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Explaining the concept of faculty members' competency from professors' point of view: a qualitative study

Background: In the education process, instructors and students are in constant interaction with each other. Faculty members play a significant role in students' education process. This study aimed to explain the concept of competency among faculty members of Guilan University of Medical Sciences.

Method: In this qualitative study, using the content analysis method, 16 faculty members of Guilan University of Medical Sciences in 2018 who were willing to participate in the study were selected through the purposive sampling method. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and their experiences and viewpoints were surveyed until data saturation was reached.

Results: In this study, five categories were extracted: individual characteristics, individual skills, scientific knowledge, using new technologies, and receiving internal and external organizational support. Furthermore, 'The competent faculty member: a perfect human with all qualifications necessary for education' emerged as the main theme.

Conclusion: Based on the results, faculty members considered all the necessary qualifications for a professor in the education process as the criteria for competency. Consideration of the qualifications stated by the faculty members can help the managers and those involved in the field of education in enhancing and promoting faculty members' competency. The results of this study can be used as enlightenment for further studies in this field.

Keywords: Competency, Content Analysis, Faculty, IRAN

شرح مفهوم کفایت اعضای هیئت تدریس من وجهة نظر الأساتذة: دراسة نوعية

الخلفية: في العملية التعليمية، يتفاعل المعلمون والطلاب باستمرار مع بعضهم البعض. يلعب أعضاء هيئة التدريس دوراً مهماً في عملية تعليم الطلاب. هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى شرح مفهوم الكفاءة بين أعضاء هيئة التدريس بجامعة جيلان للعلوم الطبية.

الطرق: في هذه الدراسة النوعية، وباستخدام أسلوب تحليل المحتوى، تم اختيار ١٦ من أعضاء هيئة التدريس بجامعة جيلان للعلوم الطبية في عام ٢٠١٨ ممن كانوا على استعداد للمشاركة في الدراسة من خلال طريقة أخذ العينات الهادفة. تم جمع البيانات من خلال المقابلات شبه المنظمة، وتم مسح خبراتهم ووجهات نظرهم حتى الوصول إلى تشبع البيانات.

النتائج: تم في هذه الدراسة استخلاص خمس فئات هي: الخصائص الفردية، والمهارات الفردية، والمعرفة العلمية، واستخدام التقنيات الحديثة، وتلقي الدعم التنظيمي الداخلي والخارجي. علاوة على ذلك، ظهر "عضو هيئة التدريس المختص: إنسان مثالي مع جميع المؤهلات اللازمة للتعليم" كموضوع رئيسي.

الخلاصة: بناءً على النتائج، اعتبر أعضاء هيئة التدريس جميع المؤهلات اللازمة للأستاذ في العملية التعليمية كمعايير للكفاءة. إن النظر في المؤهلات التي ذكرها أعضاء هيئة التدريس يمكن أن يساعد المديرين والمشاركين في مجال التعليم في تعزيز وتعزيز كفاءة أعضاء هيئة التدريس. يمكن استخدام نتائج هذه الدراسة كتطوير لمزيد من الدراسات في هذا المجال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكفاءة، تحليل المحتوى، الكلية، إيران

تبیین مفهوم صلاحیت اعضای هیات علمی از دیدگاه اساتید: یک مطالعه کیفی

زمینه و هدف: در فرایند آموزش، مربیان و دانشجویان در تعامل مستمر با یکدیگر هستند. اعضای هیئت علمی نقش بسزایی در آموزش دانشجویان دارند. این مطالعه با هدف تبیین مفهوم صلاحیت اعضای هیئت علمی در دانشگاه علوم پزشکی گیلان انجام شد.

روش: در این مطالعه کیفی با استفاده از روش تحلیل محتوا، ۱۶ نفر از اعضای هیئت علمی دانشگاه علوم پزشکی گیلان در سال ۱۳۹۷ که مایل به شرکت در پژوهش بودند، به روش نمونه‌گیری هدفمند انتخاب شدند. داده‌ها از طریق مصاحبه نیمه ساختاریافته جمع‌آوری شد و تجربیات و دیدگاه‌های آنها تا رسیدن به اشباع داده‌ها مورد بررسی قرار گرفت.

