



An Exploration of Palestinian Physical Therapy Student's Attitudes and Perceptions Toward their Field

Azzam Alarab^{1*}, Safa Abu Abed¹, Philip Afghani² and Iyad Abu Radwan³

¹Physiotherapy Department, Faculty of Post Graduated Studies and Research, Palestine Ahliya University, Bethlehem, Palestine

²Department of Clinical Sciences, Palmer College of Chiropractic, Port Orange, FL, USA

³Physiotherapy Department, Hebron University, Hebron, Palestine

*Corresponding Author: Azzam Alarab, Physiotherapy Department, Faculty of Post Graduated Studies and Research, Palestine Ahliya University, Bethlehem, Palestine.

Received: June 02, 2026

Published: June 26, 2026

© All rights are reserved by Azzam Alarab, et al.

Abstract

Background: Over the past few decades, the physiotherapy discipline has developed very fast, which led to growing significance, methods, venues, and obligations of its specialists. It is important to understand the way in which students perceive their future profession in order to develop a proper curriculum and improve their careers.

Objectives: The objective of this research was to explore the way in which undergraduate physiotherapy students in Palestine perceived their training programs and their views on the physiotherapy profession.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey on a five-point Likert scale was performed among 311 undergraduate physiotherapy students at five Palestinian universities: Palestine Ahliya University, Bethlehem University, Al Quds University, An-Najah National University, and Palestine Polytechnic University.

Results: The research found that personal curiosity and motivation to help others play an important role in attracting people to the profession (54.7% found «desire to help others» very influential). The availability of employment and reputation of the university play a moderate role in influencing the perception of students. A majority of the respondents considered physiotherapy to be a reputable profession (53.4% agreed/strongly agreed). However, students felt concerned about lack of employment opportunities (only 28.3% felt that there were enough opportunities available), lower salary levels (23.1% agreed on competitive salary levels) and lack of advancement opportunities (27% found development opportunities adequate). Some of the major barriers in the field include lack of faculty support (59.3%), heavy academic work load (54.8%) and clinical placement opportunities (41%). There is a negative correlation between age and perception ($r = -0.140$, $p = 0.013$), whereas positive perception correlates with satisfaction ($r = 0.245$, $p < 0.001$).

Conclusion: Although the field of physiotherapy is respected in Palestine, there are various obstacles like lack of employment opportunities, low salaries and insufficient institutional support that make professional advancement difficult.

Keywords: Perceptions; Physiotherapy; Satisfaction; Undergraduate Students

Introduction

The scope of work performed by physiotherapists has expanded within the last decades because of changes in society, politics, and demography. The characteristics and situation of a profession can be largely influenced by the common interests of those who belong to it. Professional socialization plays a crucial role in this process, requiring individuals to adopt the norms, values, and standards recognized by current or prospective members, which is essential for developing a professional identity [1].

The employment prospects in clinical practice, research, and academic settings within this fast-growing specialty of physiotherapy are multitude. At present, physiotherapists are independent practitioners who directly participate in safeguarding against illnesses, enhancing health and physical well-being, fitness, and restoring impaired functions [2]. Numerous studies have been conducted globally to determine how people perceive physiotherapy and its role in the health system, gathering data from high school students, prospective physiotherapists, other healthcare professionals, and practicing physiotherapists [3].

Physical therapists need to be aware of their professional identity and the meaning and purpose of their job. Professional socialization ensures a connection to professional life by teaching individuals the concepts, beliefs, and attitudes associated with a professional role. Physical therapists have been increasingly acknowledged as professionals in recent years [4].

To improve the healthcare process, it is essential that the general public is aware of the professional and educational advancements in physiotherapy. Gaining insight into how students and the public view physiotherapy may help the field create more efficient plans and pinpoint areas that need work [5]. Despite numerous studies covering different aspects of physiotherapy education and career satisfaction in various countries, no study has been devoted specifically to the perception of undergraduate physiotherapy students in Palestine.

