

A BALANCED PROFESSIONAL IN DENTISTRY: PERCEPTION OF SUPERVISORS

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Abstract

The curriculum of the Bachelor of Dental Surgery in Faculty of Dentistry, USIM is based on the integration of *naqli* (revealed) and *aqli* (acquired) knowledge. It aspires its graduates to exhibit the values of balanced professionals in providing community oral health care by being technically competent, socially responsible, spiritually enlightened and professionally accountable. Their clinical supervisors are in an enviable position to assess them from these perspectives. The aim of this paper was to determine the supervisors' perception on the performance of the graduates from the Faculty of Dentistry, USIM who were under their charge. It was a qualitative study on the performance of 100 graduates from the first three batches. A total of 21 supervisors spread across the country responded to an open-ended questionnaire on the qualities of USIM graduates under their supervision. They may supervise more than one graduate. The perceptions of the supervisors were categorised into three major themes. They felt that the graduates were socially responsible in performing their functions with competence in the community oral health services They were seen to have good personal and leadership qualities. Their supervisors also perceived them to require further exposure, guidance and training as they were new to the service. The results indicated that the Bachelor of Dental Surgery programme at USIM was able to instill the values of a balanced professional in dentistry among its graduates but these values need to be further enhanced in providing care in the community. These findings can provide the principles in curriculum development to enhanced the qualities of the graduates in the context of balanced professional.

Keywords: curriculum, dental education, professional, integration of *naqli* & *aqli*, values

INTRODUCTION

Islam as a way of life emphasises on the concept of balance that permeates all spheres of activities of man. The two terms *wasatiyyah* and *mizan* are related to the concept of balance. These terms are mentioned in several verses in the quran. *Wasatiyyah* is often referred to as justly balanced through avoidance of extremes. Meanwhile, *mizan* refers to balance or scale, assessing both the good deeds with

the bad deeds. When applied literally in dental education, it relates to the development of a graduate that encompasses the essential elements that lead to equilibrium in performing the functions of a dentist.

These elements include technically competent, biologically sensitive, socially responsible and spiritually enlightened (Wan et al., 2014). The American College of Dentists, as the largest professional entity in dentistry, also expect dentists to respect human dignity, be competent, exhibit integrity and provide service as the principal concern rather than prestige or personal gain (American College of Dentist, 2016). Similarly, South East Asia Association for Dental Education (SEAADE) also require dental professionals to have interpersonal and communication skills in performing their functions effectively (<http://www.seaade.org/>). From the perspective of Islam, the aim of education is to develop a person as *khalifah* (vicegerent) of Allah who is in a state of physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, social and environmental equilibrium (Mohamad Johdi Salleh, 2009).

It is based on these considerations that the Faculty of Dentistry USIM aspires its graduates to exhibit the qualities of balanced professionals in providing oral health care to the community. They are obliged to ensure that their efforts provide benefits not only to their patients but to the community at large. Their clinical supervisors are in an enviable position to assess the performance of these graduates in providing optimal care to their patients in the context of balanced professional. The aim of the study was to determine the perception of the supervisors on the performance of the graduates from Faculty of Dentistry USIM under their charge.

METHODOLOGY

This was a qualitative study design using the phenomenological method of investigating the performance among newly qualified dentists as perceived by their supervisors. These dentists were from the first, second and third cohort of graduates from this Faculty. They were posted to government dental clinics located in various parts of the country. These newly qualified dentists were under the supervision of the officer-in-charge of the dental clinic. All supervisors of these dentists were included in the study. A supervisor may supervise more than one dentist. This study was part of the overall evaluation of the educational programme at the Faculty of Dentistry, USIM.

The open-ended questionnaire was posted to all the supervisors of newly qualified dental graduates from USIM. Informed consent was obtained from the supervisors. They were required to give an overall feedback on the performance of the dental graduates from USIM under their supervision.

The questionnaires returned by the supervisors were received by the administrative assistant who removed all data that can identify the respondents. This was to ensure anonymity. The data were analysed based on the thematic approach. An inductive method was used in the analysis of the data. In this

approach, the initial analysis involved coding for meaning by reading the comments for understanding. Difficult words were interpreted and determined in the context of the study. This was followed by categorizing and then classifying them into themes.

RESULTS

A total of twenty-one (21) supervisors responded to the open-ended questionnaire on their perception of USIM dental graduates. The supervisors were from eleven (11) states including Sabah and Sarawak. The responses were in full sentences or phrases or keywords.

The performance of the graduates as perceived by their supervisors ranged from satisfactory, good and excellent. Below were their views on the graduates.

“The performance of this Officer was good although he reported for duty only eight months ago”.

It was found that there were no negative views of the graduates under their supervision but there were indications that those who were newly posted to the facility may not achieve the expected level of performance.

“The Officer reported for duty two months ago. He needs guidance because of the lack of experience. There is room for improvement.”

“The Officer is new in the dental service and require more exposure on various aspects of the tasks”.

“The Officer needs to be guided in facing the realities of providing out-patient dental care”.