یافته‌ها: در این پژوهش پنج طبقه ویژگی‌های فردی، مهارت‌های فردی، دانش علمی، استفاده از فناوری‌های جدید و دریافت حمایت‌های داخلی و خارج سازمانی استخراج شد. علاوه بر این، «عضو هیئت علمی با صلاحیت؛ یک انسان کامل با تمام شایستگی‌های لازم برای آموزش به عنوان تم اصلی مطرح شد.

نتیجه‌گیری: بر اساس نتایج، اعضای هیئت علمی تمامی توانمندی‌های لازم برای یک استاد در فرایند آموزش را ملاک صلاحیت دانستند. توجه به صلاحیت‌های اعلام شده توسط اعضای هیئت علمی می‌تواند به مدیران و دست‌اندرکاران حوزه آموزشی در ارتقا و بهبود شایستگی‌های اعضای هیئت علمی کمک نماید. نتایج این مطالعه می‌تواند به عنوان بینشی جهت مطالعات بیشتر در این زمینه مورد استفاده قرار گیرد.

واژه‌های کلیدی: صلاحیت، توانمندی، تحلیل محتوا، اعضای هیئت علمی، ایران

پروفیسرز کے نقطہ نظر سے فیکلٹی ممبران کی اہلیت کے تصور کی وضاحت: ایک کوالٹیٹیو اسٹڈی

پس منظر: تعلیمی عمل میں، اساتذہ اور طلباء ایک دوسرے کے ساتھ مسلسل تعامل میں رہتے ہیں۔ فیکلٹی ممبران طلباء کے تعلیمی عمل میں اہم کردار ادا کرتے ہیں۔ اس مطالعے کا مقصد گیلان یونیورسٹی آف میڈیکل سائنسز کے فیکلٹی ممبران میں قابلیت کے تصور کی وضاحت کرنا تھا۔

طریقے: اس کوالٹیٹیو اسٹڈی میں، مواد کے تجزیہ کا طریقہ استعمال کرتے ہوئے، ۲۰۱۸ میں گیلان یونیورسٹی آف میڈیکل سائنسز کے ۱۶ فیکلٹی ممبران جو مطالعے میں حصہ لینے کے خواہشمند تھے، مقصدی نمونے لینے کے طریقہ کار کے ذریعے منتخب کیے گئے۔ ڈیٹا نیم ساختہ انٹرویوز کے ذریعے اکٹھا کیا گیا تھا، اور ان کے تجربات اور نقطہ نظر کا سروے کیا گیا جب تک کہ ڈیٹا سیچوریشن تک نہ پہنچ جائے۔

نتائج: اس مطالعے میں، پانچ زمرے نکالے گئے: انفرادی خصوصیات، انفرادی مہارت، سائنسی علم، نئی ٹیکنالوجیز کا استعمال، اور اندرونی اور بیرونی تنظیمی تعاون حاصل کرنا۔ مزید برآں، "مجاز فیکلٹی ممبر: تعلیم کے لیے ضروری تمام قابلیتوں کے ساتھ ایک کامل انسان" مرکزی موضوع کے طور پر سامنے آیا۔

نتیجہ: نتائج کی بنیاد پر، فیکلٹی ممبران نے تعلیمی عمل میں پروفیسر کے لیے تمام ضروری قابلیت کو قابلیت کے معیار کے طور پر سمجھا۔ فیکلٹی ممبران کی طرف سے بیان کردہ قابلیت پر غور کرتے سے مینیجرز اور تعلیم کے شعبے سے وابستہ افراد کو فیکلٹی ممبران کی قابلیت کو بڑھانے اور فروغ دینے میں مدد مل سکتی ہے۔ اس مطالعے کے نتائج کو اس میدان میں مزید مطالعہ کے لیے روشن خیالی کے طور پر استعمال کیا جا سکتا ہے۔

مطلوبہ الفاظ: قابلیت، مواد کا تجزیہ، فیکلٹی، ایران

INTRODUCTION

In the education process, professors and students constantly interact with each other (1). Principally, faculty members have the most imperative role in educating students (2). The instructor creates an environment in which the student takes steps to achieve professional and personal competencies. This process is accomplished by relying on the characteristics of a good instructor. In fact, the instructor's performance and characteristics lead the student to achieve educational and learning goals. Consequently, the qualities of a competent instructor are taken into account by most researchers (3).

