

# The Perspective of Medical Faculty Members about the Challenges of Faculties' Evaluation System in Iranian Context: A Qualitative Study

Hossein Didehban<sup>1</sup>, Azim Mirzazadeh<sup>2,3\*</sup>, Hamid Reza Khankeh<sup>4,5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PhD Candidate of medical education. Department of Medical Education, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

<sup>2</sup> Department of Medical Education, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran; Health Professions Education Research Center, School of Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran; <sup>3</sup> Department of Internal Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. <sup>4</sup> Professor in Emergency & Disaster Health, Research Center in Emergency and Disaster Health, University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Tehran, Iran. <sup>5</sup> Department of Clinical Science and Education, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden

## Abstract

**Introduction:** Faculty members' evaluation is an important factor for promotion, tenure, payment of rewards or incentives, accountability and continuation of developing faculty at medical university. Studies showed that having a fair and meaningful faculty evaluation system has an impact on the performances of all faculty members. The present study aimed at investigating the challenges of faculty about faculty members' evaluation systems. **Methods:** In this qualitative content analysis study, participants were 10 faculty members from the Tehran University of Medical Sciences. The participants were selected through purposeful sampling. The data which were collected through semi-structured interviews were used for establishing the codes, subcategories, and main categories. The collected data were analyzed by constant comparative analysis being recommended by Corbin and Strauss 2015. **Results:** The challenges of faculty evaluation system were explored in four main categories: "providing feedback for the faculty", "objective evaluation", "evaluation based on student perspective", and "faculty members' performance analysis". **Discussion:** This study founded the faculty members who preferred to receive feedback, qualitative evaluation, the need for multiple sources of information gathering, greater transparency, increased trust, and accreditation of the evaluation process. It is recommended to explore the process of faculty evaluation in Iran.

**Keywords:** Faculty-evaluation -content analysis-medical university-qualitative research-challenge

## INTRODUCTION

Experts believe that teachers' evaluation is one of the most complex types of evaluation [1]. Faculty evaluation is a rule in many countries. Formative feedback is commonly used for faculty members' improvement, development of their teaching, and summative feedback for promoting committee [2]. Based on various studies, faculty evaluation should be focused on the role of faculty members including teaching, development of educational products, education administration and scholarship in education [3-5]. Other studies indicated that the information obtained from the evaluation of faculty members should be used for two purposes: (a) providing feedback for development [6] (b) decision making such as promotion, tenure [7, 8]. Also, this information should be extracted from several sources including students, peers, and managers [9]. However, at the Tehran University of Medical Sciences, only the student's evaluation method is used to evaluate clinical and non-clinical faculty members, and the lack of multi-source evaluation and the need to find these challenges became more and more important [10]. Also, the studies in this field showed that (83.3%) of faculty members chose "mixed method rating" as the best way of

evaluation; 68.7% of the participants though "student rating" cannot be an appropriate indicator for evaluating teachers' performance" [11]. However, other studies showed that clarifying the purpose of teacher evaluation, strengths and weaknesses of each method were emphasized by faculty members [10]. Although, there has been a lot of attention on having fair and meaningful faculty evaluation system in the

**Address for correspondence:** Azim Mirzazadeh, Department of Medical Education, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran; Health Professions Education Research Center, School of Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran; Department of Internal Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran  
Email: Mirzazad @ tums.ac.ir

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**How to cite this article:** Didehban, H., Mirzazadeh, A., Khankeh, H. R. The Perspective of Medical Faculty Members about the Challenges of Faculties' Evaluation System in Iranian Context: A Qualitative Study. Arch Pharma Pract 2020;11(1):47-53.

world [12, 13]. Few studies have been conducted so far on the faculty members' opinions about the faculty evaluation system, and since faculty members, as part of the education system, play a highly critical role in designing and re-designing the evaluation system [8] and, consequently, the change of faculty members behavior will be further based on the results of the evaluation system. This qualitative study aimed at determining the challenges of the faculty evaluation system based on faculty experience at Tehran University of Medical Sciences.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Method

This study used inductive qualitative content analysis and grounded theory data analysis according to recommendations by Corbin and Strauss (2008) [14] among medical faculty members at Tehran University of Medical Sciences.

### Study Design

The researchers conducted the semi-structured interview and constant comparative analysis to obtain participant experience. The results were presented as codes, subcategories, and categories using an inductive approach.

