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Examining the impact of audience response systems on student performance in anatomy education: a randomised controlled trial.

Ferguson SJ1, Ng J2, Hennessy CM2, Wilson AJ2, Parson SH2, Harrison EM2, Finn CM2, Stillwater TH3.

Abstract
Background and aims Electronic audience response systems offer the potential to enhance learning and improve performance. However, objective research investigating the use of audience response systems in undergraduate education has so far produced mixed, inconclusive results. We investigated the impact of audience response systems on short- and long-term test performance, as well as student perceptions of the educational experience, when integrated into undergraduate anatomy teaching. Methods and results A cohort of 70 undergraduate medical students was randomly allocated to one of the two groups. Both groups received the same anatomy lecture, but one group experienced the addition of audience response systems. Multiple-choice tests were conducted before, immediately after the lecture and again 10 weeks later. Self-rated pre-lecture subject knowledge, confidence and enjoyment ratings did not differ between groups. Test performance immediately following the lecture improved when compared against baseline and was modestly but significantly superior in the group taught with audience response systems (mean test score of 17.3/20 versus 15.6/20 in the control group, p = 0.01). Tests conducted 10 weeks after the lecture showed no difference between groups (p = 0.61), although overall a small improvement from the baseline test was maintained (p = 0.02). Conclusions Whilst audience response systems offer opportunities to deliver novel education experiences to students, an initial superiority over standard methods does not necessarily translate into longer term gains in student performance when employed in the context of anatomy education.

Keywords: Medical education; anatomy; audience response systems; education methodology; education technology