Competency semantically means professional growth and maturity, constructive and effective communication with others, cognition, knowledge and awareness, creativity, and innovation (4). Regarding faculty members' competency, some studies have referred to rhetoric, employing appropriate and diverse teaching methods, mastery of the subject matter, creativity and innovation, identifying individual differences, appreciating student work, fair behavior, and a good relationship with students to facilitate learning in them (5). Since the role of faculty members in teaching and learning process is imperative and undeniable, possessing the competent professors' criteria for effective teaching can be advantageous in improving their performance (6).

Various studies have been conducted to determine the criteria of a competent faculty member and reported the following criteria: timely presence in the classroom, movements, and walks in the classroom, mastery of the subject matter, up-to-date information, flexibility, and appropriate use of teaching aids (7-10). In addition, the factors such as mastery of teaching methods, educational regulations and rules, individual characteristics, and interpersonal communication have been reported to be essential in promoting the higher education system and increasing the quality of education in faculty members (11). In a qualitative study, which examined the perspectives of those who experienced the phenomenon, had dealt with the existing problems, and perceived the problems in their cultural and social context, seven categories including scientific knowledge, educational skills, individual characteristics, emotional characteristics, professional ethics, and support and management characteristics were extracted (12-14).

From the standpoint of others, the most important characteristics of a competent professor include: a variety of teaching methods, interpersonal communication, individual characteristics, and scholarship (15). In the study conducted by Anderson et al. on 205 doctoral students at an American university, the responses concerning characteristics of an effective teacher included being professional, expert, connector, transmitter, ethical, and director. In this study, the views of doctoral students were multidimensional and suggested that students' attitudes should be used in faculty evaluation forms and the provision of guidelines and strategies for Ph.D. students (16).

The ideal professor enjoys academic ability, professionalism in teaching, individual characteristics, role modeling, and

professional ethics (17). The characteristics of a competent nursing faculty member were identified in a qualitative study conducted in greater depth so that the main theme of this study, "a competent nursing faculty member is a perfect human," as a novel and profound spiritual finding, appropriately explains the position of the nursing discipline. This study recommends that the characteristics of a competent nursing faculty member can be used as a practical guide in nursing management and education (18).

Based on the results of other studies and the need for further studies in this field, and since the best way to explain the concept of faculty competency is a qualitative approach, the researchers aimed to conduct a qualitative study using content analysis to explain the concept of competency from the perspective of medical faculty at Guilan University of Medical Sciences. The reason for employing the qualitative approach is that such studies help both instructors and students reconstruct past experiences and cause the phenomenon to be explained and understood broadly.

METHODS

This qualitative study was conducted in 2018 with a conventional content analysis approach. In this approach, the researchers immerse themselves in the data to obtain a novel insight (19). The qualitative content analysis approach is one of the organized approaches of data analysis and categorization through which textual data can be analyzed and scrutinized, and the occurred processes and patterns can be interpreted (20).

In qualitative research, the principle of sample appropriateness is argued, which raises the necessity of using purposive sampling and the participation of individuals willing to discuss the subject in detail (20,21). Therefore, the initial participants were selected from among the professors who, according to the previous knowledge of the researchers, had the characteristics of key informants. In other words, they were able and willing to talk about the subject. On the other hand, in qualitative research, the goal is to obtain the possible information; therefore, sampling was conducted with maximum variation (21,22).

In this study, the selection of each participant and the questions were based on the collected data and analysis of previous data, which necessitated raising further questions. The researcher continued sampling until new information was not obtained; in other words, the sampling process continued until data saturation was reached.

