

Role of the facilitator in post graduate training programme: Students' perspectives

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Abstract

The teaching of post graduate students is undergoing major changes over the past few decades. Indian studies have revealed a mixed viewpoint on the challenges faced by the facilitator during post graduate teaching. The dominant paradigm seems to be that students learn when teachers transfer knowledge to them, whilst they are expected to function more independently in postgraduate education. This research thus aims to explore the consequences on role of faculty in post graduate education and how such contribution changes the conditions for teaching as we move from a discipline-based view to a learning-based view on higher education.

A set of questionnaires were imparted to second and third year post-graduate students of all disciplines of University College of Medical Sciences and Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital for their answer and comments and results were analysed on a Likert's scale.

A total of 143 post graduate students participated in the study. The perspective of students showed that as the post graduate students gradually shift more towards self-directed learning evolution, the role of the facilitator in this change cannot be disregarded.

PG study cannot be solely facilitator motivated but is also a self-driven learning evolution which facilitates the learner's own capacity development. In most cases it is best for both the teacher and the taught to use a combination of the above approaches to ensure that students' needs are met and a well-balanced educational atmosphere is generated.

Keywords: Facilitator; Post Graduate Training Programme; Medical Education.

Introduction

Education is a continuous process of imparting knowledge, developing skills, inculcating values and promoting the overall personality development of human beings. Imparting quality education is greatly influenced by different factors viz. curriculum, faculty, and information source, teaching methods, examination systems, evaluation mechanism and infrastructure. Among all the components, faculty assumes a vital role in ensuring a quality education. Continuous enhancement and up-gradation of a conceptual knowledge, practical skills and competencies of faculties in their chosen subjects to ensure quality education to younger generation has become a great concern of all academic institutions aspiring to impart quality education to younger generation across the globe.⁽¹⁾

Medical education has seen major changes over the past decade. While the increasing emphasis on student autonomy in medical education has moved the centre of gravity away from the teacher and closer to the student, the teacher continues to have a key role in student learning.

The teaching of post graduate (PG) students is undergoing major changes over the past few decades. Indian studies have revealed a mixed viewpoint on the challenges faced by the facilitator during PG teaching.⁽²⁻⁴⁾ Development in the field of information technology and enhanced educational system, the time is opportune to extricate from teacher centered

approach and adopt a student centered self-directed learning.

The policies and practices of higher education have over emphasized academic content and its teaching as a primary core discipline objective. However PG education varies widely from taught to research-based programmes. Literature suggests that students are often ill-prepared for the changes in learning, teaching, and approach to the curriculum training from the undergraduate to postgraduate levels – regardless of the programme format.⁽⁵⁾ The dominant paradigm seems to be that students learn when teachers transfer knowledge to them, whilst they are expected to function more independently in postgraduate education.

This research aims to explore the consequences on role of faculty in PG education and how such contribution changes the conditions for teaching as we move from a discipline-based view to a learning-based view on higher education. It is our argument that such views may facilitate our understanding of postgraduate students' learning processes and find ways that could enable students to self-develop transferable competencies. With this above aim, the present study was designed to evaluate the following objectives

- a. To determine the students viewpoint on the extent of involvement of faculty members in implementation of training for the post graduate students in the respective department.
- b. To identify the contribution of the facilitator in PG curriculum designing and effective evaluation.

Material and Method

This study was conducted from August 2014 to September 2014. A set of questionnaires were imparted to second and third year post-graduate students of all disciplines of UCMS and GTB Hospital for their answer and comments. The questionnaire had been validated by three independent individuals who were not part of this proposal. Participation was voluntary and strict confidentiality was maintained regarding identity. The ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional ethics committee. All the participants were informed of the purpose, design of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation. The results of the questionnaires were analysed for evaluation on a Likert's scale.

