Perceptions on Integrating Personal and Professional Development & Ethics at DSMA

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Abstract

Introduction: This qualitative case study investigates how students and faculty perceive the integration of Personal and Professional Development & Ethics (PPD&E) within the outcome-based curriculum at the Defence Services Medical Academy (DSMA), Myanmar. The PPD&E component emphasizes non-technical skills such as communication, ethical reasoning, and emotional intelligence, which are increasingly recognized as essential in modern medical education.

Method: Using purposive sampling, the study engaged students and faculty from various departments through focus group discussions. The data were collected via audio recordings and field notes, then analyzed thematically to identify key patterns and insights.

Results: Participants expressed a generally positive perception of PPD&E. Both students and faculty acknowledged its contribution to developing soft skills, promoting holistic personal and professional growth, and encouraging self-directed learning. Interactive teaching methods (e.g., role-plays, group projects) and the role of educators as professional role models were seen as effective in increasing student engagement. However, challenges included a perceived lower priority of non-technical skills and limited faculty readiness to teach PPD&E.

Conclusion: The study concludes that while PPD&E is valued for its role in producing well-rounded, competent healthcare professionals, further efforts are needed to strengthen faculty development and elevate the importance of non-technical competencies in medical training. Ongoing collaboration between students and faculty is essential for refining and fully integrating PPD&E within the curriculum.

Keywords: Personal and Professional Development and Ethics (PPD&E), Medical Education, Qualitative Research

I. INTRODUCTION

The Defence Services Medical Academy (DSMA) in Yangon, Myanmar, is undergoing a significant transformation by adopting an outcome-based integrated curriculum in line with World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) standards. A critical component of this reform is the inclusion of Personal and Professional Development & Ethics (PPD&E), which emphasizes non-technical skills such as emotional intelligence, communication, cultural competence, and ethical reasoning (Tyler, 2018). However, integrating PPD&E into the curriculum faces challenges, including its perceived secondary importance compared to technical training and insufficient faculty preparedness. Understanding the perceptions of students and faculty is pivotal for successfully embedding and improving the PPD&E component, fostering holistic development in medical students.

II. METHODS

This qualitative study explores student and faculty perceptions regarding PPD&E integration in the DSMA curriculum. Using purposive sampling, participants from diverse student batches and faculty departments were selected. Data collection methods included focus group discussions with students and semi-structured interviews with faculty, documented via audio recordings and field notes. Thematic analysis identified and interpreted recurring themes, with coding and categorization aligned with the objectives of the study. Ethical approval was granted by the DSMA Institutional Review Board, and informed consent was obtained to ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity.

III. RESULTS

1. Positive Perception of PPD

Both students and faculty expressed a positive view of PPD&E. Faculty acknowledged its contribution to academic and personal growth, while students valued its relevance to their personal and professional development.

- *Faculty*: " PPD&E enhances both our academic knowledge and personal growth."
- *Student*: " PPD&E prepares me for real-life challenges and gives direction to my studies."

2. Development of Essential Skills

PPD&E was seen as instrumental in cultivating soft skills like communication, teamwork, professionalism, and problem-solving, which are crucial for medical practice.

- *Faculty*: " PPD&E fosters professionalism and communication, essential for clinical success."
- *Student*: "Teamwork projects in PPD&E improved my communication and understanding of different perspectives."

3. Holistic Development

PPD&E was recognized for supporting students' academic and personal growth, fostering a well-rounded approach to healthcare roles.

- *Faculty*: " PPD&E prepares students with workplace competencies like teamwork and communication."
- *Student*: "It shifted my focus from just grades to becoming a well-rounded individual."

4. Emphasis on Self-Directed Learning

Both groups stressed the need for self-directed learning. Faculty encouraged students to take initiative, while students acknowledged the importance of managing their own learning.

- *Faculty*: "Encouraging self-directed learning complements benefits of PPD&E."
- *Student*: "I need to rely less on teachers and take charge of my learning."

5. Interactive Teaching Enhances Engagement

Interactive methods like role-playing and group projects were seen as effective in making PPD&E engaging and applicable to real-life scenarios.

- *Faculty*: "Interactive methods make learning more relevant and engaging."
- *Student*: "Group activities and workshops inspired me and showed real-world applications."

6. Role Modeling

The role of educators as role models was highlighted. Faculty felt sharing experiences added authenticity to lessons, while students found inspiration in their instructors' examples.

- *Faculty*: "Sharing personal experiences makes lessons more impactful."
- *Student*: "My instructors' journeys motivate me to strive for excellence."

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that both students and faculty perceive PPD&E positively, recognizing its critical role in preparing future healthcare professionals. Faculty highlighted the contribution of program to academic enrichment and personal growth, aligning Duffy (2024) on the value of personal and professional development initiatives. The emphasis on essential soft skills aligns with Daugherty et al. (2020), underlining their necessity for clinical practice. The role of PPD in holistic development reflects a growing recognition of empathy, cultural competence, and ethical reasoning as integral to medical education. This aligns with Tseng (2015), advocating for a balanced integration of technical and non-technical skills. However, challenges remain. Both groups identified a gap in self-directed learning, with students relying heavily on faculty guidance. Faculty suggested fostering a culture of initiative, consistent with Patchan et al. (2016) on lifelong learning. Additionally, integrating PPD&E into the curriculum requires continued faculty development to effectively deliver its content. Future studies should investigate the long-term impact of PPD&E on professional practices and patient outcomes. Exploring effective strategies for promoting self-directed learning and assessing its effect on engagement and clinical competence would further inform curriculum development.

V. CONCLUSION

Integrating PPD&E into the curriculum of DSMA has been met with positive perceptions, with its benefits spanning improved communication, emotional intelligence, and ethical reasoning. Nevertheless, challenges persist, such as resistance to prioritizing non-technical skills and the need for faculty training in PPD&E pedagogy. The findings emphasize the need to foster a supportive environment for PPD&E integration and address existing barriers

to fully realize its potential in shaping competent, empathetic, and adaptable healthcare professionals. Continuous dialogue between students and faculty, alongside curriculum evaluation, is essential for refining the PPD&E framework. By prioritizing holistic development, DSMA is poised to produce future physicians equipped to navigate the complexities of modern healthcare.

Ethical Approval

Ethics approval was granted by the Ethical Review Committee of the DSMA, Ethical Review Board (7/ ERB/ 2024).

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this research study declare that there are no conflicts of interest that could potentially influence or bias the outcomes, interpretations, or conclusions of the study. A conflict of interest is defined as any financial, consultant, institutional, or other relationships that may pose a risk of bias or conflict with the objectivity and integrity of the research.

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15515750

237