

“MENTORING: AN INSIGHT OF STUDENT’S PERCEPTION”

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: *The objective of our study is to know the perspectives and expectations of undergraduate medical and dental students about implemented mentorship programs in their institutions.*

Methodology: *A cross-sectional and observational study was conducted after getting an ERC approval from the institutional (FUSH) review board. Study was carried out over a period of one year from June 2022 to June 2023. Students from first to final year MBBS and BDS of two different institutes, already running mentorship programs, were included in the study. Non-Probability convenience sampling technique was used, and proper consent was taken from each participant. Data was collected from 761 MBBS and BDS students from Islamic International Dental College and Foundation University school of Health Sciences (FUSH) on a predesigned, revalidated questionnaire. SPSS version 22 was used.*

Results: *761 students participated in this study, comprising of 562 (74%) females and 199 (26%) male students. Out of this total 92% of the students considered mentorship as a mean of guiding the students, 89% agreed that mentorship is a relationship rather than set of activities, whereas 95% students felt that there is a definite need of mentorship in medical education. 74% of students felt that contact sessions with mentor should be done before exam.*

Conclusion: *Most of the students were of the opinion that mentorship is the need of the day of every academic institute and did not consider this program as an additional burden on them.*

Key Words: *Mentoring, Student’s feedback, medical students.*

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INTRODUCTION

Mentorship is defined as a professional relationship in which a more experienced or knowledgeable individual, known as the mentor, provides guidance, support,

and advice to a less experienced or knowledgeable individual, known as the mentee. In the ever-evolving landscape of medical and dental education, the role of mentoring programs has gained prominence as an essential component of fostering student growth and success¹. The significance of mentorship in shaping the future healthcare professionals cannot be overstated. These programs often pair students with experienced dental practitioners who offer valuable insights into clinical practice, ethical considerations, and professional development^{1,2}. Mentoring in dental colleges and medical colleges is a multifaceted process that benefits students by enhancing their clinical skills, guiding their professional development, and supporting their personal growth^{1,3}. These programs serve as a bridge between the theoretical knowledge acquired in classrooms and the practical skills required in clinical practice. Dental education is a rigorous and multifaceted journey, and mentorship programs provide students with essential guidance and support to navigate this demanding path effectively^{2,4}.

Mentorship programs have proven to be an effective method of supporting undergraduates in their academic lives and preparing them for their careers ahead⁵.

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Mentors typically provide their assistance willingly, engaging in dynamic and mutually beneficial relationships with the aim of offering assistance, motivation, and fostering growth in others^{2,4,6}. Ultimately, these programs contribute to the overall improvement of the medical profession by producing well-rounded and competent professionals⁵. With an increasing recognition of the influence that mentoring relationships can have on students' academic and career trajectories, it becomes imperative to evaluate these programs comprehensively^{2,3,4,7}.

According to previous studies medical students in the UK found mentorship useful for integration into the team, and an opportunity for constructive feedback on their clinical skills and professional skills, for example, communication and team working³. These programs hold great potential for undergraduate medical education, however the scientific literature on this genre is sparse⁸. While most universities around the world have already implemented mentorship programs amongst their students this concept is wholly new in several universities of Pakistan and the evidence to identify potential obstacles is scarce in this part of the world. Students are the main beneficiaries of this program; hence it is empirical to know their views about current implemented programs⁹. This would help us to bridge the gap between current practices and intended program outcomes. Thus, the objective of current study is to understand the perspectives of undergraduate medical and dental students about an ongoing mentorship program in the Islamic International Dental College (IIDC) and Foundation University School of Health Sciences (FUSH).

METHODOLOGY

An observational, cross-sectional study was conducted after getting an ERC (FF/FUCD/632/ERC/43) approval from the institutional (FUSH) review board. Study was carried out over a period of one year from June 2022 to June 2023. Study participants were students from first to Final year MBBS and BDS at Islamic International Dental College (IIDC) and Foundation University School of Health Sciences (FUSH); who were part of mentorship program being officially implement at their respective institutes. Non-Probability convenience sampling technique was used and students participating in the study did so voluntarily and with informed consent. The predesigned, revalidated questionnaire⁷ was used, the purpose of the study was explained, written informed consent was taken and the students were free to ask any queries they may have regarding the questionnaire.

A sample size of 237 was calculated using an open epi calculator at 95% confidence interval and 5% margin of error. However, we were able to collect data from 761

MBBS and BDS students. Those students who gave informed consent and were currently enrolled in mentorship program in the respective institutes were included in the study. Students who discontinued participating or missed mentorship sessions were excluded. The hard copy of the consent form along with the questionnaire was distributed at FUSH, while at IIDC data was collected using google forms. The questionnaire asked about demographic details of participants and their responses regarding different aspects of mentorship program held at their institutes.