The performance of the graduates who were posted to the government dental clinics based on the perception of their supervisors were categorized into the themes of competence, personal values and professionalism, and relationship with others. This is illustrated in **Figure 1**.

In terms of competence, the graduates were found to have the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their tasks in the dental clinics where they were posted. They recognised the importance of improving their competence and adjusted their work procedures according to the clinical setting. The perception of the supervisors in this regard is presented below.

“Good basic clinical skills and showed interest to learn for improvement as well as able to get adjusted with the government dental clinic setting”.

“The Officer showed initiative to continually improve the quality of care as well as improve their knowledge and skill”.

“The Officer has the ability to perform the task well”.

Personal and professional qualities were also identified as factors that are important to take into cognisance by those in the dental clinic who are involved in the delivery of dental services.

“The Officer was good, willing to accept criticism and very committed in his tasks”

“Showed the harmony in attitude and performance of clinical tasks”

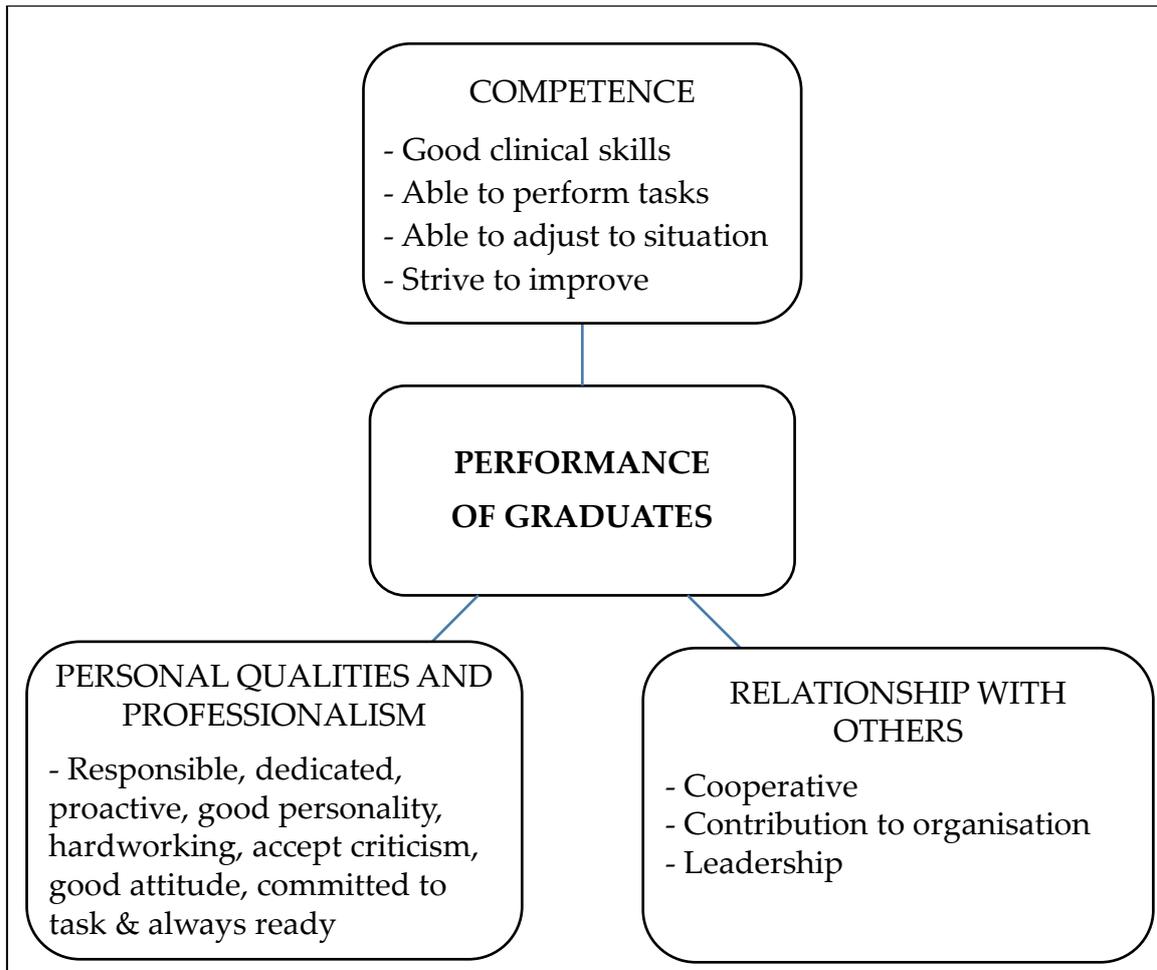


Figure 1. Performance of graduates as perceived by the supervisors

There were several terms and phrases that were used by the supervisors to indicate personal and professional qualities of the graduates that include:

- *“dedicated”*;
- *“committed”*;
- *“responsible”*;
- *“proactive”*;
- *“timeliness”*;
- *“hardworking”*;
- *“good work attitude”*;
- *“always ready to accept instructions”*; and
- *“good personal quality”*.

