

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Value of Students' Engagements in Curricular Reforms

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To explore the role of students' engagement in curricular reforms in a private medical college.**Study Design:** A qualitative case study.**Place and Duration of Study:** The Study was conducted from 1st Jan to 30th Jun 2017 in Islamic International Medical College Rawalpindi.**Materials and Methods:** Sixteen participants, 08 students and 08 faculty, were selected using purposeful homogenous sampling strategy. All the selected participants were the members of the college curriculum planning committee. For students 2x FGDs and for faculty in depth interviews were recorded, transcribed and imported to NVivo software for analysis. Thematic analysis was done to make the major themes.**Results:** Six main themes were identified. The importance of curricular reforms was acknowledged and students' engagement was valued both by the faculty and students. Some limitations in accepting these suggestions were also recognized.**Conclusion:** The study has emphasized the importance of student input in curricular reforms to eliminate the existing problems in it and faculty has fully valued these suggestions with few reservations.**Key Words:** *Student's Engagement, Student's Empowerment, Curricular Reforms, Medical Institution.*

Introduction

In medical education there is increasing interest in student engagement and in staff working in partnership with students to deliver the education program and to facilitate the change. Research has found that active student engagement in teaching and learning enhances professional achievements, promote retention of knowledge, skills and attitudes, understanding of course content and encourage self-directed lifelong learning. This method requires student's active involvement in teaching and learning which determines the effectiveness of the program. So the challenge of student centered learning is the students engagement capacity. Poor engagement in these

activities will affect their overall performance and development of critical thinking and lifelong learning skills.¹

Recent research conducted into curriculum trends identified the empowerment of students to take responsibility for their own learning and student involvement in curriculum planning committees. The experience of the faculty staff, students and community partners has a greater place for community engagement in curriculum planning and designing. Student's engagement is central to equip students with skills which will take them forward professionally.²

The supportive policies of an institution should also ensure successful integration of the curriculum throughout the academic period.³ It should include both clinical and preventive aspects and should consider the health concerns of the relevant community. Nonetheless, it is believed that the policy makers should determine what future strategies and planning to be done to tackle student's problems and contentment with the curriculum.⁵

This research has addressed the research question "How do faculty and student's value the student's engagement in curricular reforms?" The objective is to explore the role of student's engagement in curricular reforms in a medical college.

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Materials and Methods

This was a qualitative case study conducted from 1st Jan 2017 to 30th Jun 2017 at Islamic International Medical College Rawalpindi. This approach helped to explore individuals through complex interventions to develop theory, evaluate programs and interventions. Sampling technique was purposeful sampling and strategy was homogeneous sampling.⁶ As per inclusion criteria 08 MBBS students and 08 faculty, being the members of the college curriculum planning committee, were chosen after their written consents. Semi structured face to face interviews were recorded from the selected faculty members to get in depth views. Two FGDs, in the group of four, were done with the students as it was convenient for them to express shared views among their colleagues. All interviews/FGDs were conducted at a safe and secure mutually predefined place and time. The data was recorded, transcribed and transferred to NVivo software for analysis. All the text was coded generating thematic nodes in the NVivo software version. The emerging themes were named according to the nodes in which data was stored. Analysis was done using search queries, node analysis and node comparison diagrams.

Results

Three main themes for faculty interviews data and three for students FGDs were recognized. They are:

Table I: Themes from Faculty Interviews

Questions Asked	Main Themes	References	Common Quotes
1: In your opinion why curricular reforms are needed in Pakistani Medical institutions?	Importance of curricular reforms	36	<i>F1: "The curricular thought has brought about certain changes in medical education which are consistent with the advancement of communication technologies, advent of social media, expansion of research in different medical fields as well as the expansion of the basic educational concept in medical education itself."</i>

2: What is your opinion about students' engagement in curriculum planning? 3: What is your opinion about the suggestion given by students during curriculum planning? Are they worthwhile and can be accepted? 4: What are the possible implications of student's engagement in planning curriculum? Can you give an example?	Value of student's engagement	85	<i>F8: "We have to engage them in every step whether it is curriculum, whether it is methodology whether it is assessment. We have to achieve our outcomes by the involvement of the student." F4: "However we think the student level of understanding is not as that of the teachers and however the problems at their implementation, problem in the sequencing, learning teaching strategies."</i>
5: What are the possible limitations in accepting student's suggestions?	Limitations of student's suggestions	29	<i>F1: "Student engagement we have started very recently, it has not been there from the very beginning. Particularly student engagement has never been practiced and I am a bit skeptical that whether it will be accepted or not in the policies of the institutions."</i>

