



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### LACK OF MOTIVATION DURING TRAINING IN DENTISTRY AT THE FACULTY OF CASABLANCA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

<sup>1,\*</sup>Bouchra Badre, <sup>2</sup>Zineb Serhier, <sup>3</sup>Mohammed Bennani Othmani and <sup>4</sup>Samira El Arabi

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor in Peadiatric Department, Faculty of Dental Medicine of Casablanca

<sup>2</sup>Assistant professor in Medical informatics laboratory, Faculty of Medicine of Casablanca

<sup>3</sup>Head of Medical informatics laboratory

<sup>4</sup>Head of peadiatric Department

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#### ABSTRACT

Absenteeism observed during lectures is increasing over the years of study and the low clinical performances are evidence of a decrease in students' motivation. Few studies have looked into the factors of dental students' lack of motivation during their training. The aim of our study was to determine the reasons for the decline in motivation during the course of studies in dentistry at the University of Casablanca. A qualitative study was carried out among the students of the Faculty of Dentistry in the year 2012. Five focus groups (one per year of study), totaling 40 participants were conducted. The duration of sessions varied between 30 to 45 minutes. Open questions concerning the perception of the career of dentist, dental medicine choices, motivation and lack of motivation, were used to guide discussion. Time and again, the choice of dentistry came after medicine. Most of the participants reported a decrease in motivation compared with the beginning of the training. In discussing the causes of this decrease in motivation, three main arguments emerged. These arguments were related to stress, expenses related to the training and lack of confidence in skills. The improvement of learning conditions is necessary to maintain the students' motivation.

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## INTRODUCTION

The choice of dentistry as a career may be influenced by expectations about the role of the dentist and the expectations regarding the learning environment and learning outcomes. The extent of the match between expectations and experience can determine the students' performance and class participation. In the literature, several factors are related to the choice of dentistry including financial gain, safety, occupational status and schedule flexibility. Kristensen et al. (2009) showed in their study that dental students were focused on their professional role in the future, their practical dimensions and their future working conditions. Motivation for the choice of dental education had an influence on their motivation to study. Motivation is defined as the dynamic and directional behavior (Orenuga, 2006), it is related to the student's perceptions of himself and his environment, which encourages him to choose an activity, commit himself and keep up its fulfillment (Rigal, 2007). Success is the fruit of motivation; generally, a student who is committed and sustains his efforts succeeds (Quinton, 2007). Students generally come to university with a strong motivation.

\*Corresponding author: Bouchra Badre,

Assistant Professor in Peadiatric Department, Faculty of Dental Medicine of Casablanca.

However, it decreases over time. For some students, this decrease in motivation may be due to a particularly busy and challenging curriculum. For others, personal changes may be the cause of their loss of motivation, eg family or financial difficulties. Nevertheless, in the literature, the main factors behind lack of motivation are: educational activities, evaluation practices and the relationship with the teacher. In Morocco, there are two dental schools, one in Casablanca and another in Rabat. Access to dental school goes through a pre-selection based on the average obtained in the Baccalaureate followed by an entrance exam. The number of students admitted (146) remains low compared to the access requests that are around 10000. Students are probably motivated given the privileged position dentists have in different societies (Khami, 2008; Bernabé, 2006). However absenteeism observed during lectures, which increases over the years of study, and the low clinical performances are evidence of a decrease in students' motivation. This motivation between the beginning and the end of the training has been reported in the literature (Kristensen, 2009). This can be explained by a more realistic perception of the career of the student who acquires knowledge about the practical aspects and constraints of the profession (9,10). Few studies have examined the factors behind the motivation of dental students during their training. The aim of our study was to determine the reasons for the decline in motivation during

the course of studies in dentistry at the University of Casablanca.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a qualitative study among students of the Faculty of Dentistry in Casablanca in the year 2012. Five focus groups (one group per year of study), totaling 40 participants were conducted. Each focus group consisted of eight students (four girls and four boys). The discussions were facilitated by the principal investigator. The duration of sessions varied between 30 to 45 minutes. Open questions concerning the perception of the career of the dentist, dental medicine choices, motivation and lack of motivation reasons, were used to guide the discussion. The questions included:

- Was dentistry your first choice?
- Why did you choose to study dentistry?
- In your opinion, is the profession of dentist interesting?
- Is your current motivation for this training the same as the one you had when you joined the faculty?
- In case of decrease in motivation, what are the reasons?
- The discussions were transcribed verbatim. Subsequently, two independent investigators classified the individual contributions to the discussion of the major themes.

## RESULTS

For some students participating in focus groups, dentistry was not their first choice; it often came after general medicine. All participants perceived dentistry as an interesting profession. The main reason behind this choice of career was the fact that it is a noble profession that allows providing a service to the population and the possibility of a liberal profession. Most of the participants reported a decrease in motivation compared to the beginning of the training. "Motivation decreases because of the education system" (5<sup>th</sup> year student). In discussing the causes of this decrease in motivation, three main themes emerged. These themes were related to stress, expenses related to training and lack of confidence in skills.

