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Challenges faced by medical faculty in implementation of competency-based medical education and lessons learned

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Abstract:

BACKGROUND: Regulations on Graduate Medical Education (Amendment), 2019 (GME) introduced competency-based medical education (CMBE) for undergraduate medical students and were implemented in the 2019 entrance batch in medical colleges all over India. This study aimed to find out the challenges faced by medical teachers in CBME implementation, lessons learned, and the level of preparedness for upcoming batches.

MATERIAL AND METHODS: A cross-sectional, multi-centric descriptive study was conducted from November 2021 to February 2022 including first-year faculty of medical colleges. A self-administered questionnaire was provided through electronic media, about challenges faced during CBME implementation and suggestions for improvement. Responses were analyzed as descriptive statistics, and content analysis was conducted for open-ended questions.

RESULTS: A total of 50 responses were analyzed. About 46% believed that the foundation course (FC) could satisfy the GME Regulation's goal to only some extent. About 60% believed that integration was not optimum, and 40% had not taken any integrated session. About 36% had not taken any attitude, ethics and communication (AETCOM) session, and 30% considered that they were not sufficiently competent. About 68% believed that early clinical exposure (ECE) given is insufficient. "Skills" (50%) and "attitude-communication" (34%) could not be satisfactorily assessed. About 72% believed that the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic significantly affected academics, 20% are still confused about the complexities of CBME, and 58% believed they are better prepared for the future. The COVID-19 pandemic (78%), lack of proper training (70%), and adequate faculty (60%) were common difficulties. Frequent hands-on workshops (68%) and better inter-departmental coordination (68%) were suggested.

CONCLUSION: First professional-year faculties are slowly getting accustomed to the transition from a traditional to a competency-based curriculum. These reforms are complex, and the challenges need to be addressed sincerely and timely.

Keywords:

Competency-based medical education (CBME), medical education, self-directed learning and educational measurement

Introduction

Regulations on Graduate Medical Education were notified way back in 1997. A need was felt for more than 20 years to relook into all aspects of the

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existing regulations, and changes were required to make the medical curriculum more learner-centric, patient-centric, and outcome-centric.^[1]

Regulations on Graduate Medical Education (Amendment) 2019 (GME) were notified on May 14, 2019, and were

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implemented on medical students of the 2019 entrance batch. These regulations introduced competency-based medical education (CBME) for undergraduate medical students. The National Medical Commission (NMC) is the regulatory body in India that has the responsibility of regulating the quality of medical education in the country. It came into force in August 2019 after succeeding the erstwhile Medical Council of India.^[2] The traditional curriculum, which was driven by knowledge and content, and was teacher-centric, is now replaced by a competency-based curriculum, which is student-centric and driven by outcome or knowledge application. Competency is defined as an observable ability of a healthcare professional, and it includes components, such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes.[3]

Transitioning from traditional medical education to CBME requires careful change in the organizational structure of training programs so that new curricula and assessment methods can be delivered. It requires modification in processes of teaching and evaluation, as well as effective communication and strong support among all stakeholders involved in the process.^[4,5]

More than 2 years have passed since the introduction and implementation of CBME in medical colleges all over India. During this time, the world has witnessed tough times with the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic that has significantly affected the education system throughout the world including medical education.^[6]

Few studies have reported the faculty's perspective on CBME in India. Ramanathan *et al.*^[7] in their study on faculty perception including 91 medical colleges have reported that 80% opined that faculties in departments are inadequate for CBME implementation. Teli *et al.*^[8] have reported that inadequate faculty and lack of coordination among departments can affect CBME implementation. Most of the studies have reported faculty's perceptions but the extent of specific challenges faced have not been focused in these studies.^[7-9] Thus, a need was felt to find out the challenges faced by medical teachers in its implementation, lessons learned, and the level of preparedness of teachers for the upcoming batches.

Materials and Methods

Study design and setting: A cross-sectional, multi-centric descriptive study was conducted including all medical colleges of Udaipur District of Rajasthan State in India. The study was conducted from November 2021 to February 2022. There are one government and four private medical colleges in the Udaipur District.

Study participants and sampling: All teaching faculty members of pre-clinical subjects (anatomy, biochemistry, and physiology) were included in the study as they were the forbearers of the implementation of CBME. A total of 90 first-year faculty from the Department of Anatomy, Biochemistry, and Physiology were contacted.

