Impact of a Tutored Theoretical-Practical Training to Develop Undergraduate Students’ Skills for the Detection of Caries Lesions

Braga, Mariana Minatel; Lenzi, Tathiane Larissa; Ferreira, Fernanda Rosche; Mendes, Fausto Medeiros; Raggio, Daniela Prócida; Imparato, José Carlos; Bonecker, Marcelo; Magalhães, Ana Carolina; Wang, Linda; Rios, Daniela; Pessan, Juliano Pelim; Duque, Cristiane; Rebelo, Maria Augusta Bessa; Alves Filho, Ary Oliveira; Lima, Marina De Deus Moura; Moura, Marcoeli Silva; De Carli, Alessandro Diogo; Sanabe, Mariane Emi; Cenci, Maximiliano Sergio; Oliveira, Elenara Ferreira; Correa, Marcos Britto; Rocha, Rachel Oliveira; Zenkner, Julio Eduardo; Murisí, Pedroza Uribe; Martignon, Stefania; Lara, Juan Sebastian; Aquino, Fatima Gabriela; Carrillo, Alfredo; Chu, Chun Hung; Deery, Chris; Ricketts, David; Melo, Paulo; Antunes, José Leopoldo Ferreira; Ekstrand, Kim Rud

Published in:
J M I R Research Protocols

DOI:
10.2196/resprot.7414

Publication date:
2017

Document version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Document license:
CC BY

Citation for published version (APA):
Protocol

Impact of a Tutored Theoretical-Practical Training to Develop Undergraduate Students’ Skills for the Detection of Caries Lesions: Study Protocol for a Multicenter Controlled Randomized Study

Mariana Minatel Braga1,2*, DDS, PhD; Tathiane Larissa Lenzi1,3,4*, DDS, MSc PhD; Fernanda Rosche Ferreira1, MSc, DDS; Fausto Medeiros Mendes1, DDS, MSc PhD; Daniela Próvida Raggio1, MSc, DDS, PhD; José Carlos Imparato1,5, MSc, DDS, PhD; Marcelo Bonecker1, MSc, DDS, PhD; Ana Carolina Magalhães6, DDS, MSc PhD; Linda Wang6, MSc, DDS, PhD; Daniela Rios6, MSc, DDS, PhD; Juliano Pelim Pessan7, DDS, MSc PhD; Cristiane Duque7, DDS, PhD; Maria Augusta Bessa Rebelo8, DDS, MSc PhD; Ary Oliveira Alves Filho8, MSc, DDS, PhD; Marina De Deus Moura Lima9, MSc, DDS, PhD; Marcoeli Silva Moura9, MSc, DDS, PhD; Alessandro Diogo De Carli10, MSc, DDS, PhD; Mariane Emi Sanabe11, DDS, MSc PhD; Maximiliano Sergio Cenci12, DDS, MSc PhD; Elenara Ferreira Oliveira12, DDS, MSc PhD; Marcos Britto Correa12, MSc, DDS, PhD; Rachel Oliveira Rocha1, MSc, DDS, PhD; Julio Eduardo Zenknner1, MSc, DDS, PhD; Pedroza Uribe Murisi1,13, MSc, DDS, PhD; Stefania Martignon14,15, DDS, PhD; Juan Sebastian Lara11,16,17, DDS, MSc PhD; Fatima Gabriela Aquino18, Msc Candidate, DDS; Alfredo Carrillo19, Msc Candidate, DDS; Chun Hung Chu20, MSc, DDS, PhD; Chris Deery21, MSc, BDS, PhD; David Ricketts22, BDS, MSc PhD; Paulo Melo23, PhD; José Leopoldo Ferreira Antunes24, MSc PhD; Kim Rud Ekstrand25, DDS, PhD; IuSTC Group2*