Results

A total of 143 PG students participated in the study. A majority of post graduate students (92.96 %) felt that evolution from undergraduate to PG level requires motivational change which should be initiated by the facilitators. There was no significant difference between the responses of clinical and non-clinical departments. However more than half of the students also state that PG study should not be exclusively facilitator motivated but a self-driven learning component was also essential.

More than 60 % of the PG students agree that the contribution of all faculty members in their respective

departments is noteworthy. The academic and research ambience satisfied nearly 50% of the students.

That post graduate training system has helped to develop their critical thinking skills in 81% of learners.

Overwhelming number of participants (98.6 %) observed that there is an urgent need for remodelling of current curriculum with involvement of faculty members in such restructuring. They opined that a structured centralized curriculum plan should be followed uniformly in all colleges and the curriculum planning decision should not be left to individual colleges alone. Activities like PG seminar, UG small group discussions and exchange of feedback between facilitator's and students were favoured by 94% of students as also demonstration/bed side teachings as a method of training. The need for up gradation of ancillary staff and logistic support was felt by 70 %.

Fifty one percent of students find that the current method of assessment is not able to judge them accurately and 86% of students felt improvement in evaluation system is needed. Majority of students (80.6%) suggested that formative assessment should be done more often which should include both theory and practical and around one third felt that there should be three summative assessments – one at the end of each year by external assessors, instead of a single one at the end three years. Majority of students (72.7%) do not support the idea that self-assessment is sufficient and feel facilitators' evaluation is mandatory. (Table 1)

Table 1: Students agreement status of major questionnaire

Statement	% Agreed
Transition from under-graduate to post-graduate student requires a change in psychological and social motivation	90
This change in psychological and social motivation should come from the facilitator	92.96
Post-graduate study is essentially a self-driven learning evolution	56
Assisted training by the facilitator give direction to student's thought process and generate more confidence, academic rationalism and give better insight into the subject.	65
Awareness of the learner, initiated by the facilitator, improves the outcome of learning.	65
All faculty members of the department are involved in imparting training to the PG students.	65
Extent of involvement of faculty members of the department involved in imparting training to the PG students is satisfactory.	69
Extent of training imparted to students in respective department is satisfactory.	50
The research ambience in the department helps stimulate your learning.	49
Post graduate training system has helped to develop your critical thinking skills.	81
Current method of assessment judges student accurately	50
Current method of assessment needs improvement	86
Formative assessments should be done more often including both theory and practical	80.6
There should be three summative assessments –one each year by external assessor, instead of a single one at the end three years.	35
Self-assessment is sufficient and motivating by itself and facilitators' evaluation is not required.	27
A structured centralized curriculum plan should be followed uniformly in all colleges	95
Curriculum planning should not be a decision left to individual colleges	92
Faculty members should be involved in laying down practical guidelines and preparing curriculum to enhance the depth and breadth of learning experience	98.6
Opportunities like PG seminar, journal club, UG small group discussions, UG tutoring & demonstrating or bedside teaching help in developing teaching skill and improvement of PG students' creativity and depth of knowledge	94
Departmental PG training programme can be improved if there was more money, staff & space	70

Discussion

Medical education in this part of the developing world is waking up to the fact that there is a need for change with emphasis on the shift from teacher-centered (knowledge transfer by facilitators) to student-centered (ensuring self-motivation and learning by students) learning.

As transition from undergraduate to post graduate student require a change in psychological and social motivation, majority of PG students desired that this change should be initiated by the facilitators. A facilitator's guidance is required for giving direction to the students' thought process and generating confidence. Direction by faculty makes the internalisation of subject matter sound when encapsulated in the experiential wisdom of the faculty of its relevance and current need.

