

Original article

A study on perception of Physiotherapy students towards Focus Group Discussion as a teaching-learning methodology

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Abstract:

Background: There is an increasing awareness about the process of learning to achieve an outcome. The health profession curriculums are being redesigned with new pedagogical approaches. It ensures that students acquire appropriate clinical knowledge along with practical, procedural & communication skills. We considered a study on “Focus Group Discussion” [FGD], as a pedagogical approach in which active participation of students is used to achieve educational outcomes. Objective was to study the perception of students towards focus group discussion as a teaching and learning method.

Materials & methods: Students between Age group 18-22, who volunteered to participate in this cross-sectional observational study were included. Random allocated groups were made. Total 104 students divided in 12 groups participated in FGD. At the end of sessions, perception of students towards FGD was measured by administering questionnaire on a 5 point Likert’s scale.

Results: Average of these responses of the perception of students towards the newly introduced concept of FGD showed 85.39% students expressing positive response towards FGD, only 0.46% disagreed with this concept and 14.13% remained neutral.

Conclusion: The perceptions recorded strongly support that FGD improves overall performance of students and as it generates healthy, non-threatening atmosphere.

Key words: Focus Group Discussion, Likert scale

Introduction:

There is an increasing awareness about the process of learning to achieve an outcome. This has led to a shift toward outcome-based education. Because of this, the health profession curriculums are being redesigned with new pedagogical approaches. The purpose underlined is that students should

acquire appropriate clinical & scientific knowledge along with practical, procedural & communication skills. Usual styles of didactic lectures or power point reading are not favoured by students and are known to cause boredom.¹⁻⁵

A major concern in colleges is absenteeism and students showing disinterest in conventional classroom learning. This has become a noteworthy issue, as the trend continues for successive years of the courses. Universities have precise policies regarding the obligatory presence in lectures and practical sessions. Despite the strict regulations, absenteeism is a continued problem; in universities worldwide.⁶ At wider level absenteeism, will have unfavourable consequences on social morals, health status and efficiency of the nation and therefore it's important that absenteeism has to be taken into account.^{7,8} A focus group strategy easier to implement and active learning is enjoyable for the students.^{9, 10}

Variety in teaching methods through active participation of students leads to effective achievement of educational outcomes.^{6,11} If incorporation of innovative teaching-learning method is to be adopted more widely within health science courses there is a need to explore the students' perception towards the same.⁹ Hence, in this study we considered the evaluation of students' perception towards focus group discussion as an innovative teaching learning method after executing it for them in their free time in the form of a self-administered structured questionnaire in five-point Likert scale.

Materials and methods:

This was a descriptive, cross sectional observational study conducted in College of Physiotherapy. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethical Committee of the Pravara Institute of Medical Sciences, Loni, Taluka Rahata, Ahmednagar, Maharashtra, India. Inclusion criteria consisted of those students who were willing to participate. The students were briefed about the nature of the study and written informed consent was obtained.

Total 104 BPT students voluntarily participated in this study. Initially they were explained the concept of Focus Group Discussion. The students were divided in two batches as per their educational year i.e. 42 students of II BPT were divided randomly in five groups and 62 IVBPT students were

divided randomly in seven groups, thus total 12 groups were made. The introduction was kept brief to avoid participant's bias. Separate topics for FGD were selected with consensus and choice of each group. Preparation time of 1 week was given. The resources of library, internet was made available with Principal's permission and facilitator was provided for students to guide them during preparation.

For actual execution of Focus Group Discussion, a setting of large lecture hall with infrastructure like a dais, round table, comfortable chairs, microphone, and speaker was made available for a productive experience of FGD. The selected time was during student's free library time. So, the students did not have to miss their lectures or clinical teaching. Each group was called on dais for FGD on their selected topic turn by turn. The other groups and those students who did not participate in FGD were the audience. Discussions were facilitated by the moderator and lasted for around 45 minutes to one hour for a group and two discussions were performed every weekend. The activity lasted for five sessions for five weeks. All discussion activities were noted by the investigator to record the discussion, behaviours and response by participating students.

After the end of the FGD, the questionnaire was provided to all participants and responses of second and fourth years were collected separately. The participation was voluntary and consents were requested and obtained from participating student. The questionnaire was validated by members of medical education unit and research cell unit.

The questionnaire was blind and did not ask for identification. It was collected in box with slit to maintain strict confidentiality. Separate box was provided to IInd and IVth year students. The students were between 17 -22 years age; The sample contained total 104 students. The questionnaire contained 12 questions in the form of statements. These statements were a build up to present the problem under consideration, give essential background, and ask probing questions reflecting personal views.

The responses were recorded in the form of Likert's scale as 1) Strongly agree (SA) 2) Agree (A) 3) Not agree Not Disagree (NAND) 4) Disagree (DA) 5) Strongly Disagree(SA).

