ARE WE READY FOR ARABIZATION IN MEDICAL EDUCATION?

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Objective: To obtain the views of faculty members of the College of Medicine, King Faisal University on Arabization of medical education.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted in the College of Medicine, King Faisal University, Dammam, between January and June 2001 using a standardized 41-item questionnaire to obtain the views of faculty members in both basic science and clinical departments on issues relating mainly to scientific research. The responses were recorded on a 5-point scale: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. A couple of questions were used to probe the issue of publications in Arabic and translations into Arabic.

Results: The response rate of faculty was 67% (74 of a total of 110 faculty members). The participating faculty members included 22 professors, 27 associate professors, 23 assistant professors and 2 lecturers belonging to 24 departments (6 basic sciences, 18 clinical). Thirty-four members (45.9%) were in favor of Arabization and 40 (54%) were against.

Conclusions: Faculty members form the backbone for the implementation of Arabization in medical education. The opinions obtained in this preliminary survey of the faculty of the College of Medicine at King Faisal University indicate that we are still far from achieving this goal in our medical education.

Key Words: Undergraduate, medical education, Arabization, Saudi Arabia.
INTRODUCTION

Arabization has been an objective for educators in Arab medical schools for some time.\(^1\) Several reasons have been given in support of this including an improvement in the speed of reading a medical text in Arabic by about 43% and an increase in comprehension by 15%.\(^2\) The Arab Medical Union established in 1961 had as its first objective the arabization of medical education and received the backing of the WHO and the Council of Arab Health Ministers to publish the Unified Arab Medical Dictionary as a stepping stone for the achievement of this goal.\(^3\) However, out of over 90 colleges of medicine in the Arab world, only 5 teach in Arabic.\(^2\) Surveys of medical students in Saudi Arabia have clearly shown the students’ support for arabization.\(^1,4\) The present report is a small offshoot of a study carried out at King Faisal University, Dammam, Saudi Arabia primarily to examine the views of faculty members in the College of Medicine on scientific research activities and other relevant issues in the college.\(^5\) The aim is to focus on an important issue that was not the primary objective of the main study but requiring essential further research in the process of developing a well planned program for Arabization.

METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted in the College of Medicine at King Faisal University, Dammam, Eastern province of Saudi Arabia between January and June 2001 using a questionnaire. Faculty members in both the basic and clinical departments were surveyed. The questionnaire consisted of 41 items mainly addressing issues on scientific research in the College of Medicine. These items included issues pertaining to the presence or absence of strategic goals and objectives for research, quality of research, process of application, facilities for research, obstacles to scientific research, as well as the means to enhance scientific research. The responses were obtained on a 5 grade scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree and undecided. A couple of questions addressed research publications in Arabic and medical books translated into Arabic. The data were entered as a standard data base file and analyzed using a personal computer.

RESULTS

The target population consisted of 110 faculty members in 4 categories (professors, associate professors, assistant professors and lecturers) in 24 departments (6 Basic Sciences, 18 Clinical Sciences). There were 74 responders (67%): 22 professors, 27 associate professors, 23 assistant professors and 2 lecturers. Most of these 41 (55%) were in the clinical sciences, 9 (12%) were involved in the Basic Sciences and 24(32%) had combined Basic and Clinical Sciences involvement. Thirty-four members (46%) were in favor of arabization and 40(54%) were against. One item on the questionnaire was on the nationality of the faculty, whether they were Arabic or non-Arabic speaking. Data obtained from the college records indicated that 56% of the faculty members in the college of medicine were non-Saudis, but the majority of these were Arabic speaking.

DISCUSSION

Both educators and learners generally consider the use of the mother tongue at all levels of education a cornerstone for the success of the educational process. For medical students who had had all their pre-university education in Arabic, reading medicine in Arabic is naturally the first choice.\(^1,3,4\) The obvious improvement in reading speed and comprehension supports Arabization. Arabization has also been the
main objective of the Arab Medical Union for over 40 years. However, for a smooth and effective changeover from English to Arabic, there should be faculty members who are very fluent in both languages to cover all the subjects in the curriculum of both sciences, basic and clinical. A quick review of the indexed biomedical research refereed journals showed a dearth of journals published in Arabic. Besides, with the present rate of the growth of knowledge, newly published textbooks are virtually out of date by the time they go to press. This situation calls for the creation of specialized infrastructure and foundation for Arabization. At present, it is of paramount importance that students master the English language in order to keep up with the majority of worldwide medical literature published in English. Thus, the implementation of Arabization in medical education is a fundamental change which requires sustained effort and support of every Arab country, through the allocation of resources for the engagement of capable faculty members, and the acquisition of all the required up-to-date textbooks and educational material for basic and clinical sciences necessary for implementation before a political decision is made. The establishment of an association of all the medical colleges in all Arab countries will be a useful nucleus to unify, supplement and complement efforts for the production of unified educational resources in terms of faculty development, and the production of textbooks as well as various basic and clinical teaching materials. Moreover, the encouragement of research on Arabization and the provision of special scholarships for talented faculty to engage in Arabization will be a means of promoting a focused approach on Arabization. Arabization is a logical and reasonable ambition, the success of which depends on faculty members. However, the present status indicates that the majority of our faculty members are not ready for it.

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