

ROAD AHEAD; FACULTY'S PROPOSALS FOR EFFECTIVE TRANSITION FROM CONVENTIONAL TO INTEGRATED MEDICAL CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To study delve into the faculty's recommendations to the administration as well faculty of a medical college in order to assist a transition from a conventional to an integrated curriculum at the commencement and some years afterwards.

Study Design: Qualitative exploratory study.

Place and Duration of Study: 18 months, Khyber Medical University, Peshawar.

Material and Methods: A qualitative exploratory study involving two undergraduate medical institutions was conducted between April 2018 and October 2018; one of these at the beginning of transition to the integrated curriculum (College-A) while the other successfully doing it for about nine years (College-B). For thematic content analysis, semi-structured interviews (Twelve in number, six from each college) were conducted. Recommendations by the faculty, to facilitate the hands-on transition to integrated curriculum, to administration and faculty were looked at.

Results: According to suggestions for the administration, four themes were identified; "Plan properly and prepare" "hand over the job to willing leadership", "provide incentives", and "establish an efficient system of feedback". As far as the suggestions for faculty are concerned; promote self-directed learning and nurture a collaborative environment surfaced as themes. Equal voices from both colleges were incorporated for all themes, with the exception of hand over the job to willing leadership and nurture a collaborative environment, that were based on the answers mainly from College-B.

Conclusion: Various recommendations came up, that if implemented both by the faculty and administration of a medical college, can bring about a favorable effect on an effortless and workable transition to an integrated medical curriculum.

Key words: Faculty, Medical college, Curriculum, Undergraduate.

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INTRODUCTION

Endless necessity of a doctor, specially trained for the provision of contextually apt healthcare services, results in constantly expanding medical syllabi to be tutored at the medical institutions¹. Along the lines of the Flexner report, the conventional curriculum has been the principal option for years going on². Although the main critique was that it demonstrated a gap between theory and practice by preventing undergraduates from integrating because there was a chronological gap in the teaching of both, thus discouraging

them³. There should be a solution to this scarcity of interdisciplinary inquiry⁴, now extended in the form of a globally acceptable, Integrated curriculum, with the licensing standards of different accrediting bodies^{2,5}.

An aggressive strategy is required to reverse the tendency of "recommending but not implementing integration," which has been pursued over the past few decades, but with only marginal success, leading to a depressing cycle of "change without difference⁵."

Before implementing any curricular reforms, the faculty must be consulted since they are the common tool used to teach the curriculum⁴. This has the added benefit of increasing responsibility and elevating the course standard⁶.

Such improved curriculum is considered right and proper to attain the desired results⁷. Literature, addressing faculty's perceptions in comparison with those of students' about the transition to an integrated curriculum, is scanty⁸. Only

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research, at national level, reported faculty perceptions of integrated curriculum prior to implementation and identified process-influencing frame factors 1 .

Literature is silent in terms of any reports from Pakistan about what the faculty recommends regarding the assistance of transition to an integrated curriculum, at commencement and post- implementation phase, thus portraying the evolutionary process down the road.

This research was done in order to get the suggestions by the faculty for an efficient conversion from the traditional / conventional to an integrated medical curriculum on commencement and some duration after changeover.

METHODS

This was a qualitative exploratory study that took 18 months and was conducted at two different undergraduate medical colleges from the private sector. It explored the faculty's suggestions for executing an easy and practically sustainable shift from traditional to an integrated curriculum. Two categories for both medical institutes were made; College-A was at the initial stage of transition, whereas College-B had nine years post-transition experience. After getting ethical permission from both colleges and Khyber Medical University (KMU), participants were selected by purposive sampling technique. As much as possible variation was ensured regarding the gender, specialty and length of service of the participants pool.

After getting an informed consent, the participants were contacted for semi-structured interviews and were fictitiously numbered. Theoretical saturation was observed after six interviews each from both colleges, and the interviews were discontinued. Since sample size decision in advance in a qualitative research comes with some inherent issues, it is always superior to consider, the theoretical saturation, a significant factor ⁹. The principal researcher conducted all interviews one after the other. Following two questions with the relevant prompts were asked. Questions were in line with the objectives, and were validated by 05 medical education experts.

Q-1: What steps could be taken by the administration to facilitate a smooth and sustainable transition from traditional to integrated medical curriculum?

Q-2: What steps could be taken by the faculty itself to facilitate a smooth and sustainable transition from traditional to integrated medical curriculum?

Data collection and analysis was done side by side. Every interview was transcribed. Analysis of the thematic content was performed in accordance with the Braun and Clark framework¹⁰. We adopted this order: familiarity with the data (by repeatedly

reading the transcripts), generation of initial codes (using the open code technique), categorization of codes (axial-codes), and completion of resulting themes, with reexamination. Communication of codes and themes between the principal investigator and the assistant researcher was ensured. Up until a mutual understanding was reached, all differences were taken up.

