

## RP4

### **Student Satisfaction Surveys Conducted Among Medical Undergraduates After the Final MBBS Examination in 2020 and 2021, Faculty of Medicine, University of Ruhuna**

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#### **Abstract**

Evaluating the satisfaction level among medical undergraduates is an essential step in ensuring the quality of medical education. The Faculty of Medicine (FoM), University of Ruhuna (UoR) conducts student satisfaction surveys (SSS) annually, aiming to improve the quality of teaching, learning environment, and facilities of the faculty.

Two SSSs were conducted through a Google Form in 2020 and 2021 for the students who completed the final MBBS examination before the results were released. Students were given a week to respond anonymously. The questionnaire prepared by referencing international SSS was reviewed and approved by the Internal Quality Assurance Cell. It was a self-administered questionnaire consisting of twenty-one questions on the quality of teaching, the learning environment, and the facilities of the faculty. The responses were analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U test in SPSS version 28.0.

The response rates in 2020 and 2021 were, 46/179 (25.7%) and 67/161 (41.6%), respectively ( $p=0.002$ ). In both years, the majority of the respondents were females (2020-78.3%, 2021-73.1%). Out of 21 questions, only 3 questions showed a significant difference between the responses received in the two years. The results indicated that students were satisfied with the quality of teaching. Students rated all the aspects inquired on learning environment above average. The satisfaction of the students was high with facilities of library, IT, hostel, Deans' office, and student affairs unit. The response towards the quality of the canteen was not satisfactory. However, it has improved in 2021 compared to 2020 ( $p<0.000$ ). Reporting of harassment faced during the undergraduate period was improved in 2021 compared to 2020 ( $p=0.8$ ).

The information obtained through this survey is useful in identifying the deficiencies for corrective measures.

**Keywords:** Personal Satisfaction; Students, Medical; Surveys and Questionnaires

## **Introduction**

Medical education worldwide is undergoing dramatic changes in pedagogical reforms recently. Therefore, continuous gauging of the system is an essential step in ensuring that the quality of the medical program is uplifted and maintained, along with the level of satisfaction among medical students with regards to their academic activities (Jayawickramarajah, 2017). One of the many invaluable sources for assessing the quality of the medical program is student satisfaction surveys (SSS). Seeking satisfaction feedback from graduates at the exit point from the program is a reasonable approach used in evaluating the quality of medical programs.

The Faculty of Medicine (FoM), University of Ruhuna (UoR), established in 1980, has come a long way to become a pioneer in medical education in Sri Lanka by providing academic, research, and outreach services. Assisting and preparing the medical students to become ethical, skilful and knowledgeable professionals while ensuring their overall satisfaction about the course has always been one of the main focuses of the faculty. The faculty started conducting SSS annually from 2020 for the final year students who faced the final MBBS examination and before releasing the results. The objectives of conducting the SSS are, to monitor students' learning experience and satisfaction annually to ensure that learning experiences are effective and help in achieving the desired outcomes, to regularly and systematically monitor to assess the students' satisfaction with the study program and the support services, and use the information gathered for continuous improvement of learning provision and support services.

## **Methodology**

A draft questionnaire was prepared by referencing SSS of several international universities. The draft was then improved to include items related to the quality of teaching, quality of the learning environment, and quality of the facilities of the faculty. The questionnaire was reviewed and approval was obtained from the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) and the Faculty Board of FoM.

The questionnaire consisted of 3 main categories: quality of teaching, quality of learning environment, and quality of facilities of the faculty. Students' satisfaction on those categories was assessed through 3-point Likert, 5-point Likert, Yes/No questions as well as open-ended questions.

The approved self-administered SSS questionnaire was converted into a Google Form and the link was sent through the WhatsApp Platform to the students of the 36<sup>th</sup> batch in 2020 and 37<sup>th</sup> batch in 2021, after the final MBBS examination, before the results were released. The students were given a week to respond anonymously.

The responses given by the two batches to a particular question in the two years were analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U test in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28.0. Statistical significance is considered as when  $p < 0.05$ .

## Results

In 2020, out of 179 students in the 36<sup>th</sup> batch, 46 (25.69%) responded to the survey. In 2021, 67 (41.62%) students out of 161 students in the 37<sup>th</sup> batch responded to the survey. There is a significant improvement of the rate of response of the students ( $p=0.002$ ). In both years, the majority of the respondents were female (2020; 78.3%, 2021; 73.1%).

