



## Qualities of an Effective Teacher: Perspectives from a College of Medicine in Nigeria

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### Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Authors IRE and LCI designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author HUE managed the analyses of the study. Author CAO managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Evaluation of effectiveness of teaching can be obtained through feedback from students, self or peers. This study determined the perspectives of teachers in a College of Medicine in Nigeria on the qualities of an effective teacher.

**Methods:** A cross sectional descriptive study was carried out among the consenting academic staff of the College of Medicine, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus in July 2014. Self-administered questionnaire was used to determine their perspectives on the qualities of an effective health

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teacher. On a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagrees to strongly agrees, each participant was required to respond to some statements. Data entry and analysis were done using SPSS version 20 (Chicago, Illinois, USA).

**Results:** 'Having good communication skills' (4.87) and 'sound knowledge of the subject' (4.87) were the most important characteristics. Also ranking high were 'should have good presentation skills (4.83) and should be honest, moral and exhibit high ethical standards' (4.78). The rank of the respondents had a statistically significant effect on their perception of the characteristics of an effective teacher with regards to interaction with students/colleagues ( $p=0.014$ ). The more senior teachers-associate professors and professors gave the highest mean rank (4.25 and 4.23 respectively) while graduates assistants gave the lowest (3.75).

**Conclusion:** An effective medical teacher should have a good grasp of the subject, be able to communicate same excellently and possess good personal attributes as honesty and high ethical and moral standards. These attributes should be acquired and strengthened in order to attain a state of proficiency.

*Keywords: Medical teacher; teaching effectiveness; faculty; developing country.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Clinical learning is critical to medical education [1]. Effective medical teaching leads to the production of good end-products-good quality doctors [2]. The signs of an effective teacher include knowledge of the subject, enthusiasm and good communication skills [1]. The good teacher should be a mentor and leader, and should be passionate, patient and flexible [3]. Excellent teachers serve as role models, influence students' career choices and guide them to attain their potentials [4].

The attributes of a good clinical teacher have been classified into cognitive skills including medical knowledge, clinical skills and setting learning objectives, and non-cognitive skills such as relationship skills, positive personality and emotional attributes [5]. The former can more readily be acquired whereas the later are more innate and more difficult to teach and develop [5]. Both attributes however play significant role in creating a supportive learning environment [6].

Although most medical teachers in Nigeria are experts in their various fields, many do not have any formal training in teaching [7]. Knowledge of a subject does not translate automatically to effective teaching [7]. Good medical teacher is expected to have an understanding of principles of education applied to medicine [8]. Hence, some medical councils that govern the licensing and training of medical specialists require universities to ensure that training in teaching skills be provided for new appointees [8].

A common way of examining the effectiveness of teaching is through perception studies. These

have the advantage of obtaining information on a wide range of teachers behaviours from a large number of observers at a minimal cost [9,10]. Perception studies are often derived from feedback from students [10,11]. Inflated ratings have been noted to be a limitation of using students to evaluate a faculty [12,13]. Feedback from self (reflection) and peers are other ways of evaluating teaching effectiveness [3].

There is need for rigorous and repetitive evaluation of clinical teaching process and environment in order to identify areas of strength that need to be reinforced and areas that can be improved. Several authors have elucidated factors of medical teacher's effectiveness to include organization/clarity of presentation, knowledge, group interaction skill, enthusiasm/stimulation of interest and professionalism [1,13]. To the best of our knowledge, no such evaluation of the teaching process had been carried out in this medical institution since inception. It is expected that the outcome of this study will assist curriculum planners and faculty members improve on their teaching methods.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1 Study Centre

The University of Nigeria, Enugu campus is an establishment of the Federal government located in south-eastern Nigeria. It was established 47 years ago and draws majority of the teaching staff from all over Nigeria. The College of Medicine is made of three Faculties, namely faculty of medical sciences (with 23 departments), Faculty of Dentistry (with 4

departments) and Faculty of Health Sciences and Technology (with 5 departments). The College has a total of 306 academic staff.