Physiotherapy education faces particular challenges due to the profession's rapid evolution. With the expansion of undergraduate programs in Palestine, it is critical to develop a solid comprehension of what students think about their education and the craft. The current research aims at filling the gap concerning the evaluation of

the compatibility between the existing physiotherapy curriculums and the requirements of the profession in modern times [2]. The investigation of students' educational experiences, professional literacy, and future career goals will provide useful information for improving the design of the curriculum and preparing graduates of physiotherapy from Palestine.

The current research is focused on the assessment of the perceptions of undergraduate physiotherapy students in Palestine in relation to their field of study and its position within the healthcare sector. This research was conducted to reveal the main problems, faced by the students throughout their study, such as problems with the load, faculty support, clinical placement and financial issues. In addition, this paper is focused on the investigation of the level of satisfaction of the students with their physiotherapy program and identification of the most important motivation for becoming a physiotherapist. In addition, the variations in the attitudes of the students and their satisfaction in accordance with different demographic factors, such as the institution, the gender and the academic year were analyzed in this paper. The connections between the perception of physiotherapy profession and the level of satisfaction and the age were investigated.

Methodology

Study design

Quantitative cross-sectional survey methodology was adopted for this research in order to measure the levels of awareness and perceptions towards the physiotherapy profession by undergraduate students in Palestine.

Study setting

Five well-known universities located in the West Bank of Palestine were selected as the site for this study including Palestine Ahliya University, Bethlehem University, Al-Quds University, An-Najah National University and Palestine Polytechnic University.

Population and sample

Study population involved all undergraduate physiotherapy students at the five selected universities. Simple random sampling technique was employed to identify the sample size of this study which is 311 participants and it was calculated using Raosoft sample size calculator (<http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html>).

Inclusion criteria: Undergraduate student in physiotherapy program at one of the selected universities, both males and females and willing to take part in this study.

Exclusion criteria: Not enrolled in undergraduate physiotherapy program at any of the selected universities.

Instrumentation

Customized questionnaire was designed in view of literature review and requirements of the study [2]. This questionnaire was in several forms like Likert scales, Yes or No type questions, check box type questions and drop down menu type questions. Questionnaire was divided into two parts:

- **Part A:** Demographic information such as gender, age, nationality and year of study.
- **Part B:** Was related to students' knowledge and perception about the physiotherapy in Palestine and contained 13 questions which covered following five topics: The study focused on five main areas of physiotherapy education in Palestine: Factors that affect the decision of students to join the physiotherapy courses, Participants' perception about the current services being provided to the patients, Participants' perception about the current status of physiotherapy as a profession, Main difficulties faced by the participants during their studies, Participants' satisfaction about their physiotherapy program.

Data collection

A cross-sectional online survey was conducted among undergraduate students studying in physiotherapy programs from the five universities. The survey aimed at getting an understanding of the perceptions and views of the students concerning their training and profession in physiotherapy.

Statistical analysis

The data collected was statistically analyzed. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviation were calculated for the demographic characteristics of the participants and survey results. ANOVA was done to determine the differences in perception and satisfaction of the participants from different universities and different levels of study. Gender differences in perception and satisfaction were determined by independent t-test. Pearson correlation was done to determine the relationship between age, perception, and satisfaction.

Results

Demographic characteristics

Totally, there were 311 respondents in this research; these were from five different universities as follows: PAU 80 (25.7%); Bethlehem University 89 (28.6%); Al-Quds University 26 (8.4%); PPU 56 (18.0%); and An-Najah National University 60 (19.3%). Mean age of participants was 20.05 years (SD = 1.40). There were 226 female (72.7%) and 85 male (27.3%) respondents. Age range 19 - 20 years constituted the major age group (70.4%). Second-year students were the major participants (30.9%), followed by first year (25.7%), third year.

Factors influencing enrollment in physiotherapy programs

In table 1 below are some of the elements that influence the decision of students to study in physiotherapy programs. A strong personal interest and the desire to assist others became the most influential elements. The desire to assist others was considered to be "very influential" by 54.7% of respondents, while the interest in human anatomy and physiology was rated as "very influential" by 34.5%. Reputation of the university had an important role as well, since 38.6% of respondents rated it as "very influential".