To assure the study quality, audios as well as transcripts were kept safe. Triangulation ¹¹ across the researchers (principal & assistant), across the sites (the two selected colleges) and across the resources (by involving the participants) was implemented. Checking of the members was done by sharing the transcripts with the participants and fitting in any changes they suggested,

be it after the interviews were completed ¹². Detailed descriptions were recorded. For the audit trail, one external medical educator was also engaged ¹¹. Prior to analysis, personal biases were excluded and reflective memos were kept for the sake of reflexivity ¹³.

RESULTS

Question no. 1 sought faculty suggestions on steps the medical college administration could take to expedite the easy & sustainable transition from conventional/traditional to integrated medical curriculum, while Question- 2 acquired faculty suggestions on the same. It was presumed that because College-A respondents were at the beginning of the process, they came up with recommendations pertinent to the preliminary phase, resulting in an effortless transition, whereas suggestions from College-B would be relevant to both a flowing and a maintainable transition.

Analysis of the thematic content of the transcripts revealed the final four themes for Question no. 1 and two for Question no. 2, wherein axial codes were formed from the initial codes, and then final themes emerged. The themes for administration's actions comprised "plan properly and prepare, "provide incentives" "dedicate the job to willing leadership", and "establish a proper feedback system". Themes for faculty actions included self-directed learning and nurture a collaborative environment. Table-1 displays initial and axial codes, final themes, and some quotes that depict the initial codes, verbatim.

All had equal voice from both colleges, concerning the generated themes in reply to question-1, except "dedicate job to willing leadership" that appeared only from responses from College-B. For Question no. 2, which related to suggestions for faculty members, number of responses from both colleges was similar, whereas the faculty of College-B primarily felt a need for a collaborative environment.

CAPSULE SUMMARY

The study brings up following recommendations essential for transition from conventional to integrated curriculum.

- Planning and preparation
- Faculty involvement in planning and execution
- Efficient feedback system
- Provision of incentives
- Robust policies for execution of plan

Table-I: Initial & axial-codes, final themes with some representative quotes:

Initial Codes	Axial Codes	Final Themes	Representative Quotes	
SUGGESTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATION; Question-1				
A coordinating headquarters with leader	“Dedicated leadership”	“Dedicate the job to willing leadership”	“All of these efforts ought to be coordinated under the direction of a central office (a kind of headquarter)”. (B-4)	
The forthcoming leader	“Willing leadership”		“That shouldn’t be done until the leader is on board, if at all possible. Otherwise, no system will function”. (B-3)	
Leader on-board				
Training of the faculty	“Faculty Training “	“Plan properly and prepare”	“Certainly, to train the faculty. Your faculty cannot work if they are unaware of the modular system. I believe the first and most crucial component is the faculty’s training”. (A-2)	
Regular workshops holding				
Manpower enhancement	“Resource provision”		“Additionally, all conditions necessary for adding personnel should be made easier. In this system, group instruction is the norm, hence all necessary audio-visual aids should be given. All resources should be made available in accordance with the needs.”. (A-4)	
Augmentation of audiovisual (AV) aids				
Increased resources				
Infrastructure				
Need -assessment	“Prior planning”		“The administration should make a proper plan as its first priority”. (B-2)	
Proper planning				
Resolution of conflict	“Voice of the faculty”	“Establish a Proper feedback system”	“I believe the problem is that we don’t address faculty issues, and I believe that if we did, the disputes would end immediately”. (B-3)	
Listening to the faculty				
Feedback	“Feedback system”		“Administration should properly consider student and teacher’s feedback so that we can more effectively collaborate.”. (A-5)	
Provision of incentives	“Incentives”	“Provide Incentives”	“One factor provision of the teaching staff with incentives that allow for additional perks like housing, transportation, etc. in place of a wage boost.” (A-3)	
Reward system				
SUGGESTIONS FOR FACULTY; Question-2				
Show interest	“Show flair for personal growth”	“Carry out Self-directed learning”	“Faculty should also evaluate their own performance to determine whether they are staying within the parameters of their goals.” (A-4)	
Carryout personal evaluation				
Become forthcoming				
Equip themselves	“Get trained”		“Carry out Self-directed learning”	“Faculty members should undoubtedly consider if they would be interested in taking new courses on their own when the modular system was introduced. To better prepare myself and increase my knowledge”. (A-2)
Train themselves				
Updated knowledge				
Educate themselves				
Get aware of requirements	“Acquire teaching skills”		“Carry out Self-directed learning”	“They should have the necessary knowledge and keep themselves up to speed with the most recent materials, including textbooks and teaching methods, in order to inform pupils in a timely manner.”. (A-3)
Update students well				
Prepare Meaningful lectures				
Interdepartmental meetings	“Inter-departmental meetings”	“Nurture a collaborating environment”	They can hold intra-departmental meetings, and the ensuing consensus will be beneficial. (B-4)	
Communicate with faculty	“Collaboration among faculty”		“So that we don’t become overburdened, communication between disciplines and between each other should be good.” (B-1)	
Motivate fellows and colleagues				

DISCUSSION

It's hard to introduce change in any set-up, especially in the academics¹⁴. Resistance by the faculty towards change and their approach to it count as the factors hindering the transition to an integrated curriculum^{3,8}, henceforth, it is highly recommended that suggestions by the faculty be considered when planning any reforms on education, and the current research is in line with it.