## 2.2 Ethical Clearance

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Medical and Health Ethics Committee. Informed written consent was obtained from each teacher after explaining the objectives of the study.

A cross sectional descriptive study was carried out among the teachers in these faculties who attended a College meeting in July 2014. A self-administered questionnaire was given to each academic staff that was present and consented to participate in the study. The questionnaire was distributed by three research assistants who were students of Sociology from the main campus of the University.

The questionnaire was a modified version of the 24 statements used in a similar study in Malaysia [2]. They were examined and tested on a small sample of teachers in another faculty to ensure their relevance to the study area. Minor modifications were made. The statements were attributes of teacher behaviour within the framework earlier outlined. Baseline data such as age, sex, faculty, rank and teaching experience were sought from each participant. On a 5 point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagrees to strongly agrees, each participant was required to respond to each statement.

Data entry analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences [SPSS] version 20 (Chicago, Illinois, USA). Descriptive statistical methods such as the mean, standard deviation, frequency and percentage were used. The mean score for each statement was calculated and presented in a tabular form. The 24 statements termed variables were grouped into 4 categories namely; classroom behaviour, interaction with student/colleagues, personal qualities and professional development. The relationship between categorical responses and explanatory variables were evaluated using Chi-square test. All tests of significance were carried out at the 5% level.

## 3. RESULTS

A total of 239 teachers in the College of Medicine were available to participate in the study, out of which 165 gave their consent giving a

participation role of 69%. Two questionnaires had incomplete responses and were excluded from further analysis. The baseline characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1. Of the 163 participants, 68.7% were in the faculty of medical sciences and 70.6% were aged 30-49 years. There was a male preponderance.

**Table 1. Baseline characteristics of the respondents**

Variables	Frequency (n=163)	Percent
<b>Faculty</b>		
Dentistry	9	5.5
Health sciences	42	25.8
Medical sciences	112	68.7
<b>Age (Years)</b>		
20-29	7	4.3
30-39	58	35.6
40-49	57	35.0
50-59	33	20.2
60-69	8	4.9
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	39	23.9
Male	124	76.1
<b>Rank/Designation</b>		
Graduate assistant	4	2.5
Lecturer II	13	8.0
Lecturer I	45	27.6
Senior lecturer	69	42.3
Associate professor	6	3.7
Professor	26	16.0
<b>Teaching experience (years)</b>		
0 – 9	92	56.4
10 – 19	49	30.1
≥20	22	13.5

Table 2 shows the mean score of the perspective of the respondents on the characteristics of the effective medical teacher. 'Having good communication skills' (4.87±0.43) and 'sound knowledge of the subject' (4.87±0.44) were the most important characteristics. Also ranking high were 'should have good presentation skills' (4.83±0.46) and 'should be honest, moral and exhibit high ethical standards' (4.78±0.52). 'Should not encourage students participation during theory lessons' had the lowest score (1.48±0.9).

As shown in Table 3, the variables (statements) were grouped into four categories and the mean scores of the perspectives of the respondents in the three faculties were as follows: personal qualities (4.7), professional development (4.6),

classroom behaviour (4.4), and interaction with students/colleagues (4.0). Personal qualities still ranked highest across the three faculties though this was not statistically significant,  $X^2=0.448$ ,  $p=0.640$ .

From Table 3, there was no statistically significant difference in the various subgroups of characteristics of an effective teacher across faculty, age groups, gender and teaching experience. The rank of the respondents, however, had a statistically significant effect on their perception of the characteristics of an effective teacher with regards to interaction with students/colleagues,  $X^2=2.975$ ,  $p=0.014$ . The more senior teachers-associate professors and Professors gave the highest mean rank (4.25±0.47 and 4.23±0.27 respectively) while graduate assistants gave the lowest (3.75±0.34).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This study provides information on teachers' perspectives on effective clinical teaching processes and practices. There are multi-factorial attributes that make for excellent clinical teaching [6]. In this study, 'sound knowledge of subject', 'good communication and presentation skills' and personal attributes as being honest, moral and exhibit high ethical standards were rated the top characteristics of effective medical/health teachers while inflexibility regarding class room discipline and using a good sense of humour in teaching sessions were the lowest. Communication skills and content expertise were also reported as leading attributes while telling jokes and giving personal narratives were considered the least important qualities in a study in Quassim University, Saudi Arabia [13].