The data collection method was semi-structured interviews and focus groups, and participants were selected by the purposive sampling method. In order to conduct the interviews, some general questions were first considered by the researchers as the initial assumption, which led the interviewee towards sharing their experiences. Sample questions included: What do you mean by Competency? What are the criteria for faculty Competency? What are the facilitators of and barriers to faculty Competency? These initial questions were asked with similar statements according to the interview flow and continued with other exploratory questions. In the complementary section of data collection, focus groups of professors were used, and

questions were asked. These groups were formed with the cooperation of the faculty members of different medical disciplines interested in participating in the interview at their convenient hours. The interviews and findings of the focus groups were recorded by a pocket voice recorder and prepared for analysis. The whole interview was read several times by the researchers to get a comprehensive view of the data and the fundamental points in the participants' experiences. Regarding the meaning of each unit of analysis, they were coded. Afterward, initial codes and interview transcripts were provided to some participants to ensure data credibility.

Semantically similar initial codes were classified under one category. Considering the high number of codes in each category, codes with similar meanings were classified into subcategories; consequently, each category would consist of several subcategories. Afterward, the interview transcriptions, codes, and categories were read several times to determine the connections between the codes and categories and identify the main themes.

MAXQDA 2010 software was used to analyze the data and categorize the codes. First, the interview transcripts were carefully typed in Word 2010 software. After typing and transcribing the interview text in the Word 2010 file, the interview transcription was analyzed using MAXQDA2010 software.

RESULTS

The findings of the study were based on the results of the interview and their analysis until information saturation was reached. 16 participants, including 14 faculty members and two instructors, participated in this study. The mean age of faculty members was 46.34 ± 3.14 years. Twelve participants (75%) were female (Table 1). In continuous data analysis, 254 initial codes were extracted, and considering their overlap and integration, 53 primary codes were obtained. Following the continuous analysis, five categories: individual characteristics, individual skills, scientific knowledge, using new technologies, and receiving internal and external organizational support were extracted (Table 2). In this study, "the competent faculty member: a perfect human with all the necessary qualities necessary for education" emerged as the main theme that all participants acknowledged. In the following section, the mentioned categories and themes, as the main characteristics of a competent faculty member are described and explained.

Individual characteristics

The subcategories of this category included interest in teaching, good manners, and appropriate appearance. All participants mentioned that general individual characteristics would influence teaching. Interest in teaching and motivation, good morals, humanity, punctuality, rhetoric and proper dialect, responsibility, appropriate appearance, dignity, appropriate personal communication, and taking criticism were among the characteristics mentioned by the participants.

Faculty member No. 5:

"As I told you, discipline, punctuality, responsibility, taking criticism, good personality, right behavior with colleagues

and students, and the ability to mutually cooperate are some of the general characteristics of a competent professor."

Individual skills

In this category, the subcategories included having knowledge and teaching skills, using various teaching methods according to the content, and improving teaching skills. Taking into account the students' needs and individual differences, skills required for communicating with students and colleagues, knowledge of teaching skills, using diverse teaching methods according to the content, and upgrading teaching skills were among the factors mentioned by the participants.

Faculty member No. 14:

"In my opinion, specific abilities that find their meaning in different fields, the ability to increase one's scientific knowledge and correctly transfer the concepts that have mastered them, acquisition of practical skills related to their field, and the ability to teach achieved skills, refer to the concept of Competency."

Scientific knowledge and discipline awareness

Mastery of subject matter, content knowledge, promotion of knowledge and awareness by participating in congresses and seminars, and conducting scientific studies were among the subcategories raised by participants regarding scientific knowledge and discipline awareness.

Faculty member No. 12:

"Many professors have the necessary scientific knowledge but don't have the necessary skills in terms of Competency or

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants

Participant number	Gender	Age	Duration of interview (Minutes)	Job
1	Female	49	35	MS in nursing
2	Female	47	40	MS in nursing
3	Male	50	43	PhD in disaster health
4	Male	52	55	PhD in disaster health
5	Male	51	45	Ophthalmologist
6	Female	55	38	Ophthalmologist
7	Female	49	43	Ophthalmologist
8	Male	47	40	Anesthesiologist
9	Female	50	35	Anesthesiologist
10	Female	41	35	Ph.D. in nursing
11	Female	42	40	Ph.D. in nursing
12	Female	43	45	Ph.D. in nursing
13	Female	49	40	Ph.D. in nursing
14	Female	35	45	Ph.D. in nursing
15	Female	51	43	Ph.D. in reproductive health
16	Female	45	40	Ph.D. in reproductive health

