

Title: Developing a student assessment plan appropriate for Problem-based Learning (PBL) and Community-Based Education and Service (COBES) curriculum

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Introduction:

When Makerere University Faculty of Medicine instituted a new PBL and COBES curriculum, it became necessary to examine the current student assessment system in order to ensure alignment with the new competencies desired in the medical graduates. Misalignment of student assessment (e.g. instituting a PBL curriculum while maintaining traditional assessment) has the potential of greatly weakening the desired beneficial impact of the curriculum change. What should be assessed depends on the terminal competencies desired and include assessment in all three domains of learning: knowledge skills and attitudes. The project involved obtaining the perceptions of students and faculty regarding the current methods of assessment with regard to adequacy, efficiency in measuring the desired competencies, and fairness. From this analysis, a new student assessment system was designed.

Methods:

Questionnaires were developed to obtain the ratings of students and faculty on the basis of VRP: validity (V), reliability (R), and practicability (P) of assessment methods used in the traditional curriculum, with regard to measuring knowledge (K), skills (S) and attitudes (A). The methods included multiple choice questions (MCQ), short essay questions (SEQ), long essay questions (LEQ), long and short clinical case examinations (LSCCE), oral (Viva) exams. A Likert scale of 0-3 (0 = not useful or applicable, to 3 = very useful or applicable) was used to rate each assessment method as to its VRP. Focus groups were subsequently held with faculty and students to validate the survey results, as well as to consider the data in the context of literature on assessment, and to inform the Educational Committee about the assessment methods that were viewed as most appropriate for the new curriculum.

Results:

The MCQ and SEQ assessment methods were judged by 90% of respondents to be powerful by for measuring knowledge on all the VRP criteria, but were judged to much weaker at measuring skills and attitudes (only 26 and 50% respondents said they do). LEQ, Vivas and LSCCE were rated as unfair and unreliable by 27 - 59% of all respondents. In subsequent FGDs the three methods were recommended to be scrapped.

Conclusions:

In conclusion greater emphasis will be placed on continuous assessment. For summative assessment, LEQ, Vivas and LSCCE were recommended to be scrapped while MCQ, SEQ and OSCE/OSPE were adopted. In addition, integration of student assessment across disciplines was chosen, in order to align with the integration of learning within the PBL curriculum. A new format of the academic transcript was also proposed.

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