#### • Participants and Study Setting

This study was performed in the School of medicine and Educational Hospitals of Tehran University of Medical Sciences. 10 participants were selected through purposive sampling from the faculty members who were believed to be the most knowledgeable and experienced in the evaluation process. The participants included two groups of basic and clinical medical teachers in different scientific departments and academic degrees. All study participants were the residents of Tehran University of Medical Sciences and are interested in sharing their experiences. The faculty members with higher academic rank than an assistant professor, with experience in management and research in the field of medical education and evaluation of faculty and high motivation to participate in the interview, were considered as the primary criterion for participation in the interview. The faculty members with faculty instructor degree were excluded because most of the time they were teaching practical courses which had different evaluation procedures. As agreed with the participants, the interviews with the basic science faculties were conducted at the workplace and the clinical teaching was conducted in their hospital. The reaching data saturation regarding was faculty evaluation system endpoint for sample selection.

#### • Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this study were collected from 2016 to May 2018 through in-depth semi-structured interviews with the participants. The interviews were conducted by a qualitative research expert. The interviews with the basic and clinical medical faculty started with their experience about academic evaluation process and based on the interview guidelines,

general open-ended questions were asked, says "How is your experience of being evaluated in the evaluation system?" or describes an instance "What are the challenge of the faculty evaluation system?". Then, depending on the content of the responses, the interviewer continued with exploratory questions such as "Can you please give an example?" The duration of the interview ranged from 45 to 60 minutes depending on the willingness of the respondent. At the end of the interview, they were asked "Would you like to add anything else" to give more information. After each interview, audio files were listened to several times and then transcribed. The transcribed data were read several times and meaning units were identified. Then, the condensed meaning units were abstracted and labeled with a code. After that, they were compared based on differences and similarities and sorted into sub-categories and categories. If the code did not match any of the subcategories, a new subcategory would be formed (Table 1).

**Table 1-** A part of the process of creating the subcategory and main category of challenges faced by the faculty member evaluation system.

Coding sample	Subcategory	Main category
Ph.D. students Bachelor students The student with good performance The student with poor performance	Heterogeneity in the category of students	Student evaluation perspective
Providing old questions Providing easy questions Providing good score on student's assessment Gaining a good score by student evaluation	Bias in student evaluation	

#### • Trustworthiness of Data

For the credibility of the results was found using prolonged engagement methods (2016-2018). Also, triangulation in data sampling was used for data collection. We also use a peer check procedure and asked three peers who were familiar with the field of medical education and qualitative research to encoding some of the interviews. To increase the dependability of the results was found using an expert check, and some sections of the transcriptions and extracted codes were sent to two medical teachers (qualified in the field of medical education and qualitative researches) [15].

#### • Ethical Considerations

This paper is extracted from the Ph.D. dissertation of the first author in the medical education department of the medical faculty of Tehran University of Medical Sciences with the code of (IR.TUMS.MEDICINE.REC.1396.2949). The purpose of the study and procedures were completely

explained by sending emails and then orally to target individuals before each interview. Also, an informed consent form was received before each interview from the participant.

## RESULTS

The participants of the study included 10 faculty members, 6 females and 4 males, who took part in a total of 10 interviews. Among the participants, 6 faculty members were basic medical science, and 4 were clinical science. Also, 4 of the participant were full professors, 4 were associate professors, and 2 were assistant professors (Table 2). The results of the presentation of 4 main categories and 15 subcategories, as described in Table 3, are explained below.

**Table 2:** Participants 'characteristics

Variable	Number
Gender	
Male	4
Female	6
Educational level	
Assistant professors	2
Associate professors	4
Full professors	4
Specialty (basic or clinical sciences)	
Basic science	6
Clinical science	4

**Table 3.** Main categories and subcategories of challenges faced by faculty members' evaluation system

Subcategory	Main category
Lack of direct and positive feedback	Providing feedback to the faculty
Feedback for promotion	
Score to quality of teaching	Objective evaluation
Rating by students	
Numeric result of the evaluation	
Quantitative evaluation on educational structure	
Carelessness in filling out evaluation forms	Evaluation based on the student perspective
Bias in student evaluation	
Evaluation by absent students	
Emphasis on evaluation at the end of the semester	
Heterogeneity in the category of students	

Poor monitoring of faculty activities	Faculty performance analysis
Inability to distinguish between faculty members	
Excessive strengthening of the evaluation system	
Comparing performance with another faculty	

### Providing Feedback to the faculty

- Lack of Direct and Positive Feedback

The first case obtained from the analysis of the interview indicated that the faculty members did not receive enough feedback to improve their professional skills.

