



**PERCEPTIONS AND FEEDBACK OF TEACHERS ABOUT THE NATIONAL MEDICAL
COMMISSION INDIA MANDATED ELECTIVES PROGRAM**

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ABSTRACT

Electives program was introduced by the National Medical Council of India for the phase 3 MBBS students as mandatory 2-months program, to facilitate learning beyond primary care and to allow students to plan their careers by providing more choices. An online study was conducted involving 111 teacher-facilitators to collect their perceptions, experiences and suggestions for further improvement of the electives program for medical graduates.

Results: A total of 35 departments participated in electives posting. Majority of the faculty (89%) were of the opinion that Electives program was a useful addition to MBBS course, and most of them (64%) considered the duration of Electives program to be just right. Most of the faculty members (88%) felt that the addition of electives before completion of MBBS course is an advantage to the students; it provided them with a learning platform that was different from routine helping them to develop self-directed learning skills and to contemplate about their career choices. Only 3% of the teachers felt that it wasted students' time and rest 8% were not sure about the relevance of elective program. Sixty five percent felt that this program not only enhanced their pre-existing knowledge and confidence but also bettered their organizational skills. **Conclusions:** Teachers perceived electives as a positive entry. Our study highlighted the potential of electives in undergraduate medical curricula by pointing out the possible strengths of the electives.

KEYWORDS: *Competency-based medical education, Electives, MBBS, National medical council, Perceptions, Teachers.*

INTRODUCTION

Basic science and clinical subjects constitute the traditional medical curriculum. With the introduction of competency based medical education (CBME), early clinical experience and self-directed learning have tried to introduce students to novel methods to widen their academic horizons. Electives further offer alternative curricular pathways for better learning opportunities with personalized medical curricula and enhanced self-motivation of student.^[1] Although there is no standard definition, the term "electives" implies "a period of time during undergraduate training within which there is a significant element of student choice".^[2] With ever-growing new scientific areas, various biomedical, biosocial and information technologies, and with the limited time available to medical undergraduate, electives compliment the core medical curricula.^[1] Thus, the inclusion of electives in medical curriculum is of

immense importance. Notwithstanding their emerging relevance in medical curricula, literature about electives is scarce, probably being the least researched component of undergraduate medical education.^[3]

Electives have been a part of medical training in India since long and these are done at the end of 4 ½ years of undergraduate medical training as a part of internship or clinical training postings. But the National Medical Commission (NMC) formally introduced electives in CBME curriculum for undergraduate medical students at the completion of phase-3 part-1 before the completion of undergraduate training.^[4] The reason for this change though not articulated clearly, could be to facilitate learning beyond primary care and allow students to reflect and plan their careers, provide wider horizon of choices. This might also allow students to begin the process of professional networking early.

In essence, it consists of mandatory 2-months electives (2 blocks of 4 weeks each) posting for undergraduate medical students at the completion of phase-3 part-1. Block-1 shall be done in a pre-selected pre-clinical, para-clinical, basic sciences laboratory or under a researcher in an ongoing research project. Block-2 shall be done in a clinical department (including super specialties, ICUs, blood bank and emergency services). The NMC also released a module on electives to guide the institutes to implement the electives.^[4]

It is important that academic institutions should collect feedback from stakeholders, teachers in our case, about their educational satisfaction with electives. This feedback provides an opportunity for teachers to reflect on teaching-learning methodology and also offers the possibility for them as well as institutions to use feedback for further improvement.

To the best of our knowledge there is no study from India that has explored the perceptions of teachers-facilitators about this newly introduced program. To fill this gap, we conducted this study to assess the relevance and importance of Electives program (for Phase 3 Part II M.B.B.S. students -2019 Batch) as perceived by the teacher-facilitators.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted at the Pt. B. D. Sharma PGIMS, Rohtak. The ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Institute Ethics Committee (vide No. BREC/23/148 dated 08.5.2023). The electives program was meticulously planned and carried out as per the NMC guidelines. The participating faculty was sensitized and oriented in advance with the objectives of electives program and the logistics involved.

Teachers who participated as facilitators for various electives in different departments constituted the study population. The study was conducted online using pre-designed, pre-tested questionnaire as a Google form. A link to the form was shared with all the eligible participants. All the consenting participants were requested to complete an online proforma.

Data Analysis

The data thus collected was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative statistical techniques.

RESULTS

A total of 35 departments participated in electives posting (Block 1= 14 & Block 2= 21). Out of 111

contacted faculty members, 101 responded. Most of the faculty members were of age group 36–55 years, females (65%) and most of them (72%) had >10 years of teaching experience.

The initial part of the questionnaire sought their opinion as to the duration and overall opinion about the usefulness of the Electives program. Majority of the faculty (89%) were of the opinion that Electives program was a useful addition to MBBS course, and most of them (64%) considered the duration of Electives program to be just right.

