



Attributes of Good Faculty as Perceived by Health Professions Students: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Background: Diverse perspectives have been documented regarding the attributes of outstanding university faculty members. It is crucial to consider the evolving demands and expectations of students at the University of Medical Sciences, which change with age and educational stages. Extracting students' opinions and expectations can yield valuable insights into the attributes required of faculty members in academic institutions.

Objectives: This study aimed to identify health professions students' perceptions of the attributes of a good faculty member.

Methods: A qualitative study was conducted using a conventional content analysis approach. The participants in this study were health professions students (medicine, nursing, midwifery, laboratory sciences, operating room technology, anesthesia, prehospital emergency, pharmacy, dentistry, and health) at Alborz University of Medical Sciences, who were purposefully selected. Study data were gathered by conducting in-depth, face-to-face, and semi-structured personal interviews with 23 students, as well as a group interview with seven students. The data analysis followed the conventional content analysis approach, using the steps proposed by Lundman and Granheim.

Results: Study participants' perceptions of good faculty attributes fell into two main categories: Personality attributes and professional attributes. Personality attributes included appearance and personality traits. Professional attributes encompassed scientific and scholarly qualities, as well as teaching skills.

Conclusions: Our findings reveal that study participants placed significant emphasis on both personality and professional attributes when defining good faculty characteristics. Sub-categories such as appearance, personality traits, scientific expertise, and teaching skills emerged as important factors shaping student perceptions of faculty members. This underscores the multifaceted nature of what constitutes an effective faculty member in students' eyes and highlights the importance of cultivating a diverse range of attributes within academia. Future research could delve deeper into each sub-category to refine our understanding of what truly defines effective faculty members.

Keywords: Health Occupations Students, University Professor, Teaching, Communication, Qualitative Research

1. Background

Educating and preparing the scientific workforce required by society is a key responsibility of universities (1). Within this educational process, university faculty members play a crucial role in fostering student learning, academic success, and meeting the expectations of both the university and society in terms of knowledge, attitude, skills, responsibility, accountability, work ethic, personality, and professional conduct (2, 3).

Multiple approaches are employed to assess the qualities of effective university faculty members. In numerous prominent universities globally, students' feedback is utilized as a means of improving educational outcomes and advancing educational objectives (4). Diverse perspectives have been documented regarding the attributes of outstanding university faculty members (3). It is crucial to consider the evolving demands and expectations of students at the University of Medical Sciences, which change with age and educational stages. Extracting students'

opinions and expectations can yield valuable insights into the attributes required of faculty members in academic institutions (4).

Students' perceptions of effective educators vary and are influenced by factors such as age, self-perception, motivation, and social background (2). Different teaching approaches significantly impact students' assessment of the quality of teaching provided by university faculty members (5). Despite the teaching method used, effective teaching plays a crucial role in students' academic achievement (6, 7). Understanding students' perceptions of good faculty member attributes allows educators to adapt their approach to better align with students' cultural backgrounds. This insight can be valuable for faculty members' self-assessment and professional growth (2). Numerous studies in Iran and other countries have identified diverse criteria for outstanding faculty members across various disciplines, as perceived by students. However, there are differences in the viewpoints of students from different universities (3, 4, 8, 9).

Medical sciences universities play a pivotal role in training future healthcare professionals and advancing research in the field of medicine (10). Understanding these distinct characteristics and requirements is crucial for designing effective faculty development programs and curriculum enhancements tailored to the specific context of medical sciences universities (11). Therefore, it is necessary to identify faculty characteristics in such a context from students' perspectives.

2. Objectives

Unlike prior research, which primarily used a quantitative methodology, the current study was conducted using a qualitative approach to explore health professions students' perceptions of the attributes of a good faculty member.

3. Methods

3.1. Study Design, Setting, and Participants

A qualitative study was conducted using a conventional content analysis approach. Qualitative content analysis identifies themes or patterns, both obvious and hidden, in the collected data through a

systematic classification process. In conventional content analysis, the researcher avoids predetermined categories and allows categories to emerge from the data (12).

The participants in this study were health professions students (medicine, nursing, midwifery, laboratory sciences, operating room technology, anesthesia, prehospital emergency, pharmacy, dentistry, and health) at Alborz University of Medical Sciences, who were purposefully selected. Participant selection commenced with nursing students. As the study progressed, students with maximum diversity (in terms of discipline, academic level, semester, gender, and marital status) were chosen to capture diverse perspectives. The purposeful sampling continued until data saturation was reached, ensuring no new categories or themes emerged from the data (13). The inclusion criteria were as follows: Having completed at least one academic year, expressing a willingness to participate in the study, and having the ability to articulate their experiences.