**Table 2. Mean score of the characteristics of effective medical/health teacher**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Classroom behaviour</b>		
Should have good communication skills	4.87	0.43
Should have good presentation	4.83	0.46
Should use good sense of humour in teaching sessions	4.27	0.74
Should be innovative in using technology in classroom	4.55	0.64
Should be well organized and possess excellent time management skills	4.66	0.6
Should be inflexible regarding maintaining classroom discipline	3.21	1.33
<b>Interaction with students/colleagues</b>		
Should be aware of student interests and needs	4.47	0.7
Is really approachable	4.59	0.69
Should not encourage student's participation during theory lectures	1.48	0.9
Should work well with colleagues and administrators	4.56	0.75
Should be inspiring and motivational to students	4.74	0.56
Should be very generous in assessing the performance of the students during exams	2.69	1.14
Should offer constructive criticism to the students	4.48	0.65
Should trust and respect the student	4.19	0.82
Should be caring and shows empathy towards students	4.33	0.7
Should be able to teach students how to monitor their own	4.38	0.68
<b>Personal qualities</b>		
Should have leadership qualities	4.47	0.76
Should be punctual	4.72	0.54
Should be unbiased	4.71	0.61
Should have sound knowledge of the subject	4.87	0.44
Should be enthusiastic and has passion to teach, enjoys teaching	4.74	0.53
Should be honest, moral and exhibit high ethical standards	4.78	0.52
<b>Professional development</b>		
Should be up-to-date with the recent advances in education technology	4.61	0.62
Should have publications and should be active in research	4.49	0.71
Should be willing to learn and open to charge (flexible)	4.65	0.58
Should seek feedback from students and/or other teachers after lectures or clinical demonstrations	4.52	0.62

**Table 3. Mean score for the four categories of characteristics of effective medical/health teacher and the baseline characteristics of the respondents**

Variables	Classroom behaviour			Interaction with students/colleagues			Personal qualities			Professional development		
	N	Mean±SD	p-value	N	Mean±SD	p-value	N	Mean±SD	p-value	N	Mean±SD	p-value
<b>Faculty</b>												
Dentistry	9	4.31±0.47		9	3.94±0.25		9	4.70±0.20		9	4.56±0.35	
Health sciences	42	4.41±0.40		42	3.96±0.26		42	4.77±0.26		42	4.65±0.37	
Medical sciences	112	4.40±0.46	0.178 (0.837)	112	4.01±0.48	0.231 (0.794)	112	4.69±0.50	0.448 (0.640)	112	4.54±0.55	0.782 (0.459)
<b>Age (Years)</b>												
20-29	7	4.33±0.29		7	3.90±0.33		7	4.76±0.27		7	4.46±0.39	
30-39	58	4.50±0.34		58	4.04±0.35		58	4.73±0.32		58	4.55±0.42	
40-49	57	4.30±0.58		57	3.89±0.52		57	4.66±0.61		57	4.56±0.65	
50-59	33	4.39±0.35		33	4.05±0.37		33	4.77±0.29		33	4.59±0.38	
60-69	8	4.40±0.34	1.411 (0.233)	8	4.18±0.40	1.570 (0.185)	8	4.73±0.37	0.390 (0.816)	8	4.69±0.37	0.220 (0.927)
<b>Sex</b>												
Female	39	4.44±0.42		39	4.01±0.37		39	4.73±0.38		39	4.66±0.45	
Male	124	4.38±0.45	0.784 (0.434)	124	3.98±0.44	0.338 (0.736)	124	4.71±0.46	0.262 (0.794)	124	4.54±0.51	1.354 (0.178)
<b>Rank</b>												
Graduate assistant	4	4.42±0.44		4	3.75±0.34		4	4.75±0.22		4	4.25±0.20	
Lecturer II	13	4.21±0.40		13	3.89±0.27		13	4.69±0.26		13	4.69±0.34	
Lecturer I	45	4.41±0.60		45	3.97±0.52		45	4.64±0.65		45	4.54±0.67	
Senior lecturer	69	4.41±0.36		69	3.93±0.39		69	4.70±0.37		69	4.53±0.46	
Associate professor	6	4.39±0.43		6	4.25±0.47		6	4.81±0.19		6	4.71±0.37	
Professor	26	4.42±0.35	0.518 (0.762)	26	4.23±0.27	2.975 (0.014)	26	4.87±0.21	1.034 (0.399)	26	4.66±0.37	0.885 (0.492)
<b>Teaching experience (years)</b>												
0-9	92	4.41±0.48		92	3.97±0.44		92	4.69±0.49		92	4.54±0.55	
10 -19	49	4.39±0.37		49	4.04±0.37		49	4.80±0.27		49	4.63±0.41	
≥20	22	4.35±0.45	0.186 (0.830)	22	3.98±0.47	0.429 (0.652)	22	4.64±0.48	1.402 (0.249)	22	4.51±0.46	0.658 (0.519)