The second part of the questionnaire sought their feedback regarding relevance of the program. It is obvious from Table 1 that most of the faculty members (88%) felt that the addition of electives before completion of MBBS course is an advantage to the students; it provided them with a learning platform that was different from routine, helping them to develop self-directed learning skills and to contemplate about their career choices. Only 3% of the teachers felt that it wasted students' time and rest 8% were not sure about the relevance of elective program.

When asked about the effectiveness of the electives program, almost 3/4th of the participants opined that the program benefitted the students in acquiring motor skills and provided them with real life experience [Table 2]. Sixty five percent felt that this program not only enhanced their pre-existing knowledge and confidence but also bettered their organizational skills.

Responding to open-ended questions [Table 3], faculty members felt that the program was highly structured, well planned and timed. Many facilitators expressed their willingness to add more modules in their specialties. Concerns raised by some included the program being too early for the MBBS students, and that the structure of the program somehow encouraged nonseriousness among the students. Also, that many students wasted their time during this posting and treated this time as holiday. Method of allocation also called for attention suggesting that allocation of electives should be as per the choice of students.

Table 1: Responses of faculty to specific questions related to impact of Electives Program on students (n=101).

Do you think that	Yes n (%)	No n (%)
Addition of Electives before completion of MBBS course is an advantage to students	89 (88.11)	12 (11.90)
Introduced students to learning environment that is different from usual, regular learning	92 (91.08)	9 (8.91)
Help students to decide about their career plans	93 (92.01)	8 (8.01)
Helped students to acquire self-directed learning skills	90 (89.10)	11 (10.99)
Was a wastage of time*	3 (2.19)	89 (88.01)

*9 participants were not sure about it.

Table 2: Skills gained by students due to Electives Program as perceived by faculty members (n=101).

Skill	Frequency n (%)
More Knowledge	65 (64.09)
Motor skills	71 (70.19)
Organization skills	37(37.01)
Exposure to real life experience	74 (73.39)
Increase in confidence	52 (51.19)

Table 3: Responses of faculty to open-ended questions.

Allocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It should be allocated as per student's choice • Low diversity • Good method in the absence of adequate number of modules available
Organization of electives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well planned and organized • Sensitization workshop helped • Day-wise program schedule made things clear • Too complex • Not enough infrastructure available
Operational logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased workload • Demands extra effort and time from teachers • Exposed students to different type of learning • Real-world experience for students • Need more support from department and colleagues • Wastage of students' time
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Method of assessment is tedious • Assessment seemed more subjective than objective • Reflections is a good method of assessment
Socio-affective tones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Felt good doing things with students • Challenging but interesting • Lessened the gap between teachers and students • Enriching on personal note • Unique for us but liked it • More interactive than traditional teaching; good for both teachers and students • Students became nonserious • Students wasted time; holiday for them

DISCUSSION

Apropos of the initiative by MCI,^[4] Electives program was implemented in our institute for the MBBS batch (Year 2019). The index study was carried out to assess the perceptions of faculty members involved as facilitators/teachers about the usefulness and effectiveness of this course, and their suggestions for further improvement. To the best of our knowledge there are no studies from India exploring the newly introduced pattern of electives in MBBS curriculum.

Purpose of change in timeline for electives though not clear, but this introduction was considered appropriate by majority of the participants in our study and as suggested by many researchers, facilitators felt that electives helped students to gain confidence, skills and self-directed learning by creating a condition of optimal challenge.^[1,5,6]

Majority of the faculty in our study were of the opinion that the Elective program was a useful addition to the MBBS course and it helped students to get acquainted to

the new career choices as well as sensitized them to newer skills expected of and useful to Indian Medical Graduate. Similar benefits of electives have been suggested by other researchers as well.^[6,7]

It is important to highlight that many facilitators raised the concern that the students enjoyed this posting as free time. This poses a serious threat to the concept of elective itself as cautioned by Mathur et al as well.^[8]

Feedback from facilitators echoed the two advantages of electives mentioned by Kusrkar & Croiset.^[9] First, the electives provide the opportunity to experience something more than which are not a part of the routine syllabus, introduces "autonomy-support" in the curriculum. Autonomy-support or providing choices to students in their learning is an important pillar for stimulating autonomous motivation.^[6] Second, electives help to cater to high-caliber students who often find the medical syllabus too restrictive and boring. Electives provide them with more challenges in their study and

opportunities to do things which are different from the routine study.^[9] Facilitators also perceived electives as a novel but valuable experience as described earlier by Mihalynuk et al^[10], with benefits in providing a better learning and academic platform, with an opportunity of personalizing medical curricula and stimulating self-motivation of students. The latter reflects the self-determination theory of self-motivation.^[6]

CONCLUSION

The Electives program has largely been perceived as a positive addition by the faculty. It is hoped that this program would be successful in meeting its objectives by not only providing the diverse learning experience, but also stimulate experiential and transversal learning. Feedback from the maiden year of implementation of electives will help recognizing the shortcomings and to improve. Feedback from different institutes can also help in further refining the program for better achievement of objectives.

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