Viva Voce-A Perspective From the Other Side of Table

Taaha Muddassir Mirza,
Third Year Rawalpindi Medical College.

Abstract

Background: To study the perceptions of undergraduate medical students regarding viva voce and its acceptance as a mode of examination

Methods: In this cross sectional study a structured questionnaire comprising of 16 items was administered to 194 students undergraduates (112 females; 82 males) to assess their perceptions regarding viva voce as a mode of examination. The results were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and Access. The ratios and percentages were calculated. The responses of male students were compared with the female students through Pearson’s Chi square test and p values were calculated.

Results: Amongst 194 students, 91.8% of the females and 90% of the males felt that there was more stress prior to viva voce examinations. Forty two percent of the females and 41% of the males felt that the dressing up was important in viva voce examinations whereas 58.2% of the students felt that grudges/favoritism affected their results. Majority of the students regarded luck as an important for getting good marks. Forty percent of the males and 54.3% of the females felt that they received less marks than they deserved. Despite this, 70% of the students felt that it should continue to be part of examination. No statistically significant differences were observed in perceptions based on gender.

Conclusion: Majority of students are not satisfied with the viva voce as a reliable tool for examination, however most of them still want it to be used as a tool of assessment.

Key words: Viva voce, Examination.

Introduction

Viva or oral examination is a widely used, mode of assessment in many institutions but still remains one of the most controversial examination techniques being currently employed. Viva Voce date back to the mid-1500s and since then, with the passage of time they have gained more and more importance, even at undergraduate level in most of the medical colleges now. Viva voce are commonly used because they provide the examiner flexibility and the potential for testing higher skills not checked in written examinations. Viva voce compel the student to explore the topics in depth, and allow them to have a face to face session with the examiner. Despite being used as a mode of assessment in many institutions it still remains one of the most controversial examination techniques being currently employed. Many examiners find it difficult to set aside their personal prejudice while awarding marks. There are multiple factors which may affect a students’ score, one of the major being the stress and pre- viva voce tension experienced. The biases associated with viva voce can at times be intimidating to the undergraduate students leading to ‘fear of the examiner. With this background in mind, this research had been designed with the objective to assess the perspective of undergraduate medical students to viva voce and its acceptance as a mode of examination. Moreover it also explored any differences in perceptions of male students compared to those of female students regarding viva examination. It is hoped that findings of this research may contribute in provision of recommendations for modifying the examination policy so as to decrease the biases associated with it.

Subjects and Methods

A cross sectional study was carried out at Rawalpindi Medical College in 2014 where 1st and 2nd year students were included as study participants. A structured questionnaire was developed and pretested then was floated on the social networking group of Rawalpindi Medical College to gather the responses of students. The data was collected with the help of ‘Google Forms’ after which the data was transferred to and entered into Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Access for analytical purposes. A non probability convenient sampling technique was adopted where a total of 194 students filled up the questionnaires and returned back completely, out of a study population of 630 students who were invited for the study. Online administration of questionnaire was adopted, to avoid any potential influence of researcher’s presence and to receive honest and unambiguous responses of the study participants. The questionnaires were kept anonymous to control information bias. Students who had joined the college less than six months back were excluded from the study. For all the categorical
variables, frequencies along with percentages were calculated. Pearson’s chi square test was applied at 5% level of significance to compare responses of male students with those of female students. p-Values were calculated and those less than 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

Results
A total of 194 students participated in this study, amongst who there were 82 (42.26%) males and 112 (57.73%) were females. Amongst 194 students, 91.8% of the females and 90% of the males felt that pre examination tension was more in viva voce examinations and this difference was not statistically significant with p-value 0.67. Moreover 25% of the females and 27% of the females felt that the dressing up was not important in viva voce examinations (p-value 0.93), while remaining felt that it was either mildly important or important. 58.2% of the students felt that grudges/favoritism affected their results (Figure 1) and the difference amongst male and female proportions who answered affirmatively was not statistically significant with p value 0f 0.93. Luck was also regarded as important for getting good marks. When inquired to rate from 1 to 5 whether luck was important in securing good marks with 1 representing No and 5 Yes, 79.9% of study participants rated 4 and 5.

Discussion
Studies have criticized oral assessments for having poor validity and reliability.6–11 This can be clearly seen from the results of the present study. Further, the results of the present study show that external factors such as the pre-viva tension, the dressing up and the relation with the examiner all bias the result. This is in accordance with other studies which prove that the environment during traditional viva voce is often threatening and this could be attributed to the enhanced pre-viva tension experienced by the students in our study.4 Multiple studies on viva voce claim that the anxiety levels of students are also higher just prior to taking a viva voce exam as compared to other modes.12 Another research suggests that 93% of viva are biased by the fear of the examiner.13 This suggests that the results of this study are in coherence with researches carried around the world. The aspect of grudges and favoritism in viva voce is a challenge indeed. As we know, all examinations are coded by allotting students roll numbers to keep a degree of anonymity so that the results may be as impartial as possible. However this is not the case in viva voce, with the examiner interacting with the student face to face. Research carried out by Rehana et al also states that 92% of the viva voce are affected by biases.13 This has been reflected in the results of the present study and is in accordance with another.
research which claims that 53.62% of all viva voce examinations tend to be biased. The luck factor as described in the results above also decreases the validity of viva voce as a mode of examination. However this could be minimized as studies suggest that structural viva voce reduce the luck factor. Despite all these biases the present study shows that more than half of the students felt that they either got more or almost same marks as they thought they deserved and 70% of the students still felt that viva voce examinations should continue to be a mode of assessment. Due to all these reasons, the medical educationists are abandoning the use of ‘traditional viva voce’ and have turned towards structural viva voce which are alleged to increase the oral examinations reliability. Some researches compliment the structured viva voce as it lessens most of the apprehensions present in traditional viva voce examinations. Although the implementation of true structured viva voce is a no easy task, but once in practice, it can turn out to be a strong mode of assessment.

Conclusion

1. A large percentage of students are not satisfied with the viva voce as a reliable tool for examination, however majority of them still want it to be used as a tool of assessment.
2. More objectively designed structured viva can minimize the biases associated with traditional viva.

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References