Seven questions out of twelve that inquired about the quality of teaching showed the satisfaction of students towards the good side. These include, whether learning objectives and timetables are given before the commencement of the course, lecturers begin and end lectures/ tutorials and practical classes on time, lecturers are well-prepared for sessions, lecturers encourage students to ask questions and participate, lecturers answer questions clearly, lecturers know the subject matter and receive adequate help from the departments to pass the repeat exam. The responses received for the rest of the questions were within average (Table 1).

About the quality of the learning environment, students who had disabilities strongly agreed that they received adequate support from the faculty to continue their learning activities during the period of disability. Further students strongly agreed that they had a safe environment within the faculty premises. However, the responses are within average on mentoring service, support of administrative issues, sports activities, and activities of the student bodies (Table 1).

The responses from the students are towards the good side on the facilities of library, IT unit, Deans' office, student affairs unit, and hostel. Students had concerns on study areas, common rooms, and canteen facilities. The rest of the facilities that were inquired, received an average response. (Table 1)

Out of 21 questions, only 3 questions showed a statistically significant difference between the responses given in the two years (Table 1).

In addition to the above, eight open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire. Six students responded that some departments in the faculty do not provide learning objectives and timetables on time.

**Table 1: Undergraduates' perception on the service quality of higher education**

	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Test Value</b>	<b>P-Value</b>
Academic Aspects	Knowledge in the course content of the overall academic staff is satisfactory.	14.871	0.000
	The academic staff is caring and courteous towards students.	14.552	0.000
	Academics have a sincere interest in solving academic-related problems.	14.232	0.000
	The academic staff shows good communication skills.	14.802	0.000
Non-Academic Aspects	The non-academic staff shows a sincere interest in solving faculty problems.	14.104	0.000
	Non-academic staff is efficient/prompt in dealing with complaints.	13.711	0.000
	The non-academic staff has caring and individualized attention towards faculty circumstances.	13.123	0.000
	Non-academic staff show a positive attitude towards their service	13.978	0.000
Reputation	Hostel facilities and equipment given are satisfactory.	8.826	0.000
	Academic facilities are satisfactory.	11.691	0.000
	University provides easily employable graduates.	12.244	0.000
	Academic programs provided by the faculty are reputable.	13.922	0.000
Access	The faculty administration can be easily contacted by telephone.	11.173	0.000
	The information provided by the faculty is confidential.	13.013	0.000
	Faculty provide equal treatment and respect for all.	12.946	0.000

**Table 1: Undergraduates' perception on the service quality of higher education**

	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Test Value</b>	<b>P-Value</b>
	Use students' feedback for further faculty improvements.	12.540	0.000
Program Issues	Three academic programs are well organized.	14.353	0.000
	There is a flexible syllabus and proper structure within the degree programs.	14.101	0.000
	Provide a sound orientation program.	13.257	0.000
	Provide a variety of specialization programs.	14.626	0.000
Understanding	There is a sound counselling service	13.172	0.000
	There is a satisfactory health service.	9.232	0.000
	There is an ideal campus layout/location.	12.988	0.000
	There is a quick response to students' requests for assistance.	11.593	0.000

\*3-point Likert; 1– Good; 2- Average; 3- Poor

\*5-point Likert; 1– Strongly agree; 2-Agree; 3-Neutral; 4-Disagree; 5- Strongly disagree

As suggestions to improve blended learning, students requested to improve the internet facilities within the faculty and stated that online teaching has been more effective compared to in-hall lectures. To improve the quality of teaching, students suggested conducting more online lectures and tutorials, revising and updating the curriculum, introducing a module system, encouraging students to ask more questions, explaining more clearly the difficult concepts during lectures and having more clinically oriented and question-based teaching. Students suggested that the provision of lecture notes and constant attention and help from the mentors would improve the quality of learning in students with disabilities.

Regarding harassment during undergraduate life, 5 students in 2020 and 4 students in 2021 stated that consultants and hospital staff harassed them during clinical appointments, while in 2021, 3 students and 2 students stated that they got harassed by security officers and batch mates, respectively.

Students suggested allocating a place for group discussions, improving facilities of the senior common room and student rooms at the hospital, reducing the number of students in a clinical group, improving

lecture theatre facilities, and faculty staff being more friendly towards the medical students would improve the quality of the learning environment.