Data collection tool and technique: A self-administered questionnaire was prepared including both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The questions were related to challenges faced during CBME implementation and covered faculty development, foundation course (FC), integration and alignment, AETCOM modules, early clinical exposure (ECE), self-directed learning (SDL), small group teaching, competency-based assessment, and COVID-19 pandemic's impact on CBME implementation. Every section included open-ended questions for specific problems faced during planning and implementation, as well as suggestions for further improvement. The questionnaire was validated for content validity and face validity with the help of Medical Education Unit (MEU) faculty members and was modified accordingly. The questionnaire was then converted into a Google Form due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and was circulated online.

All first-year faculties from both government and private medical colleges of Udaipur District, whose mobile contact numbers were available on their college website or could be arranged from their college office, were sent the Google Form via electronic platforms. After 1 week, two reminders were sent, 2 days apart, requesting them to fill out the form. Informed consent was taken along with the Google Form. The link was active for 2 months, and after 2 months, the link was deactivated, and no more responses were accepted.

Data analysis: All the responses were analyzed as descriptive statistics, and content analysis was conducted for open-ended questions.

Ethical Consideration: The study plan and the questionnaire were approved by the Institutional Ethical Committee before starting data collection.

Results

A total of 90 first-year faculty from the Department of Anatomy, Biochemistry, and Physiology could be contacted. Fifty-seven responses were received at the end of 2 months; seven responses were grossly incomplete and thus removed from the analysis. Finally, 50 responses were analyzed.

About 42% of respondents were professors, 28% were associate professors, 18% were assistant professors, and

12% were senior residents. About 58% of respondents were members of the MEU in their respective institutes. About 88% of respondents had attended some form of training in medical education [Table 1].

Twenty (40%) respondents believed that the FC conducted was able to satisfy the goal mentioned in GME [Table 2]. Extracurricular activities, sessions on communication, and ECE were the most difficult to implement. The most common suggestion (38% of responses) to improve FC implementation was "to cut short the total hours and spread throughout the year" [Table 3]. About 14% responded that integration in more than 20% of the curriculum was conducted, 60% believed that integration was not optimum, and 40% had not taken any integrated session [Table 2]. Inter-departmental coordination was the most common difficulty (36.5% of responses) faced regarding alignment and integration, and "increase active involvement of clinical faculty," and "frequent faculty training" were common suggestions for improvement [Table 3].

About 58% of respondents found themselves sufficiently competent in taking AETCOM sessions, while 36% had not taken any AETCOM sessions. Common methods used were group discussions, role-play, and case-based learning [Table 2]. The most common difficulty reported was "lack of motivation in students for AETCOM sessions" (30% of responses) [Table 3].

About 68% of respondents believed that "Not much ECE given or given only to some extent." About 80% of respondents used the "case-based discussion" method for ECE [Table 2], and the most common difficulty faced was "COVID-19 pandemic and online classes" (29%) [Table 3]. About 48% believed SDL was helpful to some extent in the student's learning process.

Table 1: General information regarding responders

Components	Options	No. of respondents (%); n=50
Department	Anatomy	15 (30)
	Biochemistry	20 (40)
	Physiology	15 (30)
Designation	Professor	21 (42)
	Associate professor	14 (28)
	Assistant professor	09 (18)
	Demonstrator	06 (12)
FDP	Basic course	23 (46)
attended*	Revised basic course	25 (50)
	CISP workshop	34 (68)
	Advance course in MET	11 (22)
	FAIMER	1 (2)
	None	9 (18)
Member in	Yes	29 (58)
MEU	No	21 (42)

^{*}Respondents could answer more than one option

About 86% answered that they have made specific learning objectives (SLOs) [Table 2]. Respondents mentioned that formulating SLOs is time-consuming and needs more training, and some competencies are very broad and need multiple SLOs [Table 3].

About 54% of respondents reported that blueprinting has been conducted in their department, and 54% considered themselves sufficiently competent in blueprinting. As per respondents, "Skills" (50%) and "attitude and communication" (34%) could not be satisfactorily assessed in formative assessments [Table 4]. About 72% believed that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected academics, and practical learning (86%) and ECE (76%) were most affected [Table 2].

In terms of competence in understanding CBME, 20% are still confused about terminologies and complexities, while 58% believed that they are better prepared than last year but still need to learn more. The COVID-19 pandemic (78%), lack of proper training in CBME (70%), and lack of an adequate number of faculty (60%) were the common difficulties stated in the overall implementation of CBME. Better faculty training (78%), frequent hands-on workshops for reinforcement of faculty training (68%), and better inter- and intra-departmental cooperation (68%) were the suggestions given for better implementation of CBME [Table 5].