The need for an in-depth knowledge of the subject to be taught cannot be over-emphasized. A good medical teacher should keep abreast with the rapidly evolving field of medicine. Surprisingly, a study from Japan [14] on the characteristics of a good clinical teacher using the perspectives of resident physicians did not rate the medical knowledge of the teacher highly. Personal attributes of the teacher such as provided sufficient support and was accessible were rated more highly. The authors suggested that this could be the result of differences in educational system and settings as well as culture.

Medical students acquire knowledge from diverse sources and their views on the characteristics of an effective teacher are often at variance with those of the faculty members [15,16]. In a review of qualities of resident teachers valued by medical students, the least occurring theme was 'knowledge' suggesting that the residents' quantum of knowledge may not be as important as other qualities in the views of the medical students [17]. It was suggested that the medical students search for knowledge is being fulfilled by sources other than residents [17]. Aba Ailkhail [18] showed that the preference for resident teachers was based on their ability to establish a supportive and safe learning climate for medical students to practice and make mistakes in a non-threatening environment.

Good communication and presentation skills are essentials in relating thoughts and ideas effectively [19]. It is expected that an effective medical teacher should be able to pass on knowledge concisely and in an interesting manner. Power point slides should not be cluttered but well prepared and presented. As newer technologies (example interactive whiteboard) keep getting integrated into medical education, an effective teacher should key into these so as to maximise their potential benefits as aids for better communication.

Interestingly, using a good sense of humour and probably jokes during teaching lesson was not highly rated in the faculty. This is in agreement with other reports [13,20]. Faculty members in our study were drawn from the diverse ethno-religious entity that is Nigeria. The cultural differences among the members may be responsible for the observed differences. The perspectives from medical graduates in a study in Sri Lanka also suggest that the contents of some of the jokes contribute to the apathy as

some were sexually offensive jokes which were very embarrassing [4]. It may also be due to probable disruptive effect on thought processes and loss of valuable time.

When the attributes of an effective teacher were grouped into four categories; classroom behaviours, interactions with students/colleagues, personal qualities and professional development, personal quality was adjudged most important irrespective of faculty. This agrees with the conclusions of Bannister et al [6] that what they remember of any teacher who made the clinical experience memorable and inspired them a little harder, is the person not necessarily the content taught. In support of our findings, Burgess et al. [21] observed that such personal characteristics as demonstration of a passion for teaching, preparedness for tutorials and cordial inter professional staff interactions were worthy of emulation.

The findings that 'should not encourage students participation during theory lessons' had the lowest score suggests that all respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement. On the contrary, Singh et al. [2] reported that most of the faculties in their study prefer not to be interrupted during delivery of theory lectures. Clinical teachers should be supportive, encourage flow of information in a bi-directional manner, dispense with all magisterial tendencies while exploring all opportunities for a constructive feedback in all forms of teaching whether theory lectures, practical or bedside teachings.