1Dental School, Pediatric Dentistry Departament, University of São Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil
2Initiatives for undergraduate Students’ Training in Cariology (IuSTC Group), Multi-institutional group, São Paulo, Brazil
3School of Dentistry, Federal University of Santa Maria, Santa Maria, Brazil
4School of Dentistry, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil
5CPO Sao Leopoldo Mandic, Campinas, SP, Brazil
6School of Dentistry, University of São Paulo, Bauru, Brazil
7School of Dentistry, São Paulo State University (Unesp), Araçatuba, Brazil
8School of Dentistry, Federal University of Amazonas, Manaus, Brazil
9Postgraduate Programme in Dentistry, Federal University of Piauí, Teresina, PI, Brazil
10School of Dentistry, Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul, Campo Grande, MS, Brazil
11School of Dentistry “Prof Albino Coimbra Filho”, Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul, Campo Grande, MS, Brazil
12School of Dentistry, Federal University of Pelotas, Pelotas, RS, Brazil
13Facultad de Odontologia, Universidad de Guadalajara, Guadalajara, Mexico
14UNICA - Caries Research Unit, Research Vice-rectory, Universidad El Bosque, Bogotá, Colombia
15Dental Innovation and Translation Centre, King’s College of London, London, United Kingdom
16UNICA - Caries Research Unit, Research Vice-rectory, Universidad El Bosque, Bogotá, Colombia
17The Dental Health Unit, The University of Manchester, Manchester, United Kingdom
18Carrera de Odontología, Universidad Católica, Asunción, Paraguay
19Facultad Autonoma de Asunción, Asunción, Paraguay
20Faculty of Dentistry, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China (Hong Kong)
21University of Sheffield, Sheffield, United Kingdom
22Dundee Dental Hospital and School, University of Dundee, Dundee, United Kingdom
23Faculty of Dental Medicine, EpiUnit, University of Porto, Porto, Portugal
24School of Public Health, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil
25Department of Odontology, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark
* these authors contributed equally

Corresponding Author:
Mariana Minatel Braga, DDS, PhD
Dental School
Pediatric Dentistry Departament

http://www.researchprotocols.org/2017/8/e155/
Abstract

Background: Tutored laboratorial activities could be a manner of improving the competency development of students. However, its impact over conventional theoretical classes has not yet been tested. Additionally, different university contexts could influence this issue and should be explored.

Objective: To assess the impact of a tutored theoretical-practical training for teaching undergraduate students to detect caries lesions as compared with theoretical teaching activities. The impact of these teaching/learning activities will be assessed in terms of efficacy, cost/benefit, retention of knowledge/acquired competences, and student acceptability.

Methods: Sixteen centers (7 centers from Brazil and 9 centers from other countries throughout the world) are involved in the inclusion of subjects for this protocol. A randomized controlled study with parallel groups will be conducted. One group (control) will be exposed to a 60- to 90-minute conventional theoretical class and the other group (test) will be exposed to the same theoretical class and also a 90-minute laboratory class, including exercises and discussions based on the evaluation of a pool of images and extracted teeth. The mentioned outcomes will be evaluated immediately after the teaching activities and also in medium- and long-term analyses. To compare the long-term outcomes, students who enrolled in the university before the participating students will be interviewed for data collection and these data will be used as a control and compared with the trained group. This stage will be a nonrandomized phase of this study, nested in the main study. Appropriate statistical analysis will be performed according to the aims of this study. Variables related to the centers will also be analyzed and used to model adjustment as possible sources of variability among results.

Results: This ongoing study is funded by a Brazilian national funding agency (CNPq- 400736/2014-4). We expect that the tutored theoretical-practical training will improve the undergraduate students’ performance in the detection of caries lesions and subsequent treatment decisions, mainly in terms of long-term retention of knowledge. Our hypothesis is that tutored theoretical-practical training is a more cost-effective option for teaching undergraduate students to detect caries lesions.