A clinical faculty member stated: "I never had direct and positive feedback from the university to directly tell me saw you."(p1) (P Stands for Participant).

The university has no specific organization to provide feedback on the performance of faculty members. A clinical faculty member believed that: "We need to give feedback. One does not do well. We need to give feedback. Now, who is responsible for feedback on the faculty members?"(p2)

Also, a basic science faculty member stated: "Evaluation system gives feedback. But his feedback is not effective and has no satisfaction"(p5).

A basic faculty member stated: "Regarding the providing feedback, I do not expect to be encouraged, and I'm not upset about not saying anything to me. If they do not say so, I will do my job right" (p9).

- Feedback for Promotion

The experiences of study participants indicated that most participants considered the feedback provided by the university used only for the promotion system and believed that the information obtained from the evaluation was not used properly. In this regard, a basic science faculty member stated:

"In the evaluation system, feedback is mainly used for promotion, that is to say, it is used less."(p3).

Also, another basic science faculty member stated: "The feedback is the same as the ratings that faculty receive. For promotion"(p4).

### Objective Evaluation

The analysis of interview texts indicated that most participants objected to the use of quantitative data to assess the quality of faculty members and believed that it was necessary to evaluate the performance of faculty members by qualitative data and various evaluation methods. The necessity of qualitative evaluation in various aspects was

considered by the faculty members. This category was classified into four subcategories as follows.

- **Score to Quality of Teaching**

The analysis of the transcribed interview indicated that it is necessary to study the quality of teaching based on qualitative data rather than quantitative data.

In this regard, a basic science faculty member stated: "In the case of teaching, the system cannot evaluate the quality of teaching at all. It's just to report a number. The system gives me a score. when giving me a score that does not evaluate the quality of teaching at all "

also state: "I need more than 6 hours to hold 2 hours of class. Then, they say that you did not go to the class for 2 hours. University determines the score for the quality of teaching" (p6).

Furthermore, some other faculty members stated that recognizing the differentiation of faculty teaching is achievable only by qualitative criteria.

A clinical faculty member mentioned: "I feel like teaching student model is different from the other faculty. How should I understand this? The university should evaluate qualitatively" (p1).

- **Rating by Students**

Based on the faculty members' experience, the evaluation of faculty members by students is also based on a quantitative and used questionnaire that some faculty members have referred to.

A clinical faculty member stated: "There are quantitative criteria, the university asks students to fill out the questionnaire for evaluation of students' satisfaction" (p7).

Also, a basic science faculty member stated that students' interviews about teacher's performance can also be done "I want to go to the head of my academic affairs and I now say this is the letter I gave me, for example, 17. I want to get this student group right now, interview them yourself. See what is their real comment" (p6).

- **Numeric Result of Evaluation**

Some faculty members have focused on delivering results in numerical and quantitative terms, saying that quantifying the results of evaluation does not result in the quality of the performed work.

A basic science faculty member stated: "The results of the evaluation of their score and quantitative and finally say us. You should see these faculty evaluation forms (p6)".

Also, a clinical faculty member believed: "I say working hours are less and higher quality. My university evaluates me by the hours I am working. It's a mistake" (p7).

- **Quantitative Evaluation of Educational Structure**

Some faculty members have argued that the structure of the educational system supported quantitative evaluation. This means that the structure of the evaluation system is quantitatively evaluated.

Also, a basic science faculty member stated: "We need to modify our training structure from the pivotal score to the pivotal knowledge and from the gaining points we need to change the having skill" (p8).

### **Evaluation Based on Student Perspective**

According to the experiences of faculty members, the student evaluations of faculty members alone were not sufficient. This category included four subcategories such as "Carelessness in filling out evaluation forms"- "Bias in student evaluation"- "Evaluation by absent students"- "Emphasis on evaluation at the end of the semester" and "Heterogeneity in the category of students".

- **Carelessness in filling out evaluation forms**

The faculty members believed that students' complete evaluation forms carelessness.

A basic science faculty member commented:

"Student satisfaction is very important and they are evaluating students' satisfaction with this (Assessment Form). Students do not understand what they are filling" (p9).

Also, another basic science faculty member believed that: "I do not think that the evaluation form is bad to fill out for my colleague, but it is not perfect at all. There are some problems as well. Satisfaction cannot attract everyone" (p5).

- **Bias in Student Evaluation**

The faculty members believed that students complete evaluation forms by bias.

A clinical faculty member mentioned: "The faculty member who has the slightest encounter with the learner always gets the highest score. Then, we say that according to the rules of the promotion, someone can come to the associate professor so that (his/her) evaluation score is at least 16" (p2).