In order to improve the overall quality of the faculty, students suggested improving infrastructure (lecture halls, multimedia facilities, canteen, students' car park, facilities for sports, common rooms and study areas), activities of student bodies/societies, providing an updated academic calendar informing about the main examinations well ahead and conducting extra classes for repeat students.

## **Discussion**

The SSS was introduced to FoM, UoR in 2020. The response rate increased in 2021. The proportion of females to males is greater than 1 for both batches. Jackson et al. (2001) stated that females are more prone to be engaged in online communication and surveys than males. Tu and Liao (2007) also found that females perceive responding to a survey as behaviour consistent with empathy or emotional closeness, thus leading to a higher survey response rate for females than males. Further, the higher number of females in a batch compared to male students could be another reason for the majority of the respondents being female in the current survey.

According to the results, students were satisfied with most of the facts that inquired on the quality of teaching. However, the satisfaction level was significantly reduced regarding the responsiveness of lecturers to students outside classes in 2021 compared to 2020. It may be related to the difficulties they encountered with the Covid-19 pandemic and limitations to meet their expectations. The majority rated activities of student bodies as average in both years. It may be due to the lack of active involvement of student bodies and restriction of activities related to the prevailing pandemic. In 2020 and 2021, IQAC urged the student bodies to produce their terms of reference, conduct the annual general meetings and appoint new office bearers to reactivate their activities and requested their annual activity plan.

The results indicated a significant difference between the satisfaction levels of students regarding assistance received by the faculty administrative staff in the two years. The students' satisfaction has significantly reduced in 2021 compared to 2020. In a study conducted by Weerasinghe and Fernando (2018) with undergraduates of Ruhuna, Rajarata, Wayamba, and Sabaragamuwa Universities in Sri Lanka, it was concluded that reliability, responsiveness, caring attitude, accuracy, fairness, respect, and cooperation with students during the university period play a vital role in determining students' satisfaction level regarding the administrative staff. This was further supported by Malik et al. (2010) and Elliott and Shin (2002), who found that the above factors, along with impartial treatment to all students, significantly improve the satisfaction levels of undergraduates.

According to the results obtained in both 2020 and 2021, IT facilities, library facilities, dean's office services, hostel facilities and service of the student affairs unit were rated well indicating that students are satisfied with those facilities and services. The satisfaction on study areas, common rooms, and canteen was rated as below average. Among these, the canteen facility was the lowest rated facility in the faculty according to the students' perception. Although it showed a significant improvement with respect to students' satisfaction in 2021 compared to 2020, the majority still rated the quality of the canteen facility as poor. The canteen supplies food and tea at the concessionary rates determined by the tender procedure of the university. Although the prices are affordable, the students found the canteen facility unsatisfactory. In a study conducted by Weerasinghe and Fernando (2018) it was found that facilities such as student cafeterias and social areas work as major determinants of student satisfaction levels at state universities in Sri Lanka. In the current study, as the majority of students are unhappy with the canteen facilities, it needs attention to identify the factors and measures to rectify the deficiencies.

The response rate increased significantly in the latter year compared to the previous year. The IQAC addressed most of the issues brought forward by the students in 2020 while incorporating their suggestions into the system whenever possible. In addition, during the past year, the IQAC has been closely in touch with the students of the said batches, introducing novel approaches of the faculty to them such as an online reporting system for sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), online academic calendar, etc. Frequent recommendations made to the authority based on students' feedback could have enhanced the students' trust leading to an increased response rate.

The main areas suggested by the students to improve were infrastructure (lecture halls, multimedia facilities, canteen, students' car park, facilities for sports, common rooms and study areas), activities of student bodies/societies, providing an updated academic calendar informing about the main examinations well ahead, and conducting extra classes for repeat students.

As this is a routine survey to identify where the students' satisfaction is not up to the expectations, it would be worth conducting separate surveys in the areas where the students are not happy to recognize the exact reasons why they are not happy. Further, such in-depth studies would facilitate identifying effective remedial measures.

## **Conclusions**

The satisfaction of medical undergraduates in the academic program and the overall experience of undergraduate life is an important factor that indicates the quality of a medical faculty. In order to measure the satisfaction levels of the medical undergraduates, SSS were introduced in 2020 by the

IQAC of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Ruhuna. Through the survey, the strengths and weaknesses in teaching/learning, learning environment and facilities of the faculty were identified. The information obtained through the survey opened an avenue to the IQAC to recommend the relevant authorities to take remedial actions to improve the quality.

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