Table II: Themes from Students' FGDs

Questions Asked	Main Themes	References	Common Quotes
1: What problems do you feel with the present curriculum of your college?	Problems in the present curriculum	22	<i>S7: "The thing is a lot is covered in a very short span of time and we have just added the entire Neurology in 8 week. It was sort of hard to adjust in such a short span of time." S5: "We have this integrated modular system so, far what I have experienced is that the course is too extensive and it's really hard for the students to manage it."</i>
2: What are the areas which you think your input is valuable as a student with respect to course design, teaching and assessment?	Student's input in curriculum	45	<i>S8: " Our participation in curriculum planning will influence in a much better way that there is always room for improvement. There are many things in which there is</i>

			improvement like the formative assessment, the way it is conducted in the final prof. examinations and the CBA examination."
3: How do you feel about your participation in curriculum planning meetings? I mean what will be the benefit of it. 4: How much value is given to your suggestions/recommendations? 5: Why is it important for your voice to be listened carefully in such meetings? 6: How your participation in curriculum planning will influence the curriculum? Can you give an example	Value of students suggestions in curriculum	61	S3: "As I am the one who has been sitting in the class for learning so I am the one who is best assessing the curriculum and giving the teachers the best response about what corrections should have been done in this curriculum."

Importance of Curriculum Reforms: This theme describes the importance of curriculum reforms in Pakistani medical institutions as expressed by 08 faculty members. They described it under subthemes of a need of the time, advancement in research and cultural reason. (Table I) Examples of representative statements of the faculty are as follows:

F8: "I think it is also the need of the time to minimize the burden on the students because in conventional system there is lots and lots of curriculum which they

have to go through in five years of their tenure whether they will become a dermatologist or gynecologist they have to read and they have to all the subjects."

Value of Student's Engagement: This theme is about the value given by the faculty to the students suggestions for the curriculum. The faculty has given 88 references for this theme describing it as an essential aspect of the students, making them empowered of their own curriculum and their suggestions worth should be checked. (Fig 1) The representative statements of the faculty are as follows: (Table I).

F1: *The curriculum is planned for the sake of the students and the value of the student's opinions for the curriculum planning has to be seriously considered while the curriculum is being planned for their sake."*

F8 "They have to keep in mind that our organization has been formed on a certain mission that is inculcation of Islamic and ethical values in our curriculum. However, if the students' suggestions are not according to those mission and vision that is not acceptable."

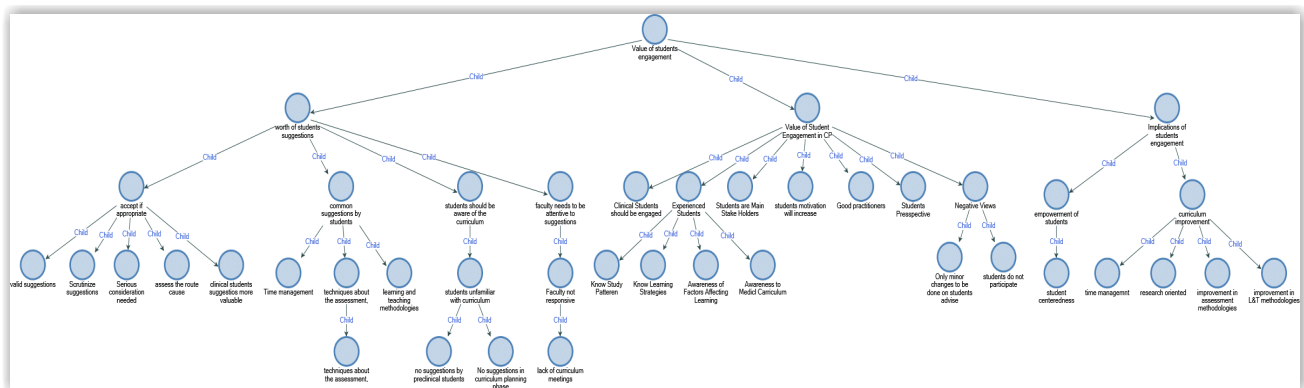


Fig 1: Model of Value of Student's Engagement

Problems in the Present Curriculum: This theme reflects the various problems being faced by the students in the present curriculum as the course contents, assessment methods, integration of the curriculum and faculty training. (Table II).