**Stress related to training:** Some students, especially those of the first year have many problems to assimilate courses and see some courses as unnecessary. Furthermore, a large number of students have reported difficulties with language; all subjects are taught in French while science subjects are taught in Arabic in high school. The need to have interactive lessons, especially in small groups, was expressed. "I find it very difficult to assimilate the courses because they contain a lot of new terms" (1<sup>st</sup> year student)

"Some subjects taught such as biophysics and chemistry are of no use" (1<sup>st</sup> year student)

"Some subjects may be better as tutorials" (3<sup>rd</sup> year student)

"The transition between high school and dental studies is difficult because of language" (1<sup>st</sup> year student)

The students considered the curriculum as overloaded; that is why they do not have time to do extracurricular activities. Some participants and members of the Students Office, emphasized the difficulty of convincing students to animate socio-cultural activities, they associated this problem with the lack of students' motivation.

"I think the curriculum is overloaded and too long" (2<sup>nd</sup> year student) "We do not have much free time for extra-curricular activities" (5<sup>th</sup> year student) "It is difficult to organize activities with the students, nobody is motivated" (5<sup>th</sup> year student) Training in dentistry was perceived as stressful. Practical work is an important part in the training. It requires manual dexterity that differs from one student to another. The fact of comparing oneself with mates is a source of stress. "The training is too stressful" (5<sup>th</sup> year student) "I find great difficulty in practical work while others succeed easily" (2<sup>nd</sup> year student)

**Training expenses:** The students, especially those of the second and third year reported a high cost to get material for practical work.

Students find it very difficult to get a set of natural teeth; they can spend a lot of money to get decaying teeth. "I struggled to get a natural set of teeth" (3<sup>rd</sup> year student). "The purchase of equipment for practical work requires a lot of money" (2<sup>nd</sup> year student)

**Lack of confidence in the acquired skills:** At the end of the training, most of the students lack confidence in their clinical skills; they feel unable to set up a practice immediately after graduation. Some students find it difficult to have a sufficient number of patients during the training, to acquire the clinical skills hoped. Many participants proposed adding a year dedicated only to clinical placements and wished to participate in prevention caravans to get closer to the needs of the population in terms of dental care.

"We must apportion patients equitably" (5<sup>th</sup> year student). "I do not feel ready to open an office" (5<sup>th</sup> year student) "We would like to participate in prevention caravans, to know the dental care needs of the population" (5<sup>th</sup> year student). "We must increase the number of clinical sessions especially for prosthetic acts" (5<sup>th</sup> year student). "It'd be interesting to add a sixth year course devoted only to prosthesis" (5<sup>th</sup> year student)

## DISCUSSION

Dentistry was not always the first choice of the students who wanted a medical career. However, it is seen as an interesting job by all the students. Decrease in motivation during the course has been confirmed by them. In this study, three themes summarizing the motivation factors were identified. These factors were related to stress, costs related to training and lack of confidence in skills. Some basic subjects were considered unnecessary or too detailed. The tendency that some dental students took medicine as their first choice was also observed in other studies<sup>1,3</sup>. The students who considered dentistry as an alternative, could face some difficulties especially in terms of work practices that require manual dexterity which is a distinctive feature of dentistry. Moreover, they may not feel a major draw to some subjects. It was noted that most of the reasons related to decrease in motivation, stated by the students revolved around the training conditions. The only answers alluding to conditions related to the practice of career after training were correlated with the lack of confidence in personal performance. This shows the importance of the learning environment for the students' motivation, but it could also be explained by the young age of the students who have no experience and have mainly focused on the training conditions.

It has been reported in the literature that the lack of match between the students' perceptions and the reality of the training could be a source of lack of motivation (Kristensen, 2009). Their expectations regarding studies do not often fully correspond to the reality they face. For instance, some courses more theoretical or basic are, to their minds, useless compared with the learning of more concrete concept notions, which can affect their motivation. However, the teaching of these courses enables them to acquire the basic knowledge necessary to understanding the sequence of the curriculum (Kristensen, 2009). It is important to make explicit links between theoretical and practical knowledge and show the relevance of the course in the curriculum and in relation to business needs. Some teaching methods did not meet the students' expectations, hence the importance of varying forms of training (learning by clinical reasoning, problem-based approach). In the first years of training, it is better to adjust the amount of new information, and reformulate the split to facilitate its understanding. In the discussion, the issue of language training emerged. The Faculty of Dentistry has been organizing for four years now courses to upgrade first year students' level in French, especially for those with an unsatisfactory level diagnosed by a placement test. The language issue was raised only by the first year students and this shows that they are familiar with the language of instruction. To get trained to practical work, students sometimes have to buy drills or artificial teeth. Those from low socio-economic backgrounds perceive these costs as too high, especially when comparing themselves with their peers in medicine.

The curriculum was regarded as overloaded especially by undergraduates; this is probably related to the transition from high school to higher education where working methods are different. It is important to develop practices that help students learn autonomy, especially during the first year, to work regularly, read effectively and collaborate with other students through group work (Barlow, 2011). Improving academic skills, autonomy and responsibility related to it, could help to better organize and better manage the content of their training and take advantage of their social life. The improvement of learning conditions is necessary to maintain the motivation of the students during their training.

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