3.2. Data Collection

Study data were gathered by conducting in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured personal interviews with 23 students, as well as a group interview with seven students from public health, occupational health, and environmental health. Each interview began with general and open questions, such as "Have you ever experienced being in a good faculty member's classroom?" and "Could you tell me what it was like? How did you feel that this faculty member was good? What factors made you think or feel that this faculty member was good?" Clarifying and probing questions such as "tell me more about this..." and "What does that mean? Please explain more" were used based on the participants' answers and emerging data.

The interviews were conducted by the first author at agreed-upon times and places with the participants and were recorded using a digital recording device. Immediately after each interview, the data were transcribed verbatim. The duration of the interviews ranged from 15 to 60 minutes. Simultaneous data collection and analysis were conducted from November 2019 to July 2020.

3.3. Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using the conventional content analysis approach, following the steps proposed by Lundman and Granheim (14). The transcribed interviews were read several times to obtain a general understanding of the content. The text was then divided into semantic units, compressed, and coded. The codes were compared based on their similarities and differences and placed into subcategories and categories based on the homogeneity of the content. The categorization began with the first interview and was refined using data from subsequent interviews. The first author conducted the coding, with the other authors supervising the process. If there was no initial agreement on the codes, the research team discussed and exchanged opinions until a consensus was reached.

3.4. Rigor

The credibility of the findings was established through prolonged engagement with the data, peer checking, and member checking. The sampling technique with maximum diversity was also used to enhance the transferability of the findings.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with the approval of Alborz University of Medical Sciences. Ethical permission was obtained from the ethics committee (IR.ABZUMS.REC.1397.127). Before the interview, participants were provided with necessary information about the study's objectives and were assured that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Participants were also assured that their information would remain confidential. Written informed consent was obtained from the participants before conducting and recording the interviews.

4. Results

Thirty health professions students (seventeen female and thirteen male) participated in this study and were interviewed. Students ranged in age from 20 to 48 years, with an average age of 27 years.

Study participants' perceptions of good faculty attributes fell into two main categories: Personality and professional attributes. Personality attributes included appearance and personality traits. Professional

attributes encompassed scientific and scholarly qualities, as well as teaching skills, as shown in Table 1 and explained below.

4.1. Personality Attributes

This main category, with two sub-categories—appearance attributes and personality traits—was emphasized by many students as important attributes of a good faculty member.

4.1.1. Appearance Attributes

This sub-category includes attributes such as the faculty member's appearance being neat and suitable for an academic environment, and the observance of Islamic affairs.

"A faculty member who wears makeup, has long, varnished nails, etc., cannot be a good role model for me in the clinical environment," said a medical student.

4.1.2. Personality Traits

The data analysis revealed that good faculty members are typically energetic, active, funny, well-mannered, encouraging, supportive, flexible, and open to criticism.

"This faculty member helps you so much to improve...supports you in every way. It is very clear that he/she wants you to improve sincerely," said an environmental health student.

The data analysis also revealed that upholding ethical standards is another key personality trait of a good university faculty member. Attributes such as being fair and conscientious, reliable and honest, available, responsible and responsive, modest and humble, polite and ethical, a keeper of students' secrets, and not abusing or slandering students or colleagues were emphasized.

"Well, it is expected that if a question is raised in the position of a consultant, without the knowledge of the student, those issues will not be raised with anyone else, even with good intentions," said a nursing student.

4.2. Professional Attributes

This main category includes two sub-categories: Scientific and scholarly attributes, and teaching skills. These are among the most important and attractive attributes of a good faculty member, as emphasized by many students in this study.

Table 1. Health Professions Students' Perceptions of Good Faculty Member Attributes

Main Category	Sub-category	Sub-sub-category	
Personality attributes	Appearance attributes	Neat and suitable for an academic environment	
		Observance of Islamic affairs	
	Personality traits	Energetic and active	
		Encouraging and supportive	
		Flexible and open to criticism	
		Reliable and honest	
		Modest and humble	
		Responsible and responsive	
	Professional attributes	Scientific and scholarly attributes	Literacy and scientific mastery of the specialized field
			Hopeful and goal-oriented
Teaching skills		Mastery of teaching methods	
		Mastery of evaluation methods	
		Mastery and adherence to teaching rules	
		Ability to communicate	
Ability to classroom management			

4.2.1. Scientific and Scholarly Attributes

This sub-category includes two sub-sub-categories: Literacy and scientific mastery of the specialized field, and being hopeful and goal-oriented, as explained below.