Factor	Not at all influential	Slightly influential	Neutral	Influential	Very influential
Interest in human anatomy and physiology	2.9%	39.9%	21.2%	3.5%	34.5%
Desire to help others	1.9%	28.3%	12.2%	2.9%	54.7%
Career prospects and job opportunities	3.2%	34.1%	35.0%	7.1%	20.6%
Family influence	5.8%	28.6%	29.9%	7.7%	28.0%
Availability of the program	3.9%	37.9%	38.9%	9.0%	11.3%
University reputation	4.5%	27.7%	24.4%	4.8%	38.6%

Table 1: Factors influencing the decision to enroll in a physiotherapy program.

Understanding of physiotherapy services

In regards to patient populations which the students think that physiotherapists usually deal with (more than one option was available), most of them selected musculoskeletal patients (68.9%), neurological patients (62.8%), sports injuries (59.9%), pediatrics (58.0%), geriatrics (51.3%), cardiopulmonary patients (46.8%), and women’s health (32.1%).

As far as the use of physiotherapy services within the Palestinian healthcare system is concerned, 67% answered “yes”, 21% answered “no”.

Perceptions of the physiotherapy profession

The table 2 below illustrates the perceptions of students about the profession of physiotherapy in Palestine. Even though 53.4% of students agree or strongly agree that physiotherapy is a respectable profession, there are worries about career opportunities, salary, and professional growth.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean ± SD
Physiotherapy is a respected and valued profession in Palestine	1.9%	13.2%	31.5%	32.8%	20.6%	3.57 ± 1.02
There are sufficient job opportunities for qualified physiotherapists in Palestine	4.9%	20.9%	46.3%	23.8%	4.5%	3.02 ± 0.89
The salaries and benefits for physiotherapists in Palestine are competitive	6.1%	25.7%	45.0%	18.3%	4.8%	2.90 ± 0.93
The professional development opportunities for physiotherapists in Palestine are adequate	6.4%	23.2%	43.4%	21.2%	5.8%	2.97 ± 0.95
Overall Perception Score						3.11 ± 0.67

Table 2: Perceptions of the physiotherapy profession in Palestine.

Challenges faced by physiotherapy students

Challenges encountered by physiotherapy students are summarized in table 3. Among these challenges, the most pressing one was the lack of faculty support, which accounted for 59.3%,

followed by a high workload and pressure from academic studies at 54.8%, lack of clinical placements at 41.0%, lack of adequate resources at 36.5%, and high tuition costs at 27.6%.

Challenge	Percentage Reporting
Lack of faculty support	59.3%
High workload and academic pressure	54.8%
Limited clinical placement opportunities	41.0%
Inadequate access to resources (laboratories, equipment)	36.5%
High tuition fees	27.6%

Table 3: Challenges faced by physiotherapy students.

Program satisfaction

In relation to the overall satisfaction with the physiotherapy program, 38.2% were satisfied, and 17.6% very satisfied, with

29.8% being neutral, 11.2% dissatisfied, and 3.2% very dissatisfied. The mean satisfaction score is 3.56 ± 1.01.

Differences in perception and satisfaction by demographic factors

Factor	Category	Mean	SD	Test Statistic	p-value
University	PAU	3.1375	0.67728	F = 3.11	0.016
	Bethlehem	3.0253	0.68366		
	Al-Quds	3.2308	0.70683		
	PPU	3.3438	0.66497		
	Najah	2.9625	0.57088		
Gender	Male	3.1700	0.68200	t = 0.92	0.360
	Female	3.1000	0.66120		
Academic Year	First	3.1781	0.64164	F = 5.69	0.010
	Second	3.2995	0.67143		
	Third	2.9312	0.67367		
	Fourth	2.9697	0.62406		

Table 4: Perception differences according to university, gender, and year of study.

Perception differences were significantly present among various universities ($p = 0.016$), where PPU students had the highest mean perception (3.34 ± 0.66) and Najah University students had the lowest mean perception (2.96 ± 0.57). Gender differences were not

significantly present. Significant academic year differences were detected ($p = 0.01$), where second-year students had the highest perceptions and third-year students had the lowest perceptions.