Discussion

The newly reformed CBME replaced the two-decades-old traditional undergraduate medical education system in 2019. These reforms introduced many new aspects in Indian medical education, such as FC, AETCOM, ECE, small group teaching, SDL, vertical and horizontal integration, and formative assessment methods.[1] Curriculum implementation support program (CISP) workshops were conducted by the NMC throughout the medical colleges of the country, yet the main burden of implementing these reforms was on the medical faculty. Along with the task of implementing CBME, another important task was to cope with the difficulties of yet another challenge, that is, the COVID-19 pandemic. This study was thus conducted with the vision to find out the extent of implementation, challenges faced by the faculty, and the lessons learned while implementing CBME during the initial 2 years. When this study was planned and conducted, the first batch of CBME was still in the second professional year; thus, faculties of the first professional year who have gone through the year-long process of implementation were included.

The majority of the respondents felt that the FC conducted in their institute could satisfy the GME goal "to only some extent." As developing soft skills in students is a

Table 2: Responses to questions related to various components of CBME

Questions	Options	No. of respondents (%); n=50
Do you believe that FC conducted is able to satisfy	Definitely yes	20 (40)
he goal mentioned in GME Regulations, that is, "to	To some extent	23 (46)
prepare a learner to study medicine effectively"?	No, not at all	3 (6)
	I am not sure	4 (8)
ast year how much integration was conducted in	< 5%	9 (18)
irst-year curriculum?	5-10%	11 (22)
	10-20%	9 (18)
	>20%	7 (14)
	I am not sure	14 (28)
Oo you think optimum integration was conducted	Yes	20 (40%)
successfully?	No	30 (60%)
How many sessions were taken by you, which	1	8 (16)
nvolved more than one department?	2	13 (26)
	3 or >3	9 (18)
	None	, ,
Journal of State of S		20 (40)
How many classes have been taken by you in last rear's batch on AETCOM?	None	18 (36)
ear a batch on ALTOOM:	1	8 (16)
	2	8 (16)
	3	5 (10)
	4 or >4	11 (22)
Which method was used by you for teaching	Small group discussion	16 (32)
AETCOM?*	Role-play	16 (32)
	Seminar	10 (20)
	Case-based learning/problem-based learning	16 (32)
	Shown AETCOM-based videos	14 (28)
	None	14 (28)
How much competent did you find yourself in taking	Highly competent	3 (6)
AETCOM?	Sufficiently competent	29 (58)
	Not sufficiently competent	15 (30)
	Not competent at all	3 (6)
As last year's academics were affected by the	Not much ECE given	12 (24)
COVID-19 pandemic, how far ECE could be given to	To some extent	22 (44)
students?	Satisfactorily given	14 (28)
	Highly satisfied with ECE	2 (4)
ECE was implemented in which of the following	Hospital visit	19 (38)
forms?*	Clinical laboratory visit	13 (26)
	,	, ,
	Shown a clinical case (patient)	8 (16)
	Case-based discussion	40 (80)
	As part of AETCOM module	9 (18)
n your experience, how far SDL was helpful in	Not useful at all	4 (8)
student's learning process?	Useful to some extent	24 (48)
	Moderately useful	14 (28)
	Extremely useful	8 (16)
Did you make SLOs for every competency of your	Yes	43 (86)
subject/topic taken by you?	No	7 (14)
low far the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the	Significantly affected	36 (72)
academics in CBME?	To some extent	14 (28)
	Not affected at all	00 (00)
Which part/parts of CBME were most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?*	FC	21 (42%)
•	ECE	38 (76%)
	Large group teaching	21 (42%)
	Small group teaching	15 (30%)
	Practical learning	43 (86%)
	Integrated learning	33 (66%)

Contd...

Table 2: Contd...