It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of key stakeholders in the fruitful implementation of any program. The theme that surfaced first and foremost for the administration was "to dedicate a willing leadership". Evidence shows that ownership by capable leaders who support educational innovations and believe in them is essential³. They can play an important role in fostering a beneficially positive culture by providing structural support and involving the faculty in decision-making at the preliminary level of educational programs¹⁵. An earlier national study has identified the political will, strong leadership, and program ownership as the elements facilitating the transition to an integrated system¹. Because the faculty at college-B, which has been involved in and overseeing the integrated curriculum for more than nine years, provided the basis for this theme, it can be assumed that giving the responsibility to willing leadership will result in a smooth transition and long-term sustainability. The real leadership can have an added, substantial role in guaranteeing accurate planning & groundwork, the 2nd theme relied on the axial codes of faculty training, resource provision and well-timed preparation and planning.

Introducing change remains a daring concept. In order to bring about effective change, the training needs of all dynamically aboard affiliates must be addressed. The superior and targeted training must be steady, and any fresh members should also be "brought up to date" with the ongoing program. Inventive techniques should be assumed¹⁶. Of paramount importance is the provision of ample and suitable resources by the administration for fruitful results¹⁷. Teaching an integrated curriculum is definitely a resource-intensive program. Often, in the beginning, resources are insufficient to run the program thereby putting its sustainability at risk. Infrastructure, faculty, and technical support are essential, particularly when switching to ground-breaking teaching methods that heavily rely on faculty development and demand superfluous resources. If the curriculum reform is to be successful, the necessary reserves should be identified at the stage of focused need assessment and the essential support obtained¹⁸.

The published research also suggests another theme: establishing a strong feedback mechanism that pays attention to faculty input while continually changing the curriculum. Recognizing the curricular deficiencies and inconsistencies that faculty members often disclose through feedback is important in order to incorporate any revisions required for the program's continuation¹⁹. As one of the factors leading to futile reforms is a reluctance to involve faculty in decision-making, paying attention by influential people can help the process both during

and after its launch⁵.

Establishing and maintaining a curriculum is a difficult endeavor¹⁸. With so many responsibilities already on their plates, faculty members find it difficult to maintain their ardor for the program. Faculty participation is sparked by the impact of research on career flight, but the desire to devote time to curriculum is diminished²⁰. As previously suggested, incentives provided by the institution's administration to faculty may encourage them to participate actively and, as a result, go above and beyond to guarantee the transitioning curriculum's success.

The theme of self-driven learning (as a recommendation to the faculty) is aided by the fact that on one's professional level, the catalysts required for a beneficial transformation comprise awareness, knowledge as well as the attitude²¹. If integration is the goal, the faculty must be eager, encouraging, and completely committed to learning using all available resources¹⁹.

Teaching staff should now be fully trained, equipped and qualified prior to embarking on any reforms on curriculum, like it has already been reported to produce positive results^{22,23}. This evidence lends credence to the idea that faculty should adopt an integrated curriculum effectively and sustainably if they want to receive accreditation for doing so.

The essential spirit is destroyed when the traditional curriculum is taught in a disconnected manner, and the boundaries between subjects are also strengthened. Communication and collaboration between disciplines are rendered obsolete by the turf polluted by traditional curricula, which causes opposition among the faculty. In addition, creating cross-links across disciplines, organizing curriculum content rationally, and interdisciplinary teaching are the main concepts that an integrated curriculum revolves around. All of this is dependent on cross-disciplinary dialogue³.

The College-B participants' proposal to the faculty of cultivating a collaborative environment emphasizes upon the importance of this strategy for the longevity of curricular improvements. It is consistent with the idea that, as we move up the integration ladder, the boundaries between disciplines must dissolve in order for the integration of fundamental knowledge and its application to be successful^{2,24}. The leadership should implement a plan for interdisciplinary collaboration by creating multi-level committees in addition to the faculty's individual efforts^{3,18}. The depths of an integrated curriculum's multidimensional structure, which depends on a number of interdependent pieces, also call for a thorough approach²⁵.

CONCLUSION

This study has found a number of recommendations that, if taken on board by the administration and faculty, might facilitate the seamless and long-lasting transition to an integrated medical curriculum. Policies that guarantee the application of these recommendations and faculty involvement in both planning and implementation must be implemented to

achieve an effortless transition.

LIMITATIONS

One restriction was a limited time that prevented students from participation. A prospective study where the same faculty might have discussed the pre- and post-experience could be done. This may accurately represent how attitudes change over time. Triangulation with future student perceptions can also improve the validity and generalizability of the findings.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Asma Hafeez	Conception and design, Acquisition of data, Analysis and interpretation of data, Drafting the Article
Aaiz Feroze Khan	Analysis and interpretation of data, Drafting the Article, Critical revision
Irum Zakria	Analysis and interpretation of data, Drafting the Article, Critical revision
Brekhna Jamil	Analysis and interpretation of data, Critical revision

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