

The Role of Varied Learning Modalities in Medical Education: Experiences from Medical Students after an Educational Trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau

Ryan Victor-Joseph, Nidhi Navaratna, Agyeiwaa Obeng, Christine Simon, Jason Adam Wasserman PhD
Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine

Introduction

In June 2023, OUWB students and faculty members embarked on a trip to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camps in Poland for the second time. Throughout the experience, students were exposed to remote learning modalities, including memoirs from Holocaust survivors and online modules, and on-site learning modalities such as visiting the local Holocaust Museum, giving an oral testimonial of their assigned memoir at historical locales in Poland, visiting Schindler's Factory, and touring the concentration camps with historians. This study aims to understand the role of mixed learning experiences on student knowledge of the events of and role of physicians in the Holocaust.

Aims and Objectives

- Compare and contrast learning modalities.
- Analyze the impact of interdisciplinary learning among students.
- Assess how historical events shape medical students' perceptions of physicians' roles during the Holocaust.

Methods

An online survey with qualitative and quantitative components was sent to the students who attended the trip. The qualitative component of the survey assessed student knowledge of the Holocaust after exposure to the following learning modalities: pre-trip assigned memoirs and online modules on Moodle, the Zekelman Holocaust Center tour, experiences giving and listening to testimonials in Poland, and touring the historic locales including Auschwitz-Birkenau. The quantitative component of the survey asked students to score their depth of knowledge of the Holocaust on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the least comfortable and 10 being the most comfortable, after exposure to each of the above learning experiences.

Results

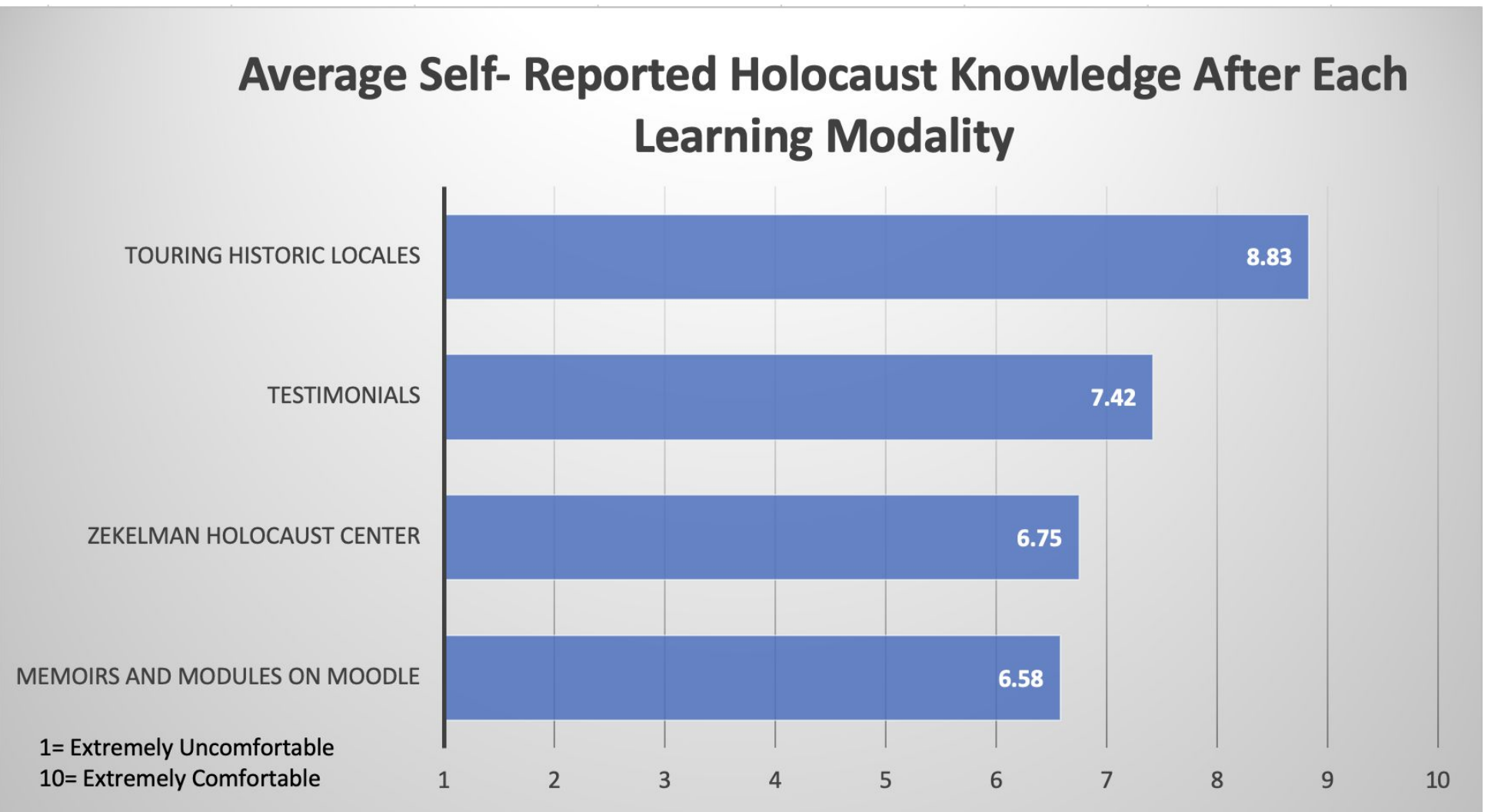
Twelve students who went on the trip completed the survey. Visiting the historic sites in Poland resulted in the highest average self-reported Holocaust knowledge score (8.83), while reading the memoirs and completing the modules on Moodle yielded the lowest average self-reported Holocaust knowledge score (6.58). Notably, after visiting the historic sites, no student reported a knowledge score less than 7, whereas the testimonials were associated with the lowest reported knowledge, with scores going as low as 1. Furthermore, student reflections praised each of the learning modalities.