Factor	Category	Mean	SD	Test Statistic	p-value
University	PAU	3.5000	1.11378	F = 10.54	<0.001
	Bethlehem	3.9551	0.82448		
	Al-Quds	3.8846	0.86380		
	PPU	2.9464	1.03431		
	Najah	3.4833	0.85354		
Gender	Male	3.48	1.003	t = 0.58	0.140
	Female	3.58	1.000		
Academic Year	First	3.6500	1.05662	F = 2.11	0.099
	Second	3.3854	1.16411		
	Third	3.7536	0.88127		
	Fourth	3.5000	0.78935		

Table 5: Satisfaction differences according to university, gender, and year of study.

Notable differences were noted among the universities with respect to their satisfaction levels ($p < 0.001$) where students from Bethlehem were most satisfied (3.96 ± 0.82) while those from PPU were least satisfied (2.95 ± 1.03). Gender differences were not noted, and academic year differences came close but were statistically insignificant ($p = 0.099$).

Correlations between age, perception, and satisfaction

It has been established that there exists a statistically significant negative correlation between the age and perception ($r = -0.140$, $p = 0.013$). This suggests that as students grow older, the perception of the physiotherapy profession becomes less favorable. Weak

Variable	Age	Perception	Satisfaction
Age	1	-0.140*	-0.038
Perception	-0.140*	1	0.245**
Satisfaction	-0.038	0.245**	1

Table 6: Correlation matrix for age, perception, and satisfaction.

*Note: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

correlation that is not significant exists between the age and satisfaction (r = -0.038, p = 0.510). Weak positive correlation exists between perception and satisfaction (r = 0.245, p < 0.001).

Discussion

This study investigated the perception of physiotherapy undergraduates in Palestine concerning their career and educational experience. The results showed that there is a complicated perception towards the profession where on one hand students have positive perceptions, and on the other, they also had concerns.

Motivations for choosing physiotherapy

The results show that personal interest and the wish to help others were the most motivating factors in joining physiotherapy; this is supported by prior studies. Just like in the study conducted in Jordan by Maayah, *et al.* (2022), where altruistic motives were shown to be the main drivers in healthcare career choices [2], Palestinian students' willingness to help others indicates the selflessness of the profession and reveals that students join the field because of their love for people and not money.

Reputation of the university was another important motivator for choosing a program in physiotherapy (38.6% "very influential"). This is an important revelation for universities trying to recruit good students for their physiotherapy programs.

Perceptions of professional status and opportunities

Although a majority (53.4%) found that physiotherapy is an esteemed profession in Palestine, significant issues were noted in terms of job prospects, pay, and professional development opportunities. Only 28.3% agreed that there were enough job opportunities available, and only 23.1% thought that salaries were adequate. The same issues were also raised by the students in another context where developing healthcare services were in use [6,7].

It is important to note the high level of neutral answers in the responses, ranging from 31.5% to 46.3%. It might indicate some degree of uncertainty in the future careers of the students. It may be due to the lack of interaction with professional physiotherapists or poor career guidance within programs.

A mean overall perception score of 3.11 ± 0.67 indicates moderately good perception with some margin for improvement. This result is in line with similar findings in other Middle Eastern settings where physiotherapy was valued, but some difficulties with professional status and remuneration existed [8].

Challenges in physiotherapy education

The ranking of inadequate faculty support (59.3%) as the most important challenge is a matter of concern and calls for immediate action. Mentorship and guidance play an essential role in professional growth and development of students [9]. The fact that many respondents cite it as their major challenge indicates serious problems in faculty to student ratio, faculty development or lack of priority to students' needs on the part of institutions.

High academic load (54.8%) and insufficient clinical placement (41.0%) are other important obstacles to quality education. The results correlate with those found by researchers in other developing countries in the field of health care education [10]. Combined pressure to perform in the academic work and lack of sufficient practical experience can make students feel unprepared to professional practice.

Insufficient access to resources (36.5%) and financial difficulties (27.6%) add to the above mentioned challenges. The opportunity provided for students to choose several challenges at once proves that there are different obstacles that Palestinian physiotherapy students face.

Satisfaction with educational programs

The satisfactory level of 3.56 ± 1.01 and 55.8% satisfied or very satisfied respondents is similar to the results found in other similar studies done in the region [2,11]. However, there were quite many respondents who had neutral (29.8%) and dissatisfied opinions (14.4%), which implies some room for further development of the program.