4.2.1.1. Literacy and Scientific Mastery of the Specialized Field

From the students' perceptions, scientific literacy, work experience in the specialized field, and providing new and updated content and resources indicate the faculty member's respect and interest in the specialized field, classes, students, and teaching.

"He had so much work experience in the hospital. We had the most productive practical classes with him ... He took us a step higher," said a laboratory sciences student.

4.2.1.2. Hopeful and Goal-Oriented

The analysis of the qualitative data revealed that being hopeful and goal-oriented are other important attributes of a faculty member. These include having a positive attitude and interest in their field of study and profession; striving for advancement in their job, professional, and specialized positions; an interest in conducting research activities; the ability to create interest and motivation in students for further research

and study; and encouraging and supporting students to conduct research and engage with scientific subjects.

"This faculty member had a certain personality type. Apart from her academic qualifications, she always served as a role model for me. Her education and moral values were truly outstanding and commendable," said a nursing student.

4.2.2. Teaching Skills

This sub-category includes five sub-sub-categories of attributes, as explained below.

4.2.2.1. Mastery of Teaching Methods

According to students' perceptions, faculty members should be motivated and interested in teaching. They should be familiar with various teaching methods and use them appropriately based on the content and timing of the class. Additionally, they should consider the students' level of knowledge and society's needs, be creative, and provide an engaging teaching atmosphere. Furthermore, they should possess simplicity, eloquence, and expressive skills.

"A faculty member evaluates the students' level of knowledge in the course and then plans and presents the materials with the necessary order and logic in specific sessions," said an anesthesia student.

4.2.2.2. Mastery of Evaluation Methods

The evaluation method should be determined and announced at the beginning of the semester, according to the educational goals and content. Observing fairness in evaluation, using various evaluation methods, conducting formative evaluations, and responding to students' objections are other important points.

"It has happened that I assumed I passed an exam well, but the score I got was much lower than I expected... At least give the student the right to object," said a prehospital emergency student.

4.2.2.3. *Mastery and Adherence to Teaching Rules*

In this section, the students mentioned factors such as preparing and presenting the lesson plan, committing to it, punctuality and discipline, respecting class time, emphasizing student attendance, and requiring compliance with educational regulations.

"A good faculty member has a specific plan from the very beginning. He should specify what this lesson is for, what topics it includes, the teaching methods, and evaluations and quizzes... Specify from the very beginning and tell the student. It is more important to at least do what was said," said a dental student.

4.2.2.4. *Ability to Communicate*

The ability to communicate is another important attribute of a good faculty member, according to students' perceptions. It is important to create successful verbal and nonverbal communication, utilize appropriate body language and tone of voice, acknowledge students by name, recognize the unique traits of each student, and identify their needs.

"What is crucial to me is for the faculty member to know the students by name and even by their personality. This is an essential part of communication. Making eye contact is also vital. At least, the faculty member should be familiar with my face and able to recognize me by it," said an operating room technology student.

4.2.2.5. *Ability to Classroom Management*

Students reported that they respect a faculty member who can manage the class well, be serious and fair, respect and encourage students' classroom activities, foster a comfortable and confident environment, and address any disruptive behavior that arises.

"The university faculty member must be able to manage the classroom conditions well. They must know where and how to give feedback to the student," said a public health student.

5. Discussion

This qualitative study explored health professions students' perceptions of the attributes of a good faculty member. The key results indicate that a good faculty member exhibits both personality and professional attributes. Personality attributes include appearance and personality traits, while professional attributes encompass scientific and scholarly qualities, as well as teaching skills.

In accordance with findings from other studies, the results of this study showed that a good faculty member is expected to maintain a tidy and refined appearance (4, 9, 15) and adhere to Islamic values (16), as these traits capture students' interest in the faculty member and the classroom. Additionally, the study by Preston et al. suggests that a professor's appearance and appeal can influence student attraction (15).

Personality attributes were another key factor emphasized by many students in this study. Other studies have also mentioned these attributes (2, 15, 17, 18). A good faculty member is expected to be energetic and active, conveying these traits to students during interactions both inside and outside the classroom. The results of this study, in line with the results of other studies, showed that a good university faculty member should also be supportive and encouraging (3, 4, 19, 20), possess good manners (3, 4, 9, 15, 17), be humorous (4, 18, 19), be flexible (3, 18), and be open to criticism (4). Such attributes serve as a role model, strengthening motivation, fostering resilience to criticism and stress, and ultimately leading students to pay more attention to the professor's teaching materials in the classroom (3, 15). The emotional support, encouragement, and guidance provided by a faculty member can play a crucial role in students' academic progress, particularly for weaker students, protecting them from inappropriate professional and academic behaviors (3).