Conclusions: If our hypothesis is confirmed, the use of laboratory training in conjunction with theoretical classes could be used as an educational strategy in Cariology to improve the development of undergraduate students’ skills in the detection of caries lesions and clinical decision-making.

(Keywords: active learning; cariology; dental education; laboratory training)
internationally [9]. Although student performance in the
detection of caries lesions using this system has already been
assessed [10-12], these investigations were performed in small
groups of students or in only 1 institutional center, reducing
the external validity of these findings [13].

A preliminary study conducted at the University of São Paulo
found that the tutored theoretical-practical training seems to
improve the caries detection by undergraduate students using
ICDAS [14]. However, it was not possible to assess the real
impact of this active-learning methodology in the teaching of
this field, which involves more time and costs, as compared
with the theoretical activity alone. Furthermore, this effect may
depend on different university contexts, mainly because
caries diagnosis content has not been taught in the same way in
different curricula. To the best of our knowledge, this is a
pioneering multicenter study that aims to investigate the short-
and long-term impact of the tutored theoretical-practical training
for detecting caries lesions in undergraduate courses in
comparison with theoretical activities.

Objective
The aim of the present protocol will be to evaluate the effect of
a tutored theoretical-practical training for teaching undergraduate
students to detect caries lesions in comparison with theoretical
teaching activities. The impact of these teaching/learning
activities will be assessed in terms of efficacy, cost/benefit,
retention of knowledge/acquired competences, and student
acceptance.

Methods

Ethical Aspects
The Research Ethics Committee of all institutions involved
previously approved this protocol. The participants will receive
and sign an informed consent prior to their involvement in the
research. For ethical reasons, the students allocated to the
theoretical group will receive laboratory training at the end the
outcome assessments. Participant confidentiality will be ensured
using identification code numbers. Participant identifiable
information will be stored in locked filing cabinets in a secure
room.

Study Design
A multicenter randomized controlled study with parallel groups
will be conducted. One group (control) will be exposed to a 60-
to 90-minute conventional theoretical class and the other group
(test) will be exposed to the same theoretical class along with
a 90-minute laboratory class, including exercises and discussions
based on the evaluation of a pool of images and extracted teeth.

This study will involve 7 centers from Brazil and 9 centers from
other countries throughout the world (Figure 1). The centers
represent two distinct contexts: 1 coordinating center, a
precursor in the development of the theoretical and laboratory
activity that will be tested, while the other institutions represent
those that will receive the proposal to develop the same activity
with support provided by the precursor center. The inclusion of
different centers aims to cover different regions and institutions
with different profiles to increase the external validity of the
study. As the coordinating center is in São Paulo, Brazil, 6 other
institutions were invited to cover different parts of the country.
Similarly, the other centers throughout the world are located in
different regions, including Latin America (Colombia and
Paraguay), Asia (Hong Kong), and Europe (Copenhagen, United
Kingdom, and Portugal). Other centers may be optionally
incorporated throughout the study, according to interest and
judgment of necessity. The Initiatives for Undergraduate
Students’ Training in Cariology is a collaborative group made
up of all people involved in this study. The detailed roles of
each member and respective affiliations are described in
Multimedia Appendix 1.

Training for Operationalization of the Study in
Different Centers
The researchers responsible for the study in each center will
participate in an initial joint meeting to clarify the methodology
to be followed in the study. Training and collaboration of the
participants from each center will be made in order to properly
adapt the logistics needed for the study, considering the
characteristics of each center. The research team will detect all
particularities of each center, and a proposal for the
implementation of the activity will be jointly developed by the
coordinating center and each participating institution. In
addition, the principal investigator will train the staff members
that will apply the activity at each center.