The high variability of satisfaction among the universities ($p < 0.001$) is especially interesting. The most satisfied were students from Bethlehem University (3.96 ± 0.82), and the least satisfied were the PPU students (2.95 ± 1.03). This may be due to institutional features, including the curriculum, clinical placements, faculty expertise, and resources provided.

Demographic differences in perception and satisfaction

Lack of notable gender differences in both perception ($p = 0.36$) and satisfaction ($p = 0.14$) indicates that male and female students share a common perception regarding the profession and their education. Such finding is contrary to some researchers who have found out gender difference in terms of career expectations while the findings are in line with researchers who emphasize common professional socialization experiences [4,12].

Notable difference in perception among different academic years ($p = 0.01$) indicates a pattern that has come up from the results. Second year students had the highest perceptions (3.30 ± 0.67) while third year students had the lowest (2.93 ± 0.67). This drop can be attributed to the reality shock as students advance to clinical rotations where they face challenges of the profession. Such a pattern has also been observed in nursing and other health professions [13].

Age, perception, and satisfaction relationships

The notable negative correlation ($r = -0.140$; $p = 0.013$) between age and perception, although very weak, implies that the more students grow up and acquire higher education, the more idealistic views of the occupation could be replaced with real-life experiences. This finding confirms the idea of professional socialization being a mechanism for modifying initial expectations [1].

The correlation ($r = 0.245$; $p < 0.001$) between perception and satisfaction has great significance. The more positively the students perceive the profession, the higher level of their satisfaction from educational programs is observed. This finding proves that interventions designed to foster the perception of the profession, such as interaction with positive role models and highlighting professional values, can also increase satisfaction from study.

The lack of correlation ($r = -0.038$; $p = 0.510$) between age and satisfaction means that the former is less associated with satisfaction than program-related and professional variables.

Implications for practice and policy

Some of the implications associated with the aforementioned results include:

- First, fixing problems of poor faculty support should be prioritized. It might entail hiring new faculty members, offering training on mentoring skills or reforming advisement practices.
- Second, increasing the number of clinical placements through collaboration with other health facilities and creating simulated education experiences may help resolve the problem faced by 41% of the respondents regarding limited placements.
- Third, universities that showed lower satisfaction rates may need to look into the practices of their better performing counterparts. For instance, the relatively high satisfaction rate of Bethlehem University (3.96) may prove helpful.
- Fourth, there is a need to introduce career guidance and realistic professional training into the curriculum. This may solve the problem of decreasing perceptions noticed among third-year students.
- Lastly, advocacy efforts from both professional and government sectors are needed to tackle the issues of job openings, pay, and professional development opportunities. Otherwise, despite all the good educational programs in place, graduates may leave the profession disappointed.

Limitation of the Study

There are numerous limitations to this study. The cross-sectional research method does not allow for causation. The use of self-reports can be subject to response bias. This study is limited in its inclusion of only five universities, although it is indicative of major Palestinian institutions, it may not encompass the experience of other smaller/newer programs. Although the use of quantitative research methodology yielded statistical results, it may have failed to capture the complex viewpoints of the students.

Recommendations

Several recommendations have been made following the analysis of the study findings for improving physiotherapy education in Palestine. Some of the recommendations include providing more support systems for the faculty members through

better faculty-to-student ratio, mentoring program, and advising program; increasing placement options for the students through building more partnerships with healthcare institutions and exploring the use of simulations; handling resource constraints through providing equipment and technology to the laboratories; reviewing the curriculum to ensure proper balance between theory and practice, especially the decrease in the third year; offering realistic career counseling to prepare the students well for their future career paths; learning from the better institutions that have high satisfaction rates; making advocacy efforts at professional and governmental levels in order to create better jobs and salary structure for the graduates; and finally, organizing pre-university orientation program in order to give high school students a realistic view about the profession of physiotherapy. With regard to future researches, although qualitative research might help in gaining greater insight into what lies behind quantitative results; in addition, comparison studies comparing differences between Palestinian organizations and neighboring countries' institutions might help in finding out the contextual variables affecting student perceptions, while intervention studies assessing specific interventions to improve faculty support or clinical placements are also needed.