Questions	Options	No. of respondents (%); n=50
	Formative assessment	22 (44%)
	Feedback	13 (26%)
	Reflective writing	17 (34%)
	Logbook	16 (32%)

^{*}Respondents could answer more than one option

Table 3: Responses related to challenges faced and suggestions provided for different components of CBME

Question	Responses	No. of responses (%); n=5
FC .		
Which part of FC was most difficult or challenging to implement?	Extracurricular activities	12
	Communication	12
	Integration and alignment	8
	ECE	12
	Skills	6
	Discipline	8
	Assessment	4
Give one suggestion	Make it optional	2
to improve FC and its	Psychiatric counseling to students	2
implementation	More clinical exposure	4
	Include assessment	6
	Cut short the total hours and spread throughout the year	38
	Faculty training and motivation	8
	Improvement of infrastructure	6
	Increase faculty strength	2
	Involvement of senior faculty	2
Alignment and integration		
Mention the most specific	Alignment of topics between different departments	14
difficulty faced during planning	Planning of integration	10
and implementation of	Lack of inter-departmental coordination	30
alignment and integration	Lack of interest shown by clinical faculty	4
	Time management	12
	COVID-19 pandemic	6
	Lack of faculty motivation	2
	Lack of administrative cooperation	2
	Lack of faculty	2
Give one suggestion to	Frequent faculty training	10
improve integration and	Improve active involvement of clinical faculty	14
alignment	Regular academic meetings	6
	Strict implementation of preplanned schedule	10
	Monitoring NMC or institutional head	8
	Uniform schedule to be provided by NMC	6
	Improve intra-departmental coordination	10
	Motivate research in medical education	2
	Motivation of faculty	8
	Increase faculty strength in all departments	4
	More sessions	2
	Flexibility in schedule	4
ETCOM	. 10.113111.	·
Mention one specific difficulty	Lack of resource material	10
faced while taking AETCOM	Lack of motivation in students for AETCOM sessions	16
session	COVID-19 pandemic	6
	Lack of sufficient training	6
	Lack of faculty motivation	6
	Lack of raceity monvation Lack of proper assessment in university examinations	2
	Lack of proper assessment in university examinations Lack of sufficient faculty	4
	Lack of Gamolott lacally	7

Table 3: Contd...

Question	Responses	No. of responses (%); n=50
Please give one suggestion to improve AETCOM sessions	Student motivation and counseling	10
	Keep interactive sessions	10
	All faculty should be involved	6
	NMC should provide sufficient resource material for AETCOM sessions	10
	Frequent faculty training and motivation	20
	Include AETCOM assessment in university examinations	6
	MEU faculty should take AETCOM sessions	4
ECE		
Difficulties faced while	COVID-19 pandemic and online classes	16
implementing ECE	Real patient availability	12
	Large number of students	10
	Lack of sufficient faculty	10
	Lack of motivation in students	4
	Lack of interest in clinical faculty	4
Suggestions to improve planning or implementation of ECE	Increase number of hospital visits	10
	Faculty training	6
	Include clinical cases in lectures	10
	Improve inter- and intra-departmental coordination	4
	More involvement of clinical faculty	12
	Clear basic concepts first, then implement clinical exposure	4
	Use simulation	6
	Improve faculty strength	6
	Plan small group visits to hospital	4
	Make it simple and relate it to first-year subjects	2

^{*}Questions were open-ended and analyzed by content analysis

Table 4: Responses related to formative assessment

Questions	Options	No. of respondents (%); n=50
Blueprinting has been conducted in your	Yes	27 (54%)
department?	No	17 (34)
	Not sure	6 (12)
How much competent did you find	Highly competent	2 (4)
yourself in blueprinting?	Sufficiently competent	27 (54)
	Not sufficiently competent	14 (28)
	Not competent at all	7 (14)
As last year's academics were affected by	Online video call-based viva voce	27 (54)
the COVID-19 pandemic, how formative	Online Google Forms	36 (72)
assessments were taken last year?*	Other online methods	14 (28)
	Offline	7 (14)
How many times formative assessments	1-3	22 (44)
were taken from last year's batch?	4-6	8 (16)
	>6	20 (40)
Which of the following parts could not be	Knowledge	7 (14)
satisfactorily assessed during formative	Skill	25 (50)
assessment?*	Attitude and communication	17 (34)
	None of them	4 (8)
	All were satisfactorily affected	14 (28)

^{*}Respondents could answer more than one option

new avenue for faculty, extracurricular activities and communication skill sessions were the most difficult to implement. The majority suggested reducing the total hours of FC and spreading them throughout the year, as also suggested by Ramanathan *et al.*^[7] Recently, NMC has reduced FC duration to 1 week, but this applies only to one batch (2021–2022) that was admitted late due to

the COVID-19 pandemic.^[10] It would be much better if 1-month duration of FC is distributed throughout the first year which would give sufficient time to the faculty as well as subject-specific sessions could also be started timely.