Upholding ethical standards is another key personality trait of a good university faculty member, as mentioned by the students in this study, which aligns with those described in other studies. For instance, a good teacher should be fair and conscientious (17),

always accessible (3, 4, 19, 20), responsible and responsive (3, 4, 20, 21), modest (3, 18, 20), polite and ethical (3, 4, 15), respectful, and possess the principles of etiquette (18, 20, 22). Additionally, a good faculty member should be able to communicate effectively and in a friendly manner with others (17, 18, 20). Ahmad Hila and Guest, quoting Goepel, suggests that the attributes of a good teacher include creating "fair, respectful, reliable, supportive, and constructive relationships," demonstrating "positive values, attitudes, and behaviors," and showing a commitment to effective communication and respect for the contributions of others (17, 22).

Ahmad Hila and Guest's research revealed that students identified several key personality traits of an effective teacher, such as patience, perceptiveness, friendliness, warmth, and self-confidence. This indicates that a teacher should not only have extensive knowledge but also be able to establish an emotional bond with students. The study also emphasized the significance of teacher availability, clear communication, allocating sufficient study and homework time, punctuality, accessible content, abstaining from granting extra marks, and using understandable language (17), aligning with the findings of the current study.

Many students who participated in this study emphasized the significance of scientific and scholarly qualities as essential and appealing attributes of an effective faculty member. The findings of this research are consistent with existing knowledge that underscores the importance of scientific expertise, educational background, and professional experience of the faculty member in their specific field. This includes providing updated and relevant content, familiarity with resources, and guiding students to authentic educational materials (3, 4, 9, 17, 20). These attributes indicate the faculty member's proficiency in conveying scientific content and concepts within their specialized area. The more scientific knowledge, background, and experience a faculty member possesses in their specialized field, the more students trust them and are attracted to their lessons. Before conducting a class, an effective teacher thoroughly prepares the lesson material, captivates students' interest in the subject matter, engages with students, ensures their comprehension of the content, and provides access to course materials (17). A teacher's literacy, scientific

expertise, and currency of knowledge can positively impact students' academic success (9, 17, 20, 22, 23).

A successful faculty member is optimistic, goal-oriented, and demonstrates a positive attitude and passion for their field. They aim to enhance their professional status, engage in research, and inspire students to pursue further study and research. Dedicated faculty members who continuously seek professional and personal growth serve as inspiring role models for students. Their commitment to research activities fosters student interest and motivation to pursue further research (20).

This study's findings align with existing literature, highlighting that teaching proficiency is the key attribute of an effective faculty member. Prior research consistently stresses the significance of educators' expertise in teaching, instructional methods, and assessment as vital qualities of a good faculty member (2-4, 8, 18). The study by Ahmad Hila and Guest reported creativity, preparedness in delivering content, and establishing a foundation for reviews and evaluations as essential professional qualities of a good teacher (17).

The importance of expressive, simple, and eloquent communication skills has been emphasized as essential attributes for effective university faculty members (2, 3, 8, 9, 20, 22). The ability to express ideas effectively is so crucial that it can impact the academic competence of a faculty member. Rahimi et al. emphasized the significance of transferring concepts as a key variable for exemplary university faculty members to enhance their abilities in this area (8).

An essential aspect of effective teaching is the teaching style. Teachers must be familiar with various teaching styles to ensure the educational content aligns with the learners' needs. A lack of awareness of different teaching styles can create a disconnect between the teacher and the learner. Faculty members who are knowledgeable about diverse teaching models and methods and understand their students' needs can enhance their students' learning outcomes (20).

Ensuring fairness in evaluations is a key attribute of an effective faculty member. This involves utilizing diverse evaluation methods, conducting formative assessments, aligning evaluations with educational objectives, and addressing student concerns. A teacher's proficiency in employing different evaluation techniques and customizing them to individual student capabilities and strengths reassures students that a one-

size-fits-all approach is not employed. These findings align with the studies by Esmaeili et al. and Peyman et al. (4, 24).

Mastery and adherence to teaching rules are essential qualities of a proficient faculty member. These findings are consistent with a study by Ripoll-Núñez et al., which emphasized the importance of having a clear educational objective for each session in a logical sequence (18). Furthermore, punctuality and respecting class time have been highlighted in other studies (17, 18).