Table 2. Them, categories and subcategories of the study

Them	Category	Subcategory
A perfect human with all qualifications necessary for education	Individual characteristics	Interest in teaching
		Good manners
		The appropriate appearance
	Individual skills	Having knowledge and teaching skills
		Using various teaching methods according to the content
		Improve your teaching skills
	Scientific knowledge	Mastery of knowledge and content
		Promotion of knowledge and awareness
		Conducting scientific studies
	Using new technologies	Awareness of new technologies
		Using new technology in teaching
	Receiving internal and external organizational support	Get support from colleagues
		Having internal and external managerial support
		Evaluated by standard assessment tools

transferring that knowledge. That is, we usually need a professor with theoretical knowledge, but because they also work in a clinical setting, they must update their clinical skills too."

Using new technologies

Awareness of new technologies and the use of these techniques in teaching were also subcategories raised by participants in the category of 'using new technologies.'

Faculty member No. 8:

"In the past, professors had to look for pamphlets, manuals, or books; They usually spent a lot of time on their scientific abilities to transfer information, but now we can transfer information by using up-to-date technology..."

Receiving internal and external organizational support

The colleagues' support, internal and external managerial support, and evaluation by standard assessment tools were subcategories that emerged in the category of 'receiving internal and external organizational support.' In this regard, the professors referred to the role of evaluation in motivations for being competent. Regarding the standard evaluation methods in universities, improper evaluation was considered a factor in diminishing motivation for Competency.

Faculty member No. 4:

"In my opinion, effective factors in empowering a faculty member can be individual, environmental, and organizational factors. Harmful factors and the prohibition of empowering professors can both prevent them from becoming competent and promote them. I mean, if any professor has such problems, they may hinder them from being competent, but improving them can lead to their competency."

DISCUSSION

In this study, five categories: individual characteristics, individual skills, scientific knowledge, using new

technologies, and receiving internal and external organizational support were extracted. In addition, 'the competent faculty member: a perfect human being with all qualifications necessary for education' appeared as the main theme. In this study, faculty members considered all the essential characteristics of an instructor in the education process as criteria for faculty Competency. They claimed that characteristics such as mastery of subject matters, eloquence and transmitting knowledge, teaching skills, scientific knowledge, and motivation to learn and improve were effective for faculty Competency.

In this regard, in their qualitative research, Adib Haj Bagheri et al. introduced five categories: application of knowledge and skills, having authority, self-confidence, support, and unification (17). In the study by Peyman et al., the most important characteristics of a competent faculty member from the learners' point of view included teaching method, interpersonal communication, individual characteristics, and scholarship, respectively. The needs, interests, and views of students at different educational levels regarding the characteristics of a competent instructor were not congruent. Based on the results of this study, the use of new materials and up-to-date scientific topics, as well as the scientific competency of the professor, were among the foremost characteristics of a competent faculty member. (15). The results of the present study in the 'communication skills' and 'individual characteristics' categories were consistent with these studies. Undoubtedly, capable professors with appropriate scientific and moral qualifications have important, fundamental, and essential factors in raising the quality of higher education systems. Therefore, empowering professors with these skills will lead to the improvement of the educational system.

In the study by Dargahi, criteria such as mastery of the subject matter, rhetoric and transferring educational materials, preserving student dignity and respect, broad-mindedness,

good temper, good work ethics, and responsibility were recognized as the most important criteria of a competent professor (3). These traits were among the individual characteristics of a competent faculty member, which are in line with the present study.

Siamian et al. likewise reported that the most significant characteristics of a good instructor from students' perspective include rhetoric, teaching skills, age, mastery of subject matter, interest in teaching, taking criticism, and using information technology (2). Vali et al. showed that the faculty members' priorities include teaching methods and educational rules. In this study, the characteristics of a competent instructor, especially teaching methods, educational rules, individual characteristics, and interpersonal communication were essential factors in promoting the higher education system (11). These results are along with the categories obtained in the present study, including individual characteristics, individual skills, scientific knowledge, and using new technologies. Obviously, competent professors should improve their personal and professional dimensions since they believe that in order to cope with the challenges faced by every teacher or professor today, the best strategy is to evaluate themselves first. In other words, they ought to update their knowledge and skills concerning their specialized field and pay special attention to their personality, and moral characteristics to remarkably affect students and their profession.