In this study, the rank of the respondents had a statistically significant effect on their perspectives on the characteristics of an effective teacher with regards to interaction with students/colleagues. The more senior teachers-associate professors and professors gave the highest mean rank. This is in consonance with other reports [2,6]. This could be attributed to the fact that senior faculty members with obviously more years of teaching experience were more likely to be versed in the values and complexities of teachers/students interaction borne out of years of exposure.

The study strength includes representative samples from all the faculties.

There are some limitations. The response rate was only 69% and this could hinder generalization of the outcome. The study

provides insight into clinical teaching from only one perspective-teacher. The views of the medical students were not sought. There was male preponderance and the possibility of gender bias exists. The survey instrument was largely based on predetermined Likert scale questions which may not allow exploration of other views not listed.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, an effective medical/health teacher should have a good grasp of the subject, be able to communicate same excellently and possess good personal attributes such as honesty and high ethical and moral standards. These are some of the good attributes any effective clinical teacher should strive to acquire and strengthen in order to attain a state of proficiency.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Questionnaire

1. Faculty : [0] Dentistry  [1] Health sciences  [2] Medical sciences
2. Age(years): [0] 20 – 24 ( ) [1] 25 – 29 ( ) [2] 30 – 34 ( ) [3] 35 -39 ( ) [4] 40 – 44 ( )  
[5] 45 – 49 ( ) [6] 50 -54 ( ) [7] 55 – 59 ( ) [8] 60 – 64 ( ) [9] 65 -69 ( ) [10] 70 -74 ( )
3. Sex : [1] Male ( ) [0] Female ( )
4. Rank: [0] graduate assistant ( ) [1] lecturer II ( ) [2] lecturer I ( ) [3] Senior lecturer ( )  
[4] Associate professor ( ) [5] Professor ( )
5. How long have you been a lecturer (ie your teaching experience)?.....

On a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree please mark your response to these statements. (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= undecided, 4=agree, 5= strongly agree)

		1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Undecided	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree
6	Should have good communication skills	1	2	3	4	5
7	Should have good presentation skills	1	2	3	4	5
8	Should use good sense of humour in teaching sessions	1	2	3	4	5
9	Should be innovative in using technology in classroom	1	2	3	4	5
10	Should be well organized and possess excellent time management skills.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Should be inflexible regarding maintaining classroom discipline.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Should be aware of students' interests and needs.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Is easily approachable.	1	2	3	4	4
14	Should not encourage student's participation during theory lectures	1	2	3	4	5
15	Should work well with colleagues and administrators	1	2	3	4	5
16	Should be inspiring and motivational to students.	1	2	3	4	5
17	Should be very generous in assessing the performance of the students during exams.	1	2	3	4	5
18	Should offer constructive criticism to the students	1	2	3	4	5
19	Should trust and respect the students.	1	2	3	4	5
20	Should be caring and shows empathy towards students.	1	2	3	4	5
21	Should be able to teach students how to monitor their own progress	1	2	3	4	5
22	Should have leadership qualities	1	2	3	4	5
23	Should be punctual	1	2	3	4	5
24	Should be unbiased	1	2	3	4	5

		<b>1 Strongly disagree</b>	<b>2 Disagree</b>	<b>3 Undecided</b>	<b>4 Agree</b>	<b>5 Strongly agree</b>
25	Should have sound knowledge of subject	1	2	3	4	5
26	Should be enthusiastic and has passion to teach, enjoys teaching	1	2	3	4	5
27	Should be honest, moral and exhibit high ethical standards	1	2	3	4	5
28	Should be up-to-date with the recent advances in education technology	1	2	3	4	5
29	Should have publications and should be active in research	1	2	3	4	5
30	Should be willing to learn and open to change (flexible)	1	2	3	4	5
31	Should seek feedback from students and/or other teachers after lectures or clinical demonstrations.	1	2	3	4	5

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