The collected data was then entered and analyzed in terms of percentages and frequencies using SPSS version 22. The information about gender, class of the student and responses of all questions was recorded as categorical data, thus results were presented in the form of frequencies and percentages only. The mean and standard deviation for age were determined. The association between the different years of the students and responses to all questions was also calculated using chi-square with p-value <0.05 is considered as statistically significant.

RESULTS

A total of 761 students of regular batch of MBBS and BDS professional years from Foundation University School of Health Sciences and Islamic International Dental College were included in the study. There were 562 (74%) female and 199 (26%) male students who participated in the study. In the first, second, third, fourth years (MBBS & BDS) and final year (MBBS), the distribution of students was 23%, 21%, 28%, 19%, and 9%, respectively. The preceding statement mentions the first four years of distribution for MBBS and BDS students together. The sample population was young with age ranged from 17 to 31 years (Mean=20.81, SD=1.65).

Out of total 761 students, majority of students, 700 (92%), perceived that mentorship means guiding the students rather than simply teaching the students as perceived by only 38 (5%) students, and the question has one other option in which if study participants felt any other meaning of the mentorship, they can write. These included mentorships don't just confine to the academic activities, it is a building of relationship, help the students in every aspect of their student life, mutual interaction, making a good human being, shows real path for the study of the students etc. The details of student's response regarding different aspects of mentoring are shown in table 1. While analyzing the association between students' responses to all set of questions using chi-square test, statistically significant association was seen in only a few, details mentioned in table 2.

TABLE 1: REPRESENTS STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON SEVERAL ASPECTS OF MENTORSHIP.

S. No	Questions	Options	Response	
			n	%
1	Mentorship means	Guiding the students	700	92
		Teaching the students	38	5
		Anything else, specify	23	3
2	Mentorship is a relationship rather than a set of activities	Strongly agree	278	37
		Agree	392	52
		Neutral	71	9
		Disagree	20	2
3	Do you think mentoring is required in medical education	Yes	722	95
		No	38	5
4	Mentorship should be required for	All students	462	61
		Those who voluntary agree to participate	299	39
5	Who should take initiative for mentor-mentee relationship	Mentor	557	73
		Mentee	204	27
6	What would you prefer regarding the selection of your mentor?	Student's choice	600	79
		According to predefined division	161	21
7	Which factors would you consider while choosing your mentor	Subject expertise	262	34
		Availability	148	20
		Nature	255	34
		Any other	96	12
8	What do you think regarding the availability of mentor	Always available	289	38
		Available as per pre-decided time	472	62
9	Interaction of mentor with mentee should be?	One to one	555	73
		In a group	206	27
10	If in a group, then how many students would you be comfortable with in one group?	Less than 5	467	61
		5-10	208	27
		11-15	47	6
		16-20	30	4
		More than 20	9	1
11	Mentor should guide/help to solve issues other than academics?	Agree	705	93
		Disagree	56	7
11a	If agreed, what are these issues?	Helps in personal growth	298	37
		Sharpen personality	148	20
		Develop professionalism	124	16
		Support academic career	78	10
		Promote student's interest	51	7
		Anything else	26	3
		Not Applicable	56	7

12	How much time in a month do you expect from a mentor?	Once a week	307	40
		Once in two weeks	190	25
		Once in three weeks	51	7
		Once a month	127	17
		Variable	86	11
13	Do you need more contact session with mentor before exams?	Yes	559	74
		No	202	26
14	Would you be comfortable if mentor has certain expectation from mentee?	Yes	550	72
		No	210	28
14a	If yes, which of the following expectations you are comfortable with?	Report on stipulated time	154	20
		Follow instructions	181	24
		Fulfil duties assigned	216	28
		Not Applicable	210	28

TABLE 2: SHOWS THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN MENTORSHIP PROGRAM PERCEPTIONS AND DIFFERENT YEARS OF MEDICAL AND DENTISTRY STUDENTS.

QUESTIONS	OPTIONS	P-VALUE
Mentorship should be required for	All students	0.015
	Those who voluntary agree to participate	
Who should take initiative for mentor-mentee relationship	Mentor	0.000
	Mentee	
	According to predefined division	
Which factors would you consider while choosing your mentor	Subject expertise	0.000
	Availability	
	Nature	
	Any other	
What do you think regarding the availability of mentor	Always available	0.021
	Available as per pre-decided time	
	Disagree	
How much time in a month do you expect from a mentor?	Once a week	0.000
	Once in two weeks	
	Once in three weeks	
	Once a month	
	Variable	

*p-value < 0.05 is considered to be statistically significant. This association between mentorship program perceptions and different years of medical and dental students via chi-square.