Furthermore, a basic science faculty member stated: "Educational system is behavioral. I'm looking for a score. Then, I look at how I can get the most score from my learners. I want to score them from giving them a high score" (p8).



Also, faculty members find difficult examinations as a factor in lower grades of student's evaluation. A basic science faculty member stated: "I am one of the professors who are always fairly poorly evaluated, after the exam, because I will never take my exam very easily" (p6).

- **Evaluation by Absent Students**

Some faculty believe that some students that were absent during the semester in the classroom had evaluated them.

A basic science faculty member mentioned: "One of the bad things that is now being evaluated by the student ... I strongly disagree with the evaluation by the student because they were never evaluated by the student who really was in my classroom" (p6).

- **Emphasis on Evaluation at the End of the Semester**

Another challenge for faculty members was an evaluation by students at the end of a semester.

A basic science faculty member stated: "Evaluation unit employee, the last session comes to class. In the last session of the classroom. During the semester, not present. This session, for example, did not have enough energy and has been a low voice and you could not communicate well with students. With ten quarters and a quarter that you should not be evaluated. I've been evaluated this way many times" (p6).

Also, another basic science faculty member stated: "What student do they evaluate? At the time of the exam or at the end of the semester. When? After the exam. A good score in the exam is given; the professor's evaluation is effective. The bad exam has an effect. The student has a problem with the teacher, for example, the class teacher that effect. That is, I can say that 100% is not real" (p5).

A clinical faculty member believed: "In this way, I disagree with giving a score of faculty by the student evaluation at the end of a semester and this score is a deciding factor for the competencies of a faculty" (p2).

- **Heterogeneity in the Category of Students**

Some differences at the level of students considered effective in faculty member's evaluation.

A basic science faculty member mentioned that: "I would be more comfortable with Ph.D. students because they can be more easily judged by Ph.D. students. The bachelor's degree is more crowded classes" (p4).

Also, a basic science faculty member stated: "First, I think we should only look at our good student's opinion ... To see, here is the Tehran University of Medical Sciences (top rank in-country). I say a student must graduate from the Tehran

University of Medical Sciences. I think evaluation must be based on good and top-ranking students" (p6).

## **Faculty Performance Analysis**

According to many faculties, the evaluation of performance and poor monitoring of competency are the other challenges in the faculty evaluation system.

- **Poor Monitoring of Faculty Activities**

Poor monitoring of the performance of faculty members is another challenge for the evaluation system.

A basic science faculty member stated: "Do we have a special system that observes that yes, this faculty member went to class at 95% of the time, for example speaking about memoirs, tales, and stories? Or having good teaching? Do we have a monitoring system?" (p8).

also, a basic science faculty member mentioned that: "An evaluation system can be motivating, provided that the evaluation system has accurate monitoring of faculty performance. Accurate monitor. For example, let's see why we evaluate Mr. x during semester five, this Mr. X has always a low evaluation score" (p3).

- **Inability to distinguish between faculty members**

From the participants' views, the evaluation system cannot distinguish the faculty members with good and poor performance.

A basic science faculty member mentioned that: "In faculty evaluation, is anyone, for example, very good and the one who is medium performance and the one who is so poor performance different from them?" When I see some faculty members I feel pity for them, for example, a faculty with good performance no difference to someone who is not a good performance at all (p3).

A clinical faculty member mentioned that: "It is not clear what is my evaluation? announced a score, but it's not clear, for example, a teacher with bad teaching, so what's the effects on? if the result of my evaluation is bad, what happens to me? For example, do not give me a classroom? It is not clear" (p10).

- **Excessive strengthening of the evaluation system**

Some faculty members stated, "the excessive reinforcement of the evaluation system is challenging".

A basic science faculty member stated: "I cannot really comment, maybe it's just because some faculty do not work at all. Perhaps this has led the university to strengthen its evaluation systems. Therefore, strengthening the evaluation

system so that you want to drink water from the drinking water evaluation.” (p6)

- **Comparing Performance with Other Faculty**

Some faculty members considered the comparison performance of faculty members as one of the challenges of the evaluation system.

A basic science faculty member stated: “One of the worst practices in the evaluation system is the comparison of professors and with each other. Teachers compare each other to pay salaries and benefits. It's not true at all, which we compare with each other. Because different disciplines are different (p3).

However, clinical faculty mentioned that: “There are no comparisons that I was better or worse than the professor. What was my weakness? What has he been doing now that he is being encouraged? for example, said that (he or she) worked better in this field. With comparison, I'm going to learn how to do it” (p10).