In Salarvand's study, from students' perspectives, the ideal instructor is a knowledgeable professor who completely supports them and is committed to his/her community and country while possessing outstanding ethical characteristics and, meanwhile, observes professionalism in nursing (18). In this study, some categories of scientific Competency and individual characteristics of faculty members were in line with the present study. Recognizing the desirable characteristics of competent professors is extremely important. The professor's characteristics are among the factors that affect the professor's scientific abilities since education depends more on the teacher's personality, characteristics, and abilities than other factors, and all educational factors are influenced by it. A competent professor must have numerous characteristics to be able to increase the credibility and reputation of an educational organization.

The study by Hekmatpour et al. reported seven categories concerning a competent nursing educator: scientific knowledge, teaching skills, individual and emotional characteristics, professional ethics, supportive characteristics, and management characteristics. In this study, 'a competent nursing instructor: a perfect human being' was revealed as the main theme acknowledged by all participants (23). In the qualitative study by Bonakdari et al., three categories, including cognitive, emotional, and behavioral factors, were obtained (24). These studies were in line with the present study in terms of employing the qualitative method. Considering that the study by Hekmatpour was conducted on medical faculty members and Bonaldari et al.'s study was carried out in several groups of professors, including the nursing department, the results of

the studies are complementary. Overall, all university professors from all fields must possess the necessary qualities and skills for better education of students, and their goal needs to be the improvement of the quality of higher education in all parts and the whole society. Therefore, attention should be paid to the professors' characteristics and empowerment in all fields. In the present study, participants considered the faculty member's personality traits as effective indicators of a competent instructor. Likewise, they pointed to the good manners and eloquence of the professor. The findings of Alavi et al.'s study revealed that from the students' perspective, instructors' essential characteristics included good personality, strong communication skills, and appropriate clinical skills (25). The results of the study by Zanak similarly consider the use of new teaching approaches and technologies and the instructor's teaching style effective in the flexibility of the classroom's atmosphere and suggest that the instructor's competency in this field is of particular importance (26).

Regarding internal and external organizational support, participants stated that receiving support from colleagues and internal and external managerial support could improve professors' competency. These results were not obtained in other studies; however, in the present study, participants stated that receiving support plays an important role in the professor's competence. This result could probably be related to the field of medical sciences, which is taught both in the university and in medical centers, and interdisciplinary support and external and internal resources are essential in promoting education in this field. Finally, in the present study, the characteristics of a competent medical faculty member were identified thoroughly through interviews and a more accurate investigation of the concept. The medical faculty introduced 'The competent faculty member: a perfect human with all qualifications necessary for education,' the main theme of this concept and a profound and prominent finding in the field of education. It was consistent with the characteristics of a competent nursing faculty member identified in Salvands' study, whose main theme was "a competent nursing faculty member is a perfect human." The study results indicate that nursing faculty members need to consider the above characteristics and have a comprehensive plan to acquire them in order to succeed in teaching (18). This study recommends that the characteristics of a competent faculty member can be used as a practical guide in management and education.

In this study, participants considered all the necessary characteristics for a faculty member in the education process as criteria for faculty competency. Considering qualified professors' significant role and influence in improving students' academic and moral levels, paying attention to professors' characteristics, skills, and capabilities seems necessary. Therefore, managers and education officials of the country should make plans to persuade teachers to acquire the necessary qualifications and empower them professionally. As a result, considering the characteristics stated by professors can help managers and those involved in the field of education to improve the faculty members' competency. Compared to commonly used quantitative methods, this study showed that

a qualitative study could better explain social situations, such as competency. The results of this study can assist in conducting further studies in this field.

The limitations of this project included the specific limitations of qualitative research, the most important point of which is the transferability of the research findings. Using the purposive sampling method and recruiting a variety of participants in terms of the faculty, an attempt was made to provide the transferability of the findings for evaluation and judgment by others.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical issues including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission,

redundancy, etc. have been completely observed by the authors. The present study was approved by the Vice Chancellor for Research and Technology of Guilan University of Medical Sciences.

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