DISCUSSION

In the study, we found that the majority of MBBS and BDS students believed that mentorship is meant to be a guidance instead of very few who believed that it is just a teaching tool. In the study, medical and dental

students also expressed that mentorship is a means of building relationships with the mentee which can help to understand the issues related to student life and help them become better human beings⁹. Farkas et al stated that mentorship in medical undergraduates

furnishes guidance for career opportunities and prove a source of student well-being¹¹.

In our study, the majority of MBBS and BDS students believed that mentor should take initiative for developing the mentor mentee relationship. The success of mentorship is mainly dependent on the consent of mentor and mentee. The mentee should acknowledge the importance of mentorship and accept the mentor in this relationship⁹. However, both mentor and mentee should be motivated for mentorship. This is the key to developing trust and confidence between mentor and mentee¹². In our study most students believed that mentors should take initiative for developing the mentor mentee relationship. Research indicates that the responsibility of initiating the mentoring process typically falls on the mentor, yet the sustainability of this process lies in the hands of the mentees¹³. It is crucial for mentees to be proactive to maximize the benefits of mentorship. Studies emphasize that the mentee assumes responsibility and actively guides the relationship. This involves expressing their needs and adhering to the communication preferences of their mentor¹⁴.

As per the previous literature, choice of mentor is a crucial aspect that ensures the success of mentorship program outcomes. In the present study, we found mixed responses when it comes to the criteria of mentor selection. Some students chose subject expertise as mentors, whilst others considered mentor availability and mentor nature to be selection criteria. However, most of the students expected the mentor to be available at the predetermined time. Other studies reported that a mentor selection should be based on the nature of the mentorship and his capability to deal with the issues related to mentee, moreover his subject specialty should be considered if the mentee seeks advice in academic issues and foremost the availability of the mentor for the mentee should be ensured¹⁵.

The mentor-mentee bond encompasses both professional and interpersonal dimensions¹⁶, arising when a mentor and a protégé or mentee connect. Unlike coaches, mentors assume the role of guides, extending advice and support while aiding mentees in the acquisition of new skills¹⁷. In addition to preparedness and commitment, a mentor-mentee relationship's core is built on essential components that include trust, mutual respect, open and honest communication, flexibility, and recognition of diverse perspectives¹⁸.

One on one mentoring stands out as a powerful approach to empower your students in advancing their skill sets. Few sources of knowledge surpass the wisdom of those with greater experience¹⁹. Within a one-on-one dynamic, mentees benefit from their mentor's exclusive focus, fostering skill development across diverse areas.

Group mentoring²⁰, also known as team mentoring, typically involves one person taking on the mentor role and providing guidance to multiple mentees. Results showed that students felt comfortable while interacting with their mentor having fewer students in the group.

Students agree on the fact that they should have a bonding with their mentor in such a way that the mentor will guide them in both their personal growth and academic issues. Within academic mentorship, students receive guidance and coaching encompassing both academic and personal aspects. These mentoring sessions often serve as a forum for dialogic education, fostering discussions between educators and students regarding the coursework's connection to their personal lives²¹ and contemporary events.

There is a range of perspectives regarding the ideal frequency of contact sessions, with suggestions spanning from weekly, bi-weekly, to monthly meetings. Previous research has also observed a broad spectrum of mentoring meeting frequencies, ranging from 2 to as many as 40 meetings per year²². The views of students regarding how often they should engage with their mentors exhibit diversity, as demonstrated by Fallatah HI et al., who identified students offering a variety of recommendations¹², including weekly, monthly, and even semester meetings. In current study almost half of the students opted for the once-a-week meeting choice. According to Kate MS et al., mentor-mentee interaction should take place for a minimum of one hour per week^{7,23}.

Studies suggest that among the array of strategies designed to alleviate exam-related stress, mentoring programs are identified as a valuable and effective approach²⁴. In the context of this study, a notable consensus among students was observed expressing the need for more contact sessions before exams. Stress related to examinations is widely recognized as a substantial issue among medical students²⁵.

The aim of a mentor-mentee partnership is to achieve both personal and professional objectives. Mentors always have positive expectations from their mentees to be actively participating in this teaching methodology. It is imperative that the mentor offers constructive feedback, while the mentee actively listens and fulfil duties assigned, thereby promoting the highest level of learning²⁶ which corresponds to the same outcomes of our study.

CONCLUSION

The majority of the students were of the opinion that mentorship is the need of the day of every academic institute and did not consider this program as an additional burden on them. Students don't merely see mentorship as a form of instruction; they perceive it

as a complex network of relationships primarily aimed at providing them with comprehensive guidance. This study will serve as a valuable guiding resource and a positive impact is expected to manifest in improved academic and personal achievements.

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