Preparation of the Material for Evaluations
The coordinating center will be responsible for organizing and/or
assisting in the organization of the material to be used in the
theoretical-practical training, including preparation of a pool of
images and extracted teeth contemplating different stages of
caries severity. The pool of images will be prepared and used
in all centers. The teeth will be obtained from the Bank of
Human Teeth located at each institution or similar donators of
material for this purpose. A tutorial was developed to guide
investigators from each center to prepare their samples aided
by an investigator from the coordinating center.
Experimental Groups
Undergraduate students at the beginning (up to second or third year) and the end of the Dentistry course (last 2 years) will be included. All students will be invited to participate, but only those who consent to participate will be included. The classes will be randomly divided into 2 groups. The randomization will be made by a central allocation located in the coordinating center, by sending the list of students to be invited. All students will be randomized, even those that will not participate. These losses will be computed and analyzed later.

One group (control) will be exposed to a 60- to 90-minute conventional theoretical class and the other group (test) will be exposed to the same theoretical class and a 90-minute laboratory class, including exercises and discussions based on the evaluation of a pool of images and extracted teeth. All students will attend the class together before the allocation. For the test group, the participants will be assigned in small groups (7-10 students) mediated by graduate tutors and/or teachers. Students will assess 30 clinical images and 10 teeth for severity (ICDAS scores) and activity status [14]. Tutors/teachers will work on correcting exercises and also discussion of questions raised by the group. In case of disagreement, tooth revaluation will be possible with the help of tutors/teachers so that students understand potential mistakes. For the control group, they will begin the outcomes assessment after having finished the theoretical class.

Despite the allocation, both groups will begin their activities (for training or outcomes assessment) at the same time, avoiding demotivation of any group. Students and teachers/tutors will know the allocated group only when they will be prepared for the activities after the theoretical class, guaranteeing the allocation concealment.

Outcomes Assessment

Cost Efficacy
To evaluate the efficacy of the teaching and learning methods both the theoretical knowledge, and the practical skills and clinical decision-making capacity of the students will be evaluated after the theoretical class (control group) and after the theoretical laboratory training (test group).

To evaluate the theoretical knowledge, the students will answer questions about caries lesions detection prepared by professors with expertise in this field. Furthermore, the participants must understand the impact of the correct decision or error when using the ICDAS in clinical practice. The practical assessment will be made through the evaluation of extracted teeth for 1 minute each. Students will evaluate selected tooth surfaces according to the ICDAS criteria with the aid of a light reflector, a plane buccal mirror, and a ballpoint probe. To simulate the distance to observe teeth in the mouth, teeth will be positioned on a plane surface approximately 30 cm from the examiners’ eyes. The teeth will first be examined wet, and then they will be dried for 5 seconds with compressed air. For this evaluation, the students’ responses regarding caries severity will be compared with a template made by teachers after visual inspection. To evaluate the capacity of decision making, the undergraduate students should propose the treatment option based on caries lesion detection for 5 clinical cases. Cases were prepared to simulate usual clinical conditions. To assess the cost efficacy of the methods, the efficacy will be considered the number of true answers registered by the students independently on the theoretical and practical tests, as well as in the decision-making query. Direct and indirect costs will be calculated, both individually (the activity itself) and institutionally (to maintain the necessary structure and provide time for the activity). Cost estimation should include planning, preparation of the material, staff training, and implementation of the activity. Lecture and practical activity costing data will be directly collected at all study sites considering institutional information itself. In addition, national databases will be
searched to estimate costs of maintenance of universities in each location. Data from these 2 sources will be collated to produce tables of costs for the activity, center, and country.

**Perception and Acceptance**

The students’ perception of the activity and their degree of satisfaction with the knowledge achieved will be assessed. Questions will evaluate the preparation level, nervousness, satisfaction, and acceptance of students regarding the proposed activities. These outcomes will be evaluated based on the State Trait Personality Inventory Scale [15]. Moreover, the goal of this outcome will verify if the students who participated in the laboratory training felt more prepared for the caries lesions detection in a clinical situation.