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify the challenges of faculty members with the evaluation system of faculty members. The results of this study showed that faculty members need to have feedback and qualitative evaluations and increase their confidence in the results of evaluations by the student. comparing the evaluation results of faculty members as positive and negative factors. In the present study, the lack of positive and adequate feedback to faculty members was emphasized as one of the challenges of the faculty evaluation system. Meanwhile, the study suggested that one of the most essential functions of an evaluation system is to provide feedback to faculty members for their professional development [3]. In a systematic review study, 70% of studies showed positive effects of feedback on performance [6]. Another study showed that the quality of feedback should be the specificity and inclusion of strengths and improvement points and with self-reflection on performance [16-18]. However, the feedback provided should focus on significant aspects such as educational-research-management, professional and job-related, and communication skills [8, 9, 19]. It should be provided by students, self, peers, outside experts, mentors, alumni, employers, and administrators. In other words, the feedback provided should be 360 degrees [9]. The results of our study were consistent with the results of the Changiz and et al study showing that faculty members receive active feedback [20]. Another challenge was that faculty members had mentioned it too much objectivity in the evaluation of faculty members. Meanwhile, the experts identified the evaluation of the evaluation of teachers' performance as “the regular process of determining competence, the value and the systematic process of determining the merit, value or worth of

someone”[21]. In evaluating the performance of faculty members, they noted that excessive objectivity has caused the quality of work performed by the faculty not to be considered. Accordingly, Hossein et al. quoted by Karimi study indicated that the objective criteria and factual indicators used in the evaluation of faculty members did not reveal the faculty members' quality of work. However, Arreola stated “evaluative in process should be objective, that is, based on clearly observable or documentable products or performances but evaluation will be made are, by definition, subjective in nature”[2, 8]. It seems that the use of the mixed method evaluation can enhance the evaluation process. Another challenge for faculty members in this study was to trust in the results of evaluations by student. In regard to the evaluation of the faculty by the student, the opinions of the faculty were different in different studies. The study of Bastani and et al showed that faculty members considered the use of student survey method as the only evaluation tool in the current system to be inefficient [10]. Nevertheless, the results of a systematic review indicated that the satisfaction of the professors of the universities of medical sciences in the country from the students' evaluation was  $47.8 \pm 18$ . Teacher stated that lack of integrity in completing forms, carelessness and lack of responsibility and lack of knowledge was the most significant reasons for dissatisfaction with student evaluation [22]. A study by Dargahi et al showed that around 70% of faculty members agreed with the faculty evaluation by student [23]. In addition, Amini indicated that around 70.2% of the faculty members agree with the evaluation by the student and consider it as a source of feedback to improve their performance and also 48% of faculty state that the score obtained from evaluation forms affects their teaching quality and improve the quality of teaching [24]. Other studies did not agree with the evaluation by students. Carmela et al, said that they are opposed to student evaluation as the only tool for assessing the quality of teaching [25]. In addition, Clayson showed that student evaluation of teaching ratings are not related to student learning [26]. Considering that the evaluation of professors from students is influenced by various conditions such as type of course, field of study, exam method, personality traits of students, and abilities of technical, communication and human skills of professors, therefore, should not be considered alone in making decisions regarding promotion of rank, granting incentive and other special and exclusive privileges to be exploited annually [27]. The evaluation of faculty members by students will be useful if quantitative and numerical results along with qualitative results and mix methods evaluation used for faculty evaluation [7, 28]. Comparing the performance of faculty members is another challenge that faculty members have pointed. This performance comparison was also emphasized as a negative and positive factor in the evaluation of faculty members. On the other hand, comparing the performance of faculty members with other faculty members in other fields and other disciplines is a negative factor that comparing with faculty members in the same groups and disciplines a positive factor. Changiz et al showed that because that disciplines and courses are differences, the results of the evaluation could be

different<sup>[28]</sup>. In other words, since evaluations are affected by various factors as course difficulties, class management, number of students<sup>[29, 30]</sup> the comparison was carefully performed.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study showed that It is necessary to constructive and qualitative approach evaluation, avoid excessive strengthening of the evaluation system, using the combination of evaluation methods, providing effective feedback to faculty and careful attention to compare the performance of faculty members. We hope the results of this study can be considered in the faculty evaluation process especially at Tehran University of Medical Sciences.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank all the participants who agreed to participate in this study and deputy of research of University of Tehran Medical Sciences for their financial support.

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