Value of Student's Suggestions in Curriculum: This theme reflects the students view about the value given by the faculty to their suggestions for the curriculum and were satisfied with few reservations. (Table II).

S1: "Teachers and all the staff actively listens---have always actively listened to my complaints and my problems."

S6: "they make our education system better and beneficial for students."

Discussion

The institutions claiming to have excellence in students' engagement must involve them in the curriculum, having active role and interaction with the faculty for curriculum planning.⁷ This study

focuses on same aspects of student's engagement in curriculum and reveals that the faculty appreciates the role of student's engagement in curriculum planning and value their voice.

Importance of Curricular Reforms: The results of this study indicate great importance to the curricular reforms in a medical institute. The most important and latest curricular reforms are changing the traditional discipline based curriculum with the integrated system by introducing clinical subjects at early stage. This enhance the cognitive and practical skills of the students.⁸ Although their long term benefits have yet to be seen but curricular reforms seems to be inevitable solution to the increasing demand of the high quality medical graduates.⁹ The educational environment remains high in a reformed curriculum resulting into better results for the institution.¹⁰ It is believed that the future model of education will be competency based, so a new approach for the educational model is required to equip the doctors for the future challenges.¹¹ New demands for reforms of medical institutes curriculum are emerging, stressing upon standardization of learning outcomes, promoting integration, encouraging habits of inquiry and focusing on doctors professional identity.¹² A meaningful agenda for the curriculum reforms is also being contemplated by the Pakistani government to acquire the requisite knowledge, values, attitude and civic participation skills to live in harmony with each other.¹³

Value of Student's Engagement in Curriculum as Perceived by the Faculty and Students: The study reveals greater importance and value of student's engagement in curriculum by the faculty and students by acknowledging their collaborative role. Literature reveals that In medical education active student participations in the curriculum is highly appreciated as it creates a vision of shared curriculum planning.¹⁴ Participation in learning activities is positively related to engagement as well as student self-reported outcomes and satisfaction with the institute.¹⁵ To reverse the passive learning experience, the student empowerment should be done by themselves supervised by critical and democratic faculty.¹⁶

Common Problems in Curriculum: The study

reveals few problems like lengthy course content, teaching methodologies and assessment methods. The literature also reveals that the faculty and students are not clear about the level and type of integration which results in to problems with lengthy contents of the modules and teaching methods.¹⁷ Minor subjects are overcrowded and time pressured curriculum could not be effectively introduced in short span of time.¹⁸ So the rapidly changing curriculum could pose number of dilemmas to the teachers which may present further problems in future.¹⁹

Students Input in Curriculum: The study reveals that students used to give their suggestions regarding teaching and learning methodologies, assessment techniques, time tabling and learning environment. Literature also stress that the student committees should identify their strengths and weaknesses with a desire to find solutions to rectify it.²⁰ Students are very important in developing resources, conducting research and evaluating programs.²¹

Limitations of Students Suggestions for Curriculum: This study also reveals few limitations for accepting the student's suggestions as faculty feels that student's lack of experience in curriculum, lack of experienced staff and financial constraints. Despite these limitations faculty must be receptive to student's suggestions and should motivate them for their voice in curriculum.²²

Limitations of the Study: The student's engagement in curriculum planning in the above studied institute is recent and all the participants are not well aware of its significance and needs more motivation to do the same.

Conclusion

This study revealed that the medical students are very vigilant about the curriculum. They can suggest wisely for its improvement and faculty values their engagement in the curriculum. This mutual and positive interaction between students and faculty is the real essence of student's engagement in curriculum planning. So after achieving the desired level of student's engagement in curriculum, further research is recommended to observe its effects on the policy of curriculum designing of the institution.

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the study and were involved in every part of it.

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