Self-Reported Holocaust Knowledge After Each Learning Modality

	Average Score	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
Memoirs and Modules on Moodle	6.58	5	9
Zekelman Holocaust Center	6.75	5	9
Testimonials	7.42	1	10
Touring Historic Locales	8.83	7	10

Selected Student Reflections on Each of the Learning Modalities

Assigned readings and memoir	Class trip to Zekelman Holocaust Center	Giving and listening to testimonials in Poland	Visiting historic locales with historians in Poland
"Had a surface level understanding of the physicians' role but gained a good understanding of the Holocaust."	"It was a broad overview of Holocaust events which was essential before the trip."	"Testimonials helped fill in gaps in my knowledge and provided experiences of the Holocaust on a more personal and individual level. The sense of realism was reinforced by being in the places where they happened."	"It was special to be in the same places where we were learning about all of the actions that unfolded...being in the real world location helped to connect me more with the historic nature of everything."
"I gathered a better understanding of physicians' role; however, I was unaware of the extent of their role and intricacies of the Nazi regime."	"It added to my foundational knowledge of the historical context of the Holocaust and allowed me to begin to process some of the atrocities we would learn more about."	"Testimonials not only provided more names and faces to put to the victims of the Holocaust but also offered stories with humanity and more in depth qualities to connect with each person on."	"It would be difficult to fully grasp the weight of this time period without stepping into the places it occurred...I would try to imagine what it would be like walking those areas in those times and it made the history come to life.It allowed us to feel more immersed in and connected to history."



Conclusions

The varied learning methods employed on the trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau enriched medical students' engagement and comprehension of medicine's role during the Holocaust. In particular, touring the historical locales provided the greatest amount of knowledge for students with an average score of 8.83/10. Furthermore, anecdotes from students on the trip all pointed towards greater understanding after engaging with online assignments, visiting the Zekelman Holocaust Center, and listening to first-hand testimonials, illustrating that student experiences and testimonials underscore the ongoing need for historical instruction and place learning in medical education, highlighting its importance in nurturing competent, culturally aware, and ethical physicians.

Discussion

Challenges: Our study initially faced challenges with survey participation. To combat this challenge, multiple reminders were sent, resulting in an 80% response rate.

Limitations: Limitations of this study involve possible recall bias as this study was executed months after the trip. Future cohort studies can limit this risk by surveying participants shortly after returning.

Future Directions: Further studies with future cohorts will aim to increase response rate and evaluate the impact of varying learning modalities on different cohorts.