

Problem based learning

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Since more than 30 years ago, there has been a great amount of research done to evaluate Problem Based Learning (PBL). PBL is both a curriculum and a process. The curriculum consists of carefully selected and designed problems that demand from the learner acquisition of critical knowledge, problem solving proficiency, self-directed learning strategies, and team participation skills. The process replicates the commonly used systemic approach to resolving problems or meeting challenges that are encountered in life and career.

Many researchers compared the problem based learning to the conventional method. Students involved in problem-based learning acquire knowledge and become proficient in problem solving, self-directed learning, and team participation. Studies show that PBL prepares students as well as traditional methods. Colliver in 1993 showed that clinical skills were gained more in PBL than from the conventional program. However, in basic science, the conventional methods were better. In fact, many studies have shown that student will score less in the National Board Part I if they adopt PBL.

Albanese and Mitchell studied the comparison of PBL against the traditional methods by reviewing the literatures between 1972 till 1992. They found that PBL is more enjoyable and students perform as well as the conventional methods in terms of the clinical skill. However, they did not perform as well in the basic science.

Harvard Medical and Dental School have tried the Hybrid problem based learning (HPBL) which is a combination of the conventional didactic methods in the basic science courses with a group based problem solving, and they showed that a larger number of students graduate and have less student attrition compared to the conventional methods.

I believe that these days schools should adapt PBL in their clinical courses and continue the traditional methods in the basic science courses. The advantage of PBL is that it stimulates the thinking and analytical process of a student, enabling them to reason and reach a viable conclusion. The conventional way stimulates the remembering power of the brain. PBL has many advantages which include strengthening the knowledge, stimulating the thinking process and long lasting remembering. However, if we stimulate only the remembering power of brain and make student memorize, they tend to lose the information memorized after sometime. PBL is a method which stimulates the student to learn and magnify his eagerness to search for more answers. In our school, we should adapt PBL in the clinical courses instead of flooding the students with handouts.

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