids in good learning.

In the present study 80% of the students felt that student led seminars as good academic activity which is slightly lower than in a similar study done by Patel et al (85.8%). Our study findings correlate with that of Patel et al.<sup>7</sup>

In the study, 80.1% students believed that interactive and student centric education methods were more interesting and non-boring which aids in good learning which is significantly higher than in a study done by Patel et al (60.6%).<sup>7</sup>

In the study majority of the students (92%) agreed that seminars help to improve confidence and personality development which was comparable to (91%) a study done by Patel et al.<sup>7</sup>

In the present study, majority of the students 93.4% opined that interactive student-led seminars helped them to think critically with better understanding of the subject and also to overcome nervousness with improvement in communication skills. Gomathi et al found that student led seminars encouraged students in self, active and peer-learning. Teamwork and communication skills were also learnt effectively.<sup>8</sup> De-Jong et al found that small group tutorial lead to greater satisfaction but better learning results were obtained with interactive seminars.<sup>9</sup>

In the study, majority of the students agreed that it made them feel like a team member. This is a good training for them as teamwork is being increasingly emphasized in

healthcare and team training is now considered essential in medical education.<sup>10</sup>

In the present study 81.6% opined that it would be better if the student presenting the seminar should summarize the discussion of the topic and record it and circulate like minutes of meeting. Passive observation without interaction by attending members makes a seminar dull.

Seminar to be fully useful and beneficial to all the participants, it is the responsibility of all the members attending the seminar, to contribute their ideas, opinions and questions. Also it is essential that the topic be well researched and be prepared in advance, both by the presenter and the audience i.e., the historical aspects, evolutionary development (as introduction), comparative outlook with other disciplines, qualitative and quantitative aspects, explaining the mechanisms, variation to general rules, applied aspects and recent advances in it.<sup>11</sup>

Organizing seminars is one step towards relieving students from becoming totally dependent on their ability to memorize. Our study further supports the views expressed by earlier studies as most of the students responded positively to participating in regular seminars. A well-organized curriculum which includes small group teaching, student engagement methods helps the students as a road map to achieve success.

## CONCLUSION

Most of the students have positive opinion about seminars. Majority opined that, seminars are more effective in deep understanding of the subject and critical thinking than didactic lectures and also helps the students to improve their communication skills, speak better in

public with increased confidence and is stimulated for self-learning.

### **Limitations**

The study was conducted in only single institute among 4th semester students, the observations obtained may not be generalized to students of all semesters. Moreover only perceptions were assessed; learning outcomes from seminar presentations were not assessed in the study. In order to gain a full picture of aspects regarding perception on seminar learning, it is important to conduct similar studies in various institutions on students of all semesters.

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