Integration of up to 20% of the curriculum in each specialty has been recommended in CBME, and 25%

Table 5: Difficulties faced in overall planning and implementation of CBME, solutions suggested

Questions	Responses	No. of responses (%); n=50
Reasons behind difficulties faced by medical faculty in implementation of CBME in India	Lack of proper training of faculty in CBME	35 (70%)
	Lack of proper guidelines	26 (52%)
	Short transition time provided	19 (38%)
	COVID-19 pandemic	39 (78%)
	Lack of support from administration	12 (24%)
	Lack of proper infrastructure	13 (26%)
	Lack of adequate number of faculty	30 (60%)
What do you believe, could help in better implementation of CBME?	Better infrastructure	22 (44%)
	Better faculty training	39 (78%)
	Frequent hands-on workshops for reinforcement of faculty training	34 (68%)
	Better inter- and intra-departmental cooperation	34 (68%)
Where do you find yourself	Still confused about terminologies and complexities	10 (20)
in terms of competence in understanding CBME?	Better prepared than last year but still needs to learn more	29 (48)
	Satisfactorily competent	9 (18)
	Highly competent	2 (4)

of the allotted time in each professional year shall be utilized for integrated learning.^[1] The majority of respondents believed that optimum integration could not be achieved and 40% of participants had not even taken a single integrated session. Lack of inter-departmental coordination is a major obstacle while implementing alignment and integration in this study, as also reported by others.^[7] Integration and its core approaches, that is, vertical and horizontal, are far from reality and still appear to be on paper.^[11] Haramati A. has stressed that integration in medical education is a sensitive area and needs to be effectively covered in training workshops.^[12]

Though more than half of the respondents consider themselves sufficiently competent in AETCOM, lack of motivation among medical students has been a major problem during these sessions. Another difficulty is the lack of sufficient resource material available for such sessions. Respondents have suggested the need for frequent faculty training in AETCOM as well as the availability of sufficient resource material. Lal *et al.*^[13] have suggested that one-time training is not sufficient and regular sensitization of faculty is important for core competencies of AETCOM.

The ECE given to students was not sufficient. The most common method used was "case-based discussion," as hospital visits and exposure to the actual clinical patient were not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. ECE could make basic science subjects more relevant by increasing interest and motivation in students. [7,14] Respondents in this study believed that to improve ECE, there is a need to increase the involvement of clinical faculty with more hospital visits.

Specific competencies for each speciality have been provided in the competency-based undergraduate curriculum,^[1] but the SLOs for each competency are to be made by the faculty. The majority answered that

they have made SLOs but found them time-consuming and also felt the need for more training in making SLOs.

As the COVID-19 pandemic had significantly affected the assessment of medical students throughout the world,^[15] respondents in this study also reported that formative assessments were reduced and conducted mainly online, and skills and AETCOM could not be satisfactorily assessed.

Almost half of the respondents accepted that they are better prepared for future batches but still need to learn more about CBME. The most common challenges encountered in overall implementation were the COVID-19 pandemic, lack of proper training in CBME, and lack of adequate faculty. Various faculty development programs (FDPs) were conducted by NMC, and the majority of faculty in this study were trained, yet they felt the need for better and more frequent hands-on workshops for reinforcement of training. New educational roles of faculty in CBME require them to work as a facilitator, planner, manager, and performance assessor, and a mere 3 days of the CISP cannot provide this competency. [16] There is a requirement for much more elaborative training programs to meet the complexities of CBME and to inculcate confidence in faculty for the same.[7-9,11]

Limitations and recommendations

This study was restricted to five medical colleges of Udaipur District and first professional-year faculty. Though this study tried to address many aspects of CBME, a few aspects, such as skill laboratory, logbooks, electives, and summative assessments, could not be included.

Conduction of frequent and elaborative FDPs is one of the major recommendations. Reduction in the total duration of FC and spreading it throughout the year,

resource material availability, and taking steps to improve student and faculty motivation are a few other recommendations that can help in boosting CBME.

Conclusion

After more than 2 years of experience in CBME, the first professional-year faculty is slowly getting accustomed to the transition from a traditional to a competency-based curriculum. CBME is envisioned as a necessary linking process to inculcate the qualities of clinical, leadership, communication, professionalism, and lifelong learning in Indian medical graduates. These reforms are complex and challenging, and these challenges need to be addressed sincerely and timely. Lack of inter-departmental coordination, proper training, adequate faculty, student motivation and resource materials for AETCOM, and the COVID-19 pandemic were the major challenges faced. The recommendations can help the policymakers in better implementation of CBME in the country.

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