Not all graduates showed good personal qualities. A supervisor indicated that one of the graduates lacked professionalism as he liked to fool around.

Relationship with others was an element identified as a trait of the graduates. These elements of quality of the graduates influenced the teamwork

and overall performance of the clinic. Below are some of the statements by the supervisors attributed to these qualities.

"Always provide the cooperation and this contributes to the productivity of the organization".

"The officer could communicate very well with the staff and patients and able to provide leadership in 5S and Innovation project for the district".

DISCUSSION

This study adopted the open-ended questionnaire method in collecting the data. This method is considered as one of the methods in qualitative study that also include interview, case study, expert opinion, focus group and observational research. Open-ended questions give the opportunity for the participants to respond freely in writing their thoughts, views and opinions on a subject matter (Singer & Couper, 2017). A review by O'Cathain & Thoma indicated differing views on open-ended questions. Some considered it as a quantitative method whilst others considered it as a qualitative method (O'Cathain & Thomas, 2004). There were also others who thought that open-ended questionnaire was a quasi-qualitative data collection method. In this study, it is considered as qualitative data collection method as it involved a small group of respondents. They are considered as experts who are familiar with the subject matter.

This qualitative study identified the performance of dental graduates in the development of balanced professional. Performance is the ability of these graduates to provide oral health care services for patients in the community according to the stipulated standards. The study identified three themes that formed the composite performance of the graduates from the aspect of balanced professional. These are competency, personal qualities and professionalism, and relationship with others.

These graduates went through a unique dental degree programme that integrates *naqli* (revealed) and *aqli* (acquired) knowledge. The curriculum was designed with incorporation of courses on fundamental Islamic knowledge. These courses include *aqidah and akhlak, halaqah* and memorisation and understanding of selected quranic verses related to health and values. In addition, the student activities involve providing the service to the communities such as oldfolks home, orphanage homes, refugees centre and homeless people. These extra-mural activities were thought to give positive impact to dental students. They can adopt these new skills that may be valuable in clinical practice (Myung Joo Kim, 2012).

The performance of the graduates need to be considered from the Islamic perspective that emphasises on *akidah* (faith), *akhlak* (manners or moral) and *fard al-khifayah* (communal responsibility). Their experiences in the undergraduate studies moulded them to internalise the universal Islamic values that are also relevant to professionalism. They were perceived by their supervisors to be responsible, dedicated and always striving for improvement.

One of the themes related to performance of these graduates was competency. Their supervisors perceived that they have achieved the required competency to provide oral health care services in a variety of clinical settings but need to be further strengthened. In the al-Quran al-Qasas, verse 26:

﴿ قَالَتْ إِحْدَاهُمَا يَا أَبَتِ اسْتَجِرْهُ إِنَّ خَيْرَ مَنِ اسْتَجَرْتَ الْقَوِيُّ الْأَمِينُ ﴾

Which means, "One of the women said, "O my father, hire him. Indeed, the best one you can hire is the strong and the trustworthy." From this verse, Islam emphasises that a person in employment must have sufficient knowledge, relevant skills and internalise the Islamic values (Alquran. Al-Qasas, 28: 26) (Pahrol Mohamad Juoi. 2010).

In addition, a hadith from Prophet Muhammad PBUH narrated by al-Baihaqi:

{ خير الناس أنفعهم للناس }

Which means, "The best among you, are those who are best for others". In the context of graduates in this study, they were perceived to be able to provide care not only to individuals and community but also ensured that care provided benefit the organisation through increased productivity or the society in terms of reducing oral health problems.

It was highlighted by the supervisors that those graduates that were newly posted to the dental clinic needed guidance. This phenomenon is as expected in learning among adult professionals. Professional development is a continuous process of improvement. Taleghani *et al.* described five levels of professional development in enhancing competencies starting from novice to beginner to competent to proficient and finally to be an expert (Mohsen Taleghani, Eric S. Solomon, William F. Wathen., 2004). The novice and beginners are undergraduate dental students under close supervision of the senior dentists. Those who have graduated and posted to the dental clinics to start their career as a dentist are deemed clinically competent but lack the speed, efficiency and experience of a proficient dentist. They require guidance from their supervisors.

CONCLUSION

This study indicated that the supervisors perceived the graduates of the programme have the competence and infused with Islamic values in providing care to the patient in the context of balanced professional. A balance professional in dentistry must be technically competent in the provision of oral health services to the individual and community. Competence is not merely acquiring a body of knowledge and developing the necessary skills in the field of endeavour. It is also concerned with internalising the values that come with being spiritually enlightened. These elements of competence ensure that the universal Islamic values that are very much relevant to personal qualities (*akhlak*), professionalism and obligation to society are maintained. The balanced professional dentist should

also have the attitude of continuously seeking for self-improvement in their performance and competency. The life-long learning process is a value that is essential in order to provide the oral health services to benefit the community. These findings can provide the principles in curriculum development to enhanced the qualities of the graduates in the context of balanced professional.

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