**Retention of Knowledge and Skills**

To evaluate the retention of knowledge and skills acquired after the tutored theoretical laboratory training, students who entered the university before the participating students will be interviewed for data collection, and these data will be used as control and compared with the trained group. This stage will be a nonrandomized phase of the study, nested in the main study. To compare the long-term outcomes, a theoretical and practical assessment will be applied to participating students after 1 or 2 years following the first training and compared with a class in the same year of the undergraduate program, but who had not been exposed to this methodology. This stage of study will be adjusted considering the curriculum of each center in accordance with the course subjects offered in the periods of interest. The flowchart of the study design is summarized in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Study design and phases to be conducted.

---

**Center/Student Characteristics**

Some characteristics related to each center will be collected during the planning and execution/data collection stages. In the planning phase, a structured questionnaire will be applied to the center coordinators in order to identify relevant aspects of center size/potential, curricula, human resources/faculty preparation, infrastructure/facilities, and expected difficulties for participant centers. Afterward, in the execution phase, we will first map each student’s background and willingness to learn Cariology and caries detection by a form they should fill out before the theoretical class. The student’s background will show both the student’s knowledge at baseline, and also the possible contents taught at his/her center. Second, qualitative research on topics and strategies used in teaching/learning of Cariology will be investigated among students and lecturers in different centers. These quantitative-qualitative variables will be used as independent variables related to the center in further analysis.

**Statistical Analysis**

For the theoretical evaluation, total number of correct responses for test and control groups will be compared at both times of evaluation (immediate and long term). Data from the number of correct responses per question will be submitted to analysis, also considering the question as a factor.

For the practical assessment, performance-related parameters (sensitivity, specificity, accuracy) when using the visual method for the caries detection and evaluation of lesions activity will be calculated. These values will be compared between groups using multilevel analysis, considering both experimental groups and different centers.
The scores given by students for acceptance and perception of the activities carried out will be compared between groups. Regression analysis will be used in each experimental group to verify the association between student performance in caries lesions detection versus theoretical knowledge and student perception in relation to the activity. Baseline student knowledge and willingness to learn caries detection will be considered during these analyses.

The association between the results of immediate theoretical and practical assessments with knowledge and skills retained in the long term will be assessed.

For all analyses, a multilevel approach will be used to consider different levels explored. The assessment, the student, the center, and the country could be considered as possible levels for these analyses considering the possible clustering observed for centers and, eventually, countries. For all the parameters tested, the influence of the different centers and the level in the course (first or end years) will be investigated by regression analysis. The significance level will be set at 5%.

Results

This protocol refers to an ongoing study mainly funded by a Brazilian national funding agency (CNPq- 400736/2014-4). The standardized protocol has been implemented in different centers and data collected throughout them. On these occasions, different situations have been experienced and all peculiarities have been recorded in order to help in explaining possible differences among the studied centers.

We expect that the tutored theoretical-practical training will improve the undergraduate students’ performance in the detection of caries lesions and subsequent treatment decisions, mainly in terms of long-term retention of knowledge. Our hypothesis is that tutored theoretical-practical training is a more cost-effective option for teaching undergraduate students to detect caries lesions.

Discussion

Motivation and Design

In aiming to formalize the curriculum in Cariology at the 1st Consensus Workshop on the Development of the European Curriculum in Cariology [1], 5 distinct areas were highlighted [2], including the caries diagnosis, which involves risk assessment and detection of caries lesions [16]. However, theoretical classes, often adopted for teaching Cariology, may not be enough to enable those undergraduate students to perform procedures, such as the detection of caries lesions in clinical practice. In this regard, we expect this study to provide the best scientific evidence for defining the best teaching/learning strategy for detection of caries.

As in other areas of dentistry, practical training may be essential for the development of these specific skills that are expected of a future professional [4]. A preliminary study conducted by our research group showed that laboratory activity could help even in solving theoretical questions that the students may have related to caries diagnosis [14]. This is a before and after type of study, in which the same students are evaluated at different times of the laboratory activities. Nevertheless, no study to date has compared this new methodology with theoretical classes. Although the practical activities tend to reinforce the theoretical content, the real cost-efficacy of using this methodology is unknown.