Results:

The responses for each question were tabulated and percentage of each response was recorded.

Table 1. Responses of participants to the questionnaire on 5 point Likert's scale

S.N	Questions / Statement	Year	Number of students	Response on Likert scale				
				SA5	A4	N3	DA2	SDA1
1	You are comfortable with FGD	IVBPT	42	18	22	02	-	-
		IIBPT	62	22	27	13	-	-
2	FGD enhances the reasoning ability and skills of the students	IVBPT	42	31	11	-	-	-
		IIBPT	62	33	18	11	-	-
3	FGD increases confidence in expressing oneself.	IVBPT	42	40	2	-	-	-
		IIBPT	62	36	26	-	-	-
4	FGD leads optimum utilization of time.	IVBPT	42	19	13	10	-	-
		IIBPT	62	17	14	31	-	-
5	Overall environment generated by FGD is conducive for learning	IVBPT	42	27	7	8	-	-
		IIBPT	62	35	13	14	-	-
6	FGD generates healthy, non-threatening atmosphere	IVBPT	42	24	18	-	-	-
		IIBPT	62	26	36	-	-	-
7	FGD helps in updating you regarding recent trends and stimulates you for further reading	IVBPT	42	37	5	-	-	-
		IIBPT	62	31	31	-	-	-
8	FGD creates healthy relationship between teacher & Students	IVBPT	42	18	9	3	8	4
		IIBPT	62	19	12	11	9	12
9	FGD is better than traditional teaching	IVBPT	42	14	13	8	7	-
		IIBPT	62	10	13	19	20	-
10	FGD improves overall performance of students.	IVBPT	42	24	18	-	-	-
		IIBPT	62	26	12	16	8	-
11	FGD brings out strengths and weaknesses of students.	IVBPT	42	29	13	-	-	-
		IIBPT	62	29	33	-	-	-
12	FGD should be a regular feature of undergraduate Teaching in Physiotherapy.	IVBPT	42	5	35	2	-	-
		IIBPT	62	27	29	6	-	-

Out of the 12 statements the first 8 statements were directly recording the perception of students towards the newly introduced concept of FGD.

Table 2: Percentage of responses of first 8 perception seeking statement

Statement No.	Positive Responses % (Total of Strongly Agree and Agree)	Neutral Responses %	Negative Responses % (Total of Disagree and Strongly Disagree)
1	88.57	14.43	-
2	89.42	10.58	-
3	100	-	-
4	60	40	-
5	78.84	21.16	-
6	86.53	13.47	-
7	100	-	-
8	55.76	13.46	30.73
Average	85.39	14.13	0.46

Table 3 : Percentage of responses to statement 9,10,11&12 (opinion seeking statement)

Statement No.	Positive Responses % (Total of Strongly Agree and Agree)	Neutral Responses %	Negative Responses% (Total of Disagree and Strongly Disagree)
9	48.07	25.96	25.96
10	76.92	15.38	07.69
11	100	--	---
12	92.30	7.6	----

Statement1: 85.57% students recorded comfortable feelings towards FGD as a teaching- learning method.

Statement 2:89.42 % students strongly agreed with the statement that FGD enhances the reasoning ability and skills of the students by updating recent trends and stimulating for further reading

Statement 3: This statement of increases confidence in expressing oneself was strongly agreed by each and every one that is 100%.

Statement 4: 60% students stated that FGD can manage optimum utilization of time but 40 % students preferred to remain neutral.

Statement 5: Overall environment generated by FGD is conducive for learning was strongly supported by 86.53% students.

Statement 6: This statement of FGD generating healthy, non-threatening atmosphere was supported by 86.53 % students

Statement 7: 100% students confirmed that FGD helps in updating their knowledge regarding recent trends and stimulates them for further reading

Statement 8: This statement “FGD creates healthy relationship between teacher & Students” created interesting pattern of response. 55.76% agreed to the notion while 31.73% opposed it and 13.46% preferred to remain neutral.

Statement 9 to 12 asked the frank opinions of students. The students recorded their true responses to the statements eliminating the possibility of bias.

Statement 9: Though majority expressed positive response towards the FGD but responding to a status of superiority of FGD

over traditional teaching, only 48.07 agreed positively while 25.96 disagreed and same numbers remained neutral.

Statement 10: FGD improves overall performance of students was accepted by 76.92 % of students while 15.38% students were neutral and minimal 7.69 % disagreed.

Statement11: FGD brings out strengths and weaknesses of students were accepted by overwhelming 100 % of the students.

Statement 12: The statement, FGD should be a regular feature of undergraduate Teaching in Physiotherapy was strongly agreed by 85.39%, agreed by 30.7% and 7.8% students were Neutral.

