

## Perceptions of Students Regarding Structured Oral Examination in Forensic Medicine

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### Abstract

**Background:** Oral viva examination is one of the assessment tools which are commonly used for formative as well as summative examination. Structured oral examination can be helpful to overcome bias of traditional oral examination.

**Materials and Methods:** All 2<sup>nd</sup> MBBS students (Fifth semester) of GMERS Medical College, Valsad, Gujarat were subjected to structured oral examination in Forensic Medicine after obtaining their informed written consent and their perceptions regarding structured oral examination were obtained via pre-tested and pre-validated Likert scale type questionnaire (1 to 3, 1 - Don't Agree, 2-Not Sure, 3 - Agree) regarding usefulness of structured oral examination in Forensic Medicine. Study was undertaken after obtaining ethical approval from the Institutional Ethical Committee. Data obtained were analyzed via median score and tabulated.

**Results:** Total 138 students of 2<sup>nd</sup> MBBS (Fifth semester) were subjected to structured oral examination in Forensic Medicine subject followed by their feedback on structured oral examination via pre-tested and pre-validated Likert scale type questionnaire. Frequency and median score of various parameters of feedback given by students were calculated. Out of 138 participants, 84 were male and 54 were female. There was no statistically significant difference between perceptions of male and female participants.

**Conclusion:** Structured oral examination in Forensic Medicine can become a better assessment tool for both formative and summative examination and with some changes as per the blueprinting and examination pattern it will be positively acceptable to the students.

**Key words:** Forensic Medicine; Structured oral examination; Students' perceptions.

### Introduction

Oral viva examination is one of the assessment tools which is commonly used for formative as well as summative examination. Traditional oral examination begins with question asked by examiner followed by its answer by students orally. It gives opportunity for examiner to interact with students in face to face manner for short time. Oral examinations are attractive because of their high face validity, their flexibility and the possibility that they measure aspects of clinical competence.<sup>1</sup> They are used for their flexibility and potential for testing higher cognitive skills.<sup>2</sup>

Orals viva gives an opportunity to the students to explore topics, give them a chance to interact one on one with examiners and get enthusiastic about learning.<sup>3,4</sup> There are some challenges routinely present in the traditional viva examinations. Threatening atmosphere during traditional oral examination is often hamper dialogue between students and examiner. Subjective bias and facial encounter may intimidate students. Questions may vary from examiner to examiner and many times fail to complete entire syllabus. It is usually restricted to recall type of questions and difficult to achieve higher domains. Number of questions

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asked, difficulty index of questions, time for viva are usually show inter student variation. Above all collectively affect score of the students.

## Materials and Methods

All 2<sup>nd</sup> MBBS students of GMERS Medical College, Valsad, Gujarat were subjected to structured oral examination in subject of Forensic Medicine after obtaining their informed written consent and their perceptions regarding structured oral examination were obtained via pre-tested and pre-validated<sup>5-17</sup> Likertscale type questionnaire (1 to 3, 1 - Don't Agree, 2-Not Sure, 3 - Agree) regarding usefulness of structured oral examination in Forensic Medicine. Study was undertaken after obtaining ethical approval from the Institutional Ethical Committee. Data obtained were analyzed via median score and tabulated.

## Results

Total 138 students of 2<sup>nd</sup> MBBS (Fifth semester) were subjected to structured oral examination in subject of Forensic Medicine followed by their feedback on their experience regarding structured oral examination via pre-tested and pre-validated Likert scale type questionnaire (1 to 3, 1 - Don't Agree, 2-Not Sure, 3 - Agree). Frequency and median score of various parameters of feedback given by students were calculated as per Table 1. Out of 138 participants, 84 were male and 54 were female. There was no statistically significant difference between perceptions of male and female participants.

**Table 1:** Perceptions of students regarding structured oral examination (Likert scale: 1 to 3, 1 - Don't Agree, 2-Not Sure, 3 - Agree).

| Sr. No. | Perceptions of students   | Median score |
|---------|---|--------------|
| 1       | Structured oral examination encourages me to pay more attention in subject.                   | 2            |
| 2       | Structured oral examination requires detail study of practical aspect.                        | 3            |
| 3       | Structured oral examination is a good form of examination and learning tool.                  | 2            |
| 4       | Structured oral examination covers important topics and relevant with objectives of syllabus. | 3            |
| 5       | Structured oral examination is fair and unbiased system of evaluation.                        | 3            |
| 6       | Structured oral examination provides clarity of question.                                     | 3            |

| Sr. No. | Perceptions of students  | Median score |
|---------|--|--------------|
| 7       | Structured oral examination depends upon individual's luck.  | 1            |
| 8       | Structured oral examination is more uniform and objective in nature as it eliminate teacher's or student's liking of particular topic. | 3            |
| 9       | Oral structured examination provide wide coverage of syllabus.   | 3            |
| 10      | I prefer oral structured examination as part of my internal and university evaluation method.  | 3            |

## Discussion

Holloway, et al. demonstrated that there is an inverse relationship between performance and anxiety of students in the oral viva examinations.<sup>18</sup> A significant error or injustice in oral performance ratings is due to the tendency for some evaluators to be soft and others to be strict in their ratings because of lack of uniformity. Correcting for such errors would change the pass/fail decisions of the examinees and results in bias.<sup>19</sup> Marks given to candidates during viva by diverse examiners indicate low reliability between ratings and agreement between panel of examiners is often deprived.<sup>20</sup> All these problems may be overcome by replacing the traditional viva examination by structured oral examination (SOE). This can be done by pre deciding the syllabus to be covered in examination with proper distribution of topics as per must know - nice to know - desirable to know area, competencies to be measured and preparing a blueprint/checklist of questions to be asked with answer keys in the viva in stipulated time period. Although the implementation process is hard, but once it is in place, it can become an efficient assessment tool for future.<sup>21</sup>

The structured oral examination format allows the teachers to exam the students on all five cognitive domains of Bloom's taxonomy i.e. knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.<sup>22,23</sup> Reliability of the viva examination is often questioned but according to Sharmila Torke, et al., rational reliability has been established with structured, standardized orals.<sup>1</sup> Their study also revealed that there was not much correlation between performance of the students in theory and in viva. Another Indian study done in Anatomy subject showed that students liked the structured viva over the traditional viva exam as it minimized the luck factor of questions being asked and reduced examiner bias.<sup>24</sup> Although there are examples of organizations restructuring their oral examinations to a structured oral

examination format, recent research describing the students' response to SOE has been limited especially compared to Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) formats.<sup>25</sup> These are multi-stationed clinical examinations which are effective in testing students' ability to integrate the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired during their pre-clinical and clinical training and experiences.<sup>23</sup>

Forensic Medicine is the subject with medical and legal terminology, one of the challenges was whether it would be possible to structure the viva. For many of them structured oral examination required detail study of subject, wide coverage of syllabus, uniform and objective in nature, provide clarity of question, cover important and relative topic, unbiased examination and must be part of internal and university examination. Structured oral examination is a morale booster and anxiety reducing experience. Students were more comfortable with structured oral examination as they knew that all of them will be assessed by same set of questions. They felt that it reduced the luck factor and made the assessment fairer. Personal biases were also minimized. We feel that, though the ground work in preparing the checklists is extensive, once done, the structured viva can be implemented successfully.

## Conclusion

Structured oral examination in Forensic Medicine can become a better assessment tool for both formative and summative examination and with some changes as per the blueprinting and examination pattern it will be positively acceptable to the students.

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