One of the motivations of this multicenter study was checking the impact of the same training activity considering different contexts. The inclusion of several university centers with different students profiles may increase the actual external validity of the proposed activity [13]. Therefore, influence of center dimension, differences in curricula, workflow, faculty formation/willingness to participate in the project, available human resources, and infrastructure/facilities can be tested using this study design. Moreover, distinct universities resources could interfere in the educational outcome or demand an extra investment for implementing the activity.

Most studies that assessed the efficacy or acceptance of students on measures associated with the theoretical classes [12,17,18], but the comparison of these measures with the performance achieved only after theoretical classes is rare [19]. Furthermore, they did not estimate the additional cost for implementation of this alternative, pointing out an innovative approach of our protocol. Once again, the multicenter study design that will permit to compare cost implementation in the different tested contexts [20].

Expectations

Among positive aspects, active methodologies tend to stimulate higher participation of students in the learning-teaching process [21]. Also, we speculate that by the end of the course undergraduate students could benefit more from this approach than those at the beginning of the course. The cumulative knowledge of the faculty associated with practical training may result in a better performance of dental undergraduate students for application of this integrated knowledge while making decisions related to prevention and management of caries [22].

A recent systematic review [8] has pointed out that the visual caries detection method has good overall performance, and the use of indices improves the accuracy of the method. With the expected results, we aim to achieve the inclusion of the teaching/learning of caries detection using the ICDAS into the curriculum of undergraduate courses. In many clinical disciplines, the content taught in laboratories may have been reduced due to a need to gain time in the clinical environment. On the other hand, considering that laboratory training may help the students solve doubts before clinical examinations and optimize chair time, we believe that tutored theoretical-practical training is a cost-effective option for teaching undergraduate students to detect caries lesions. If the results confirm our hypotheses, this study will contribute significantly to the reformulation of Cariology curriculum guidelines for undergraduate students.
Acknowledgments
This study is funded by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq-400736/2014-4) and The São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP), Brazilian funding agencies. The Principal Investigator and other Center Coordinators also receive scholarships as awards for Research Productivity in Brazil from the CNPq.

Conflicts of Interest
None declared.

Multimedia Appendix 1
Initiatives for Undergraduate Students’ Training in Cariology collaborative (IuSTC) group.

Multimedia Appendix 2
Funding agency report.

Multimedia Appendix 3
Funding agency report 2.

References


**Abbreviations**

ICDAS: International Caries Detection and Assessment System

©Mariana Minatel Braga, Tathiane Larissa Lenzi, Fernanda Rosche Ferreira, Fausto Medeiros Mendes, Daniela Próceda Raggio, José Carlos Imparato, Marcelo Bonecker, Ana Carolina Magalhães, Linda Wang, Daniela Rios, Juliano Pelim Pessan, Cristiane Duque, Maria Augusta Bessa Rebelo, Ary Oliveira Alves Filho, Marina De Deus Moura Lima, Marcoeli Silva Moura, Alessandro Diogo De Carli, Mariane Emi Sanabe, Maximiliano Sergio Cenci, Elenara Ferreira Oliveira, Marcos Britto Correa, Rachel Oliveira Rocha, Julio Eduardo Zenkner, Pedroza Uribe Murisi, Stefania Martignon, Juan Sebastian Lara, Fatima Gabriela Aquino, Alfredo Carrillo, Chui Hung Chu, Chris Deery, David Ricketts, Paulo Melo, José Leopoldo Ferreira Antunes, Kim Rud Ekstrand, IuSTC Group. Originally published in JMIR Research Protocols (http://www.researchprotocols.org), 16.08.2017. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work, first published in JMIR Research Protocols, is properly cited. The complete bibliographic information, a link to the original publication on http://www.researchprotocols.org, as well as this copyright and license information must be included.