

Student performance and perception regarding descriptive and clinical case based anatomy questions

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Anatomy is largely a descriptive science, however when teaching anatomy to medical students, teaching pure anatomy has lost its usefulness. A debate exists as to which aspect should be assessed at exams. While certain groups stress the importance of asking questions related to clinical cases, others say that questions should focus more on description of structures. It was the objective of this study to quantify the performance and ascertain the first year student perception of these two types of questions.

Students in the 1st year 2nd semester at the Faculty of Medicine Peradeniya, were recruited. They were given 2 questions similar to exam questions from a familiar area. One question was descriptive and the other was a clinical case scenario. Students were given 30 minutes to answer. Scripts were marked according to a marking scheme and scored out of hundred. At the end students were asked, which type was easy, which type should be included in assessments and which type they preferred with reasons using a questionnaire.

There were 192 students and all had answered both questions. Average scores were 73.24% for the descriptive question and 65.67% for the clinical case scenario. Of the students 65.3% thought that the clinical case scenario type of question should be given for assessments while 58% said that they preferred to answer this type of question. Eighty two percent said descriptive type of question was easy.

As expected a majority of students scored highest marks in the descriptive type of question, while they scored less for the clinical cases. It was interesting to see that even though the students as an average had scored fewer marks for the clinical cases question the majority thought this type of questions should be given for assessments. The reasons given were, they thought it would help them in their future years and that such questions were more interesting and challenging.

It is evident from these findings that even though students score better in descriptive type of questions a majority think that clinical case based type of questions should be included in assessment and they prefer to answer such questions.