Conclusion

It is clear from this study that despite positive perceptions, the physiotherapy students in Palestine face serious issues that affect their educational experiences as well as future career plans. The reasons for choosing this field include altruistic reasons and personal interests; however, there are certain institutional problems such as lack of faculty support, high workload, shortage of practical experience, and lack of resources.

Although this profession is viewed favorably, there are worries regarding the availability of jobs, remuneration, and professional development opportunities. It is very probable that these issues result in the average perception scores and can affect the future career intentions of the students.

It is important to note that there is considerable variability in the perception and satisfaction levels among different universities, indicating the significance of institutional factors in this regard. It is also notable that the fall in perception scores at the third academic year represents an important time for intervention. There is a positive association between professional perceptions and program satisfaction.

Funding Support

This research did not receive any funding.

Conflict of Interest

No, there is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank all the patients who participated in the study.

Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the Institutional Ethical Committee of Ahliya Palestine University (Approval code: CAMS/PTBR/3/148/2024). Participants were made aware that the results may be published and that they will have access to the information relevant to the research at any time and may leave the study at any point in time without any threat to their interests.

Authors' Contribution

Conceptualization, Safa AbuAbed and Azzam Alarab; Data curation, Safa AbuAbed and Azzam Alarab; Formal analysis, Azzam Alarab; Investigation, Safa AbuAbed and Azzam Alarab; Methodology, Safa AbuAbed and Azzam Alarab; Project administration, Azzam Alarab; Resources, Azzam Alarab; Software, Philip Afghani; Supervision, Azzam Alarab & Philip Afghani; Validation, Safa AbuAbed; Visualization, Philip Afghani; Writing - original draft, Safa AbuAbed; Writing - review and editing, Azzam Alarab, Safa AbuAbed, Iyad Abu Radwan.

Bibliography

1. Alaca N., *et al.* "Occupational perceptions of physiotherapists and physiotherapy students in Turkey: A comparative study". *Work* 77.1 (2024): 219-230.
2. Maayah MF, *et al.* "The perception of physical therapy students towards their profession in Jordan". *Healthcare* 10.5 (2022): 849.
3. McEvoy MP, *et al.* "Changes in physiotherapy students' knowledge and perceptions of EBP from first year to graduation: A mixed methods study". *BMC Medical Education* 18.1 (2018): 109.
4. Stenberg G., *et al.* "Gender matters in physiotherapy". *Physiotherapy Theory and Practice* 38.13 (2022): 2316-2329.

5. Eqtait FA, *et al.* "Clinical learning environment: Perceptions of Palestinian nursing students". *Inquiry* 61 (2024): 469580241273101.
6. Aloraini SM and Alrshed GR. "Exploring Saudi physical therapists' perceptions and opinions on their profession: A mixed-method study". *Rehabilitation Research and Practice* (2022): 2890548.
7. Nadeem W, *et al.* "Perception of intermediate college students about physical therapy as a profession in Lahore, Pakistan". *Rawal Medical Journal* 46.1 (2021): 127.
8. Gamage SWK and de Zoysa P. "Perception of physiotherapy students regarding their chosen career: An exploratory study on leveling the playing field". *University of Colombo Review* 3.1 (2022): 20.
9. Meyer IS, *et al.* "Perceptions of physiotherapy clinical educators' dual roles as mentors and assessors: Influence on teaching-learning relationships". *South African Journal of Physiotherapy* 75.1 (2019): 468.
10. Mahmood T, *et al.* "The attitude of physical therapy students towards their profession and education in Punjab". *Journal of Islamabad Medical and Dental College* 11.3 (2022): 182-187.
11. Tedla JS, *et al.* "Physiotherapy students attitude towards their education and profession". *Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy Journal* 2.3 (2009): 127-138.
12. Chesterton P, *et al.* "New graduate physiotherapists' perceived preparedness for clinical practice: A cross-sectional survey". *European Journal of Physiotherapy* 25.17 (2023): 33-42.
13. Alsulami S, *et al.* "Perception of academic stress among Health Science Preparatory Program students in two Saudi universities". *Advances in Medical Education and Practice* 9 (2018): 159-164.