



PROBLEM BASED LEARNING (PBL) AND INSTITUTIONS' RESPONSIBILITIES

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The deficiencies perceived in traditional methods of teaching and learning have led to moves to develop and implement more effective methods appropriate to a given situation.¹ One such method is problem-based learning (PBL), which is more active and participatory in nature.²

PBL is an innovative instructional strategy was first introduced at McMaster University, Canada in 1969 as an instructional medium and since then slowly and gradually is adapted by most of the institution around the world. PBL philosophy is congruent with modern principles of learning. It encourages self directed learning, addresses many theories of learning like information processing theory, collaborative and social learning theory. It discourages memorization and build up critical thinking and problem solving skills in learners.³ It not only helps students to construct their knowledge but also fosters attitudes and ethics, research skills and attributes prerequisite of team work and leadership.^{4,5}

There are conflicting results of literature reviews about the performance of students of two curricula but general conclusion is that there is no difference in term of knowledge acquisition but students of PBL group have demonstrated better clinical performance and knowledge application skills⁶ which denotes that although there are many benefits of

PBL but expectation should not be kept very high.

The philosophy of PBL does not believe in spoon feeding or information relay from the tutor rather tutor is expected to act as facilitator. Function of the PBL tutor is to raise students' levels of thinking to a cognitive or higher cognitive level.⁷ In PBL real life scenario with structured learning objectives is introduced to the students. Tutor job is to monitor the process of knowledge construction by the students and to keep the students on their learning track by encouraging brain storming, reflective questioning and not by letting out the information to achieve those learning objectives.

Among many factors which affect quality of PBL, most important are quality of problem presented, skills and attitude of tutor. Essence of PBL lies in effective conduction of its process that result in elaboration of facts, development of schema and understanding of meaning of words leading to development of long term memory which is contextual and connects to the practical problems of life.⁸

The importance of a quality PBL case/ scenario which is ill- structured to the extent to simulate real life experiences, requires information gathering and reflection⁹ but free of too many distracters leading to de-motivation cannot be over emphasized. Who develops PBL case?,

who cross checks it before administering to the learners?, is there any committee or subcommittee for the construction and evaluation of PBL cases?, are the important areas of a successful PBL strategy and must not be overlooked.

Institutions have to spend a lot to build infrastructure and to recruit human resource to run their PBL curriculum but if the desired objectives remain unaccomplished then it is not only waste of resources but also loss of very valuable time of the students. Do the institutions have any mechanism to monitor their PBL? Did they hire a trained faculty? Do they run faculty development programme to train their faculty? Do they arrange workshops on PBL for students? Quest to answer these questions is necessary to enjoy fragrance of PBL, otherwise PBL is not more than an artificial decoration piece and a badge of honor for institution to be proud of having a PBL curriculum.

One of the main tasks of a PBL tutor is to facilitate group discussion.¹⁰ He must balance a degree of participation in students' learning processes and refrain from the temptation to lecture.¹¹ It has been noted that often teachers tend to dominate tutorial groups and suppress the involvement of student communication, which is at the very core of PBL.⁹

Therefore it becomes an utmost responsibility of the institutions to monitor their process of PBL to achieve the desired goals. As they are already spending a lot, can they take a little more pain to conduct PBL sessions in camera and recruit few experts who should assess the videos of PBL sessions and then give constructive feedback to the concerned tutors?, or devise any other useful mechanism to address this issue, a matter that must be critically evaluated.



No doubt that challenges are many but the ladder of success cannot be climbed with hands in pockets, institutions' leaders must warm up and step in.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Author declares no conflict of interest

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