Discussion:

This study was done to find out the perception of students towards focus group discussion as a teaching and learning method. The results of the study stated that ,85.57% students recorded comfortable feelings towards FGD as a teaching- learning method ,89.42 % students strongly agreed with the statement that FGD enhances the reasoning ability and skills of the students by updating recent trends and stimulating for further reading and increases confidence in expressing oneself was strongly agreed by each and every one. According to the researchers, FGD strategy has benefits among others such as it is easier to implement than other qualitative methods also allows exploration topics according to the researcher’s interest and generating various new hypotheses out of group interactions.¹⁰Studies have stated that active learning provides encouragement to the students leading to enjoyment. It has a positive impact on their performance.⁹Also it is helpful to achieve educational outcomes through

incidental learning, which help to engage students and improve the otherwise conventional passive learning to active, intentional learning along with innovative teaching methodology.¹¹ This is also in accordance with the study Chandra s et al. (2018) which stated that, students are not actively involved in traditional way of teaching. Teachers usually provide little or no feedback and there is passive transfer of lecture content to students instead of promoting discussion.¹²

Some researches described routine casualness in the classroom are affecting both students and professors resulting in disinterest, dislike, boredom, annoyance, poor self regulation exhibited by students¹³. A study which agrees with 100 % response of this study states that students prepare good study material and contents because they have the provision of access of knowledge gained actively from the results of group discussion. In cooperative learning students work together in small groups and their personal intelligence increases along with the increase of group's collective intelligence. There is another study that supports that group learning allows learners to gain higher abilities when they have lower abilities are respected and they are allowed to self-learn.¹⁰

In the current study 100% students confirmed that FGD helps in updating their knowledge regarding recent trends and stimulates them for further reading. Interesting pattern of response was obtained in a statement of "FGD creates healthy relationship between teacher & Students", in which 55.76% agreed to the notion while 31.73% opposed it and 13.46% preferred to remain neutral. Similar study done by Riedy et al(2012) stated that active learning involves interaction with the instructor in a less formal manner which may help in developing healthy relationship towards teachers¹⁴. Another study supported that active learning is a better methodology than traditional teaching alone¹⁵. The previous studies have found that a lengthy monotonous, teacher centred large group learning is always less interesting with little perception by students and loss of interest in classroom

learning. Individual attitude and motivation are the key factors for absenteeism.¹⁶ This is in accordance with the statement, "Student engagement is the product of motivation and active learning. It is a product rather than a sum because it will not occur if either element is missing"¹⁷.

Though majority expressed positive response towards the FGD but responding to a status of superiority of FGD over traditional teaching, only 48.07 agreed positively while 25.96 disagreed and same numbers remained neutral. Students in informal discussion revealed that they liked the idea, concept but found it difficult to accept it in practical day to day teaching. One student aptly pointed out the definition of focus group discussion saying the topics under discussion may not be liked uniformly by everyone. A uniform learning still needs traditional teaching and some students found it difficult to be active all the time and be critical thinkers¹⁸. Also another study done by Drafke, Schoenbachler, and Gordon (1996) found no difference in knowledge or attitudes between students in two sections of the same class, one taught with the traditional lecture method and the other active teaching methodologies.¹⁹ Students may perceive the instructor to be more organized or structured with the lecture method.¹⁴ In such circumstances, it can be minimized by motivating and guiding the students to develop their learning skills and decision-making. No doubt the well organized and carefully presented lectures provide up to date view of subject but students must be physically present and be attentive.¹⁸

FGD should be a regular feature of undergraduate Teaching in Physiotherapy was strongly agreed by 85.39%, agreed by 30.7% and 7.8% students were Neutral. Similar results of interactive learning sessions were also obtained by Hashmiet *al.* (2010). Students value the opportunity to discuss the content rather than passive learning. Two way communications assists in learning process and aids retention. Through interaction, a high level of cognitive learning and communication skills are achieved.⁷ In addition, it is accepted

that a active and self directed learning will contribute positively to learning outcomes.^{20,21}

Benjamin Franklin's words of wisdom supports the advantages of active, self directed or cooperative pedagogical approaches in teaching –learning by a phrase : “Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.”¹⁴

Conclusion:

This study strongly concludes that the perceptions of the students were highly positive towards FGD. The recorded perceptions support that FGD improves overall performance of students and as it generates healthy, non-threatening atmosphere.

Recommendations:

Herewith the authors recommends to include FGD as a regular feature of undergraduate Teaching learning method in Physiotherapy.

Study limitations:

This study has limitations like positive statements towards FGD which were likely to be responded readily by the students. But the bias seems to be eliminated when they responded negatively to consider it as a regular feature of undergraduate Teaching in Physiotherapy.

Conflict of interest: Authors report no conflict of interest.

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