Although majority of the students maintained that the teacher centered education is more effective strategy, they also felt that PG study cannot be solely facilitator motivated but is also a self-driven learning evolution. Self-motivated learning not only helps a student to adapt more appropriately to all circumstances but it also facilitates the learner's own capacity development since delivery of the whole scale pre-packaged import of material is not entertained.^(6,7) Having mostly experienced pedagogic principles of learning as undergraduates, it is therefore important that these learners' be guided skilfully in the process of becoming a self-directed adult learner.⁽⁸⁾

In most cases it is best for both the teacher and the taught to use a combination of the above approaches to ensure that students' needs are met and a well-balanced educational atmosphere is generated.

A major obstacle to the effective planning and delivery of a training programme in any speciality has been a silo mentality in which different departments responsible for imparting education are considered in isolation. A stimulating and challenging intellectual environment in the department with opportunities for inter and intra departmental interaction is an essential prerequisite for comprehensive learning, due to the interdependencies of all fields of medical sciences.

Most of the PG students participating in the present study were contented with the level of involvement of faculty members in their post graduate training; however integrated teaching, problem based learning and more systematic curriculum planning can be advocated.

For improving the quality of PG training, the emphasis must shift from 'importing' only theoretical knowledge to indigenous generation of new knowledge. This can be done by developing interdepartmental and translational research and teaching programmes with other institutes of excellence. The research ambience in the respective departments of our hospital along with dexterous supervision of the learner has helped to stimulate the learning process and inculcate

professional skills in PG students. Similar views are echoed by others from western India.⁽⁹⁾

Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of curricula is now recognized as an integral part of the educational process.⁽¹⁰⁾ Majority of the students agreed to the need for restructuring of current curriculum such that it is interactive, exploring future trends and incorporate rapidly changing technologies and experience from other places, comparable to views expressed by other studies.^(1,11) Students expressed a strong opinion in favour of involvement of faculty members in laying down practical guidelines and preparing curriculum to enhance the depth and breadth of learning experience. However students should, by no means, be omitted from the planning and evaluation of curriculum as they are the immediate beneficiaries, as expressed by Coles et al.⁽¹²⁾

There has been little collaborative planning by professional colleges responsible for postgraduate medical education. This has led to ambiguities in the methods of imparting training to the students. The PG students also expressed the need for a uniform curriculum of training programme to be followed by all colleges. The participants suggested that a structured departmental curriculum should be provided to the PG students to ensure timely completion of the course. Majority of students felt that teaching methods affect learning in postgraduate education, and activities like PG seminar, UG small group discussions, tutoring, demonstration/bedside teaching etc. were welcomed by them.

Constructive feedback from students to teacher and vice-versa is considered a healthy method of education by majority of students.

Creating better evaluation system for students is the need of the hour. One of the objectives of PG education is the unbiased evaluation of its students and self-criticism of the teaching process. It is thus vital to develop an appropriate methodology within this educational domain. The process of formative assessment with measurements of analytical skills needs to be scheduled more frequently as suggested by the students. Assessment blueprints which links the expected exit outcome and competencies to the tools for performance assessment needs to be prepared and administered. This type of outcome based assessment helps in ensuring that assessment is coherent and consistent for all. Moreover it provides opportunities to students to demonstrate proficiency in a specific competency and improves quality of assessment.⁽¹³⁾ Endowing students with constructive feedback on their achievements also helps to improve students' knowledge in PG education.

Conclusion

As the PG students gradually shift more towards self-directed learning evolution, the role of the facilitator in this change cannot be disregarded. The

challenges faced by the learner in this respect have to be balanced by a combination of approaches. To help learner acquire professional competencies that are in alignment with the health needs of our country, a uniform systematic process of curriculum planning with opportunities of constructive feedback and improved evaluation tools to document progress would be required. This would go a long way to shape learners and make them ready for tasks and responsibilities that would be entrusted to them at the end of their learning programme. Such an approach has the added advantage of pointing out to the lacunae in the current approach and indicates directional changes for filling up the lacunae.

The authors' feel that many more such studies be conducted at different institutes all over India to elicit the views of PG students and thus help co-ordinators and regulatory bodies on PG education to formulate a purposeful policy for universal acceptance.

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