According to the results of this study, communication skills are one of the most fundamental attributes of a good faculty member. The literature review also indicates that the ability to establish effective and constructive mutual communication is among the most crucial features of a capable faculty member from the student's perspective (2-4, 9, 17, 18, 20).

The significance of a competent and impactful teacher in building rapport with students through ethical and respectful behavior is consistently emphasized. A faculty member who maintains a friendly attitude toward students, utilizes positive communication methods, and respects each student's individual needs can boost student motivation and engagement (3, 15, 22, 25). Additionally, a faculty member's understanding of psychological techniques, including body language, is a crucial factor in fostering effective and constructive communication, ultimately enhancing the quality of education for students (4).

Qualitative data analysis from this study indicates that effective classroom management is a key attribute of a competent faculty member, which originates from their communication skills and abilities. Previous research underscores the importance of control, management, and decisiveness in the classroom, coupled with the teacher's humor and positive attitude (4, 20). However, Saeidi et al. found that students rated faculty members low in terms of determination and strictness (16). Similarly, the study by Cheraghi et al. indicated that decisiveness and seriousness in classroom management hold little significance. Overly strict behavior may alienate students and lead to disinterest in the subject matter. Therefore, creating a flexible classroom environment is valued by students (3). A good faculty member should prioritize all students, particularly those who may struggle academically. The literature emphasizes the importance

of encouraging and supporting students as qualities of an effective teacher (3, 17, 18).

5.1. Strengths and Limitations of This Study

5.1.1. Strengths

This study focuses on student perceptions, providing valuable insights into what students value in faculty members. By employing both individual and group interviews, the credibility of our findings is strengthened through the inclusion of diverse perspectives.

5.1.2. Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is social desirability bias, as participants may hesitate to express negative views about faculty members during interviews, potentially biasing results towards more positive attributes. Retrospective perceptions could also be a limitation, as students may rely on past experiences when describing ideal faculty attributes, potentially overlooking aspects they have not yet encountered.

5.2. Suggestions for Further Studies

Mixed methods approach: Combining qualitative interviews with surveys could provide a more comprehensive understanding of student perceptions. Faculty perspectives: Complementing this study by interviewing faculty members could offer valuable insights into their teaching philosophies and practices. Longitudinal study: Following up with participants over time could reveal how perceptions of faculty attributes evolve during their educational journey.

5.3. Conclusions

Our findings reveal that study participants placed significant emphasis on both personality and professional attributes when defining good faculty characteristics. Sub-categories such as appearance, personality traits, scientific expertise, and teaching skills emerged as important factors shaping student perceptions of faculty members. In other words, a good university faculty member possesses qualities that make knowledge accessible and engaging for students. They are passionate about their subject, stay current with knowledge, and motivate students to learn. They create

a welcoming environment for discussion, manage the classroom effectively, and seek feedback to adapt their teaching methods to student needs. This underscores the multifaceted nature of what constitutes an effective faculty member in students' eyes and highlights the importance of cultivating a diverse range of attributes within academia.

Future research could explore each sub-category in more detail to refine our understanding of what truly defines effective faculty members. Universities should consider these qualities when recruiting faculty members, and faculty development programs should be conducted to develop and improve these identified attributes throughout their careers.

5.4. Highlights

One of the critical factors influencing the quality of education is the faculty. This study reveals:

Students notice all aspects of a faculty member; therefore, being scientifically prominent and knowledgeable alone does not define an effective educator.

Faculty members who can motivate students tend to be more successful.

Universities and educational institutes should consider both the personality attributes and scientific capabilities of applicants during the hiring process.

5.5. Lay Summary

In this study we interviewed 23 medical science students from different majors and conducted a focus group interview with seven students to explore their perspectives on what makes a good faculty member. After analysing the data, we found that students value faculty members with strong scientific knowledge, effective teaching skills, positive personality traits, and also their appearance. Therefore, administrators should take all these aspects into account when hiring new faculty members.

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Footnotes

Authors' Contribution: M. A. and R. N. were involved in the conception and organization of the study; M. A. was involved in data collection; S. N. was responsible for the transcription of qualitative interviews; M. A. and R. N. prepared the first draft of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the critical review and all of them approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interests Statement: The authors declare that they have no competing interests. We used AI just for checking and editing English writing.

Data Availability: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethical Approval: The study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of Alborz University of Medical Sciences, Iran (ethical code: [IR.ABZUMS.REC.1397.127](https://doi.org/10.29252/rme.9.3.18)).

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