

Original Article

Business Management's Inclusion in the Dental Curriculum: The Opinion of Abbasi Shaheed Hospital's Postgraduates and Dental Graduates

Zahid Ali¹, Injla Khan^{2*}, Ume Habiba³, Sobia Khan⁴, Rida Khalid Rafat⁵, Mahrukh Iqbal⁶

¹HOD, OMFS, Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, Pakistan.

²Postgraduate Trainee OMFS, Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, Pakistan.

³Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, Pakistan.

⁴Postgraduate Resident, Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, Pakistan.

⁵Trainee OMFS, Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, Pakistan.

⁶MS-Scholar, Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, Pakistan.

*Corresponding Author: Injla Khan, MS-Scholar; Email: injla_khan@hotmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Background: The landscape of dental education has historically emphasized clinical expertise and patient care. However, the evolving healthcare environment necessitates a broader skill set for dental professionals, including business management capabilities. The integration of business management components into the dental curriculum has emerged as a pivotal area of focus, reflecting the need for dental practitioners to navigate the complexities of establishing and managing successful dental practices.

Objective: This study aimed to explore the opinions of postgraduates and dental graduates from Abbasi Shaheed Hospital regarding the inclusion of business management in the dental curriculum, assessing their perceptions of its necessity and impact on their professional readiness.

Methods: A cross-sectional, questionnaire-based study was conducted from December 2023 to January 2024 at Abbasi Shaheed Hospital. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants, including final year graduates, house officers, and postgraduate trainees, with a total of 183 respondents. The questionnaire, developed after a comprehensive literature review, comprised close-ended questions divided into three sections: demographic information, knowledge regarding opening and registration of new dental setups, and perceptions regarding business management. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25.

Results: The mean age of participants was 28.44±6.03 years, with a predominance of female respondents (72.1%). A significant proportion of participants (67.2%) were only slightly aware of the requirements for setting up a dental practice, and 50.8% were not aware at all of the procedure to register their practice in Pakistan. Regarding the inclusion of dental business management in the curriculum, 59% strongly agreed, and 31.1% agreed. Financial and business management skills were identified as primary barriers to starting a new dental practice.

Conclusion: The findings highlight a strong consensus among dental professionals at Abbasi Shaheed Hospital on the need for integrating business management training into the dental curriculum. Such integration is crucial for preparing graduates to meet the challenges of modern dental practice, underscoring the importance of a comprehensive educational approach that includes both clinical and business management skills.

Keywords: Dental Education, Business Management, Dental Curriculum, Dental Practice, Professional Readiness.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, dental education has predominantly focused on equipping students with the clinical expertise, scientific knowledge, and patient care skills necessary to become proficient clinicians. However, the evolving landscape of healthcare has highlighted the need for dental professionals to possess a wider range of skills to effectively compete and excel in a dynamic and competitive environment (1, 2). This shift in perspective has led to a global reassessment of dental curricula, emphasizing the importance of integrating business management training alongside traditional clinical education (3). Dental schools, akin to other

healthcare institutions, are now faced with the challenge of preparing their graduates not only in clinical excellence but also in the competencies required to manage the complexities of operating a successful dental practice (4).

The inclusion of business management in dental education has been the subject of several studies, underscoring its significance for dental practitioners, who often function as independent professionals or small business owners. For instance, Matanhire et al. in 2020 highlighted the necessity for dental professionals to acquire basic business knowledge to effectively manage the financial aspects of their practice (5). Further research by Hassan et al. in 2023 demonstrated that graduates equipped with business management skills exhibited greater confidence in establishing and running a successful practice (3). Similarly, an investigation by Smith et al. (2019) into the experiences of dental graduates who received business management training during their studies revealed that such education bolstered their confidence in handling the non-clinical facets of their practices and enhanced their preparedness for adapting to the healthcare sector's evolving demands (6, 7). Additionally, a study by Johnson and Jones (2018) addressed concerns regarding the potential for business management to detract from the dental education's core mission of producing competent and compassionate clinicians. The authors argued for the necessity of striking an optimal balance between clinical and business training to ensure the development of well-rounded practitioners (9-11).

Given the limited availability of data on the perceptions of graduates and postgraduates regarding the integration of business management into the dental curriculum, this study seeks to fill that gap by exploring the views of postgraduates and dental graduates from Abbasi Shaheed Hospital. This investigation is grounded in the understanding that contemporary dental practitioners not only fulfill the role of clinicians but also act as entrepreneurs and integral members of broader healthcare systems. The study thereby contributes to the ongoing dialogue on the evolving requirements of dental education, emphasizing the essential nature of business management skills for the modern dental professional.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This cross-sectional, questionnaire-based study was conducted at Abbasi Shaheed Hospital between December 2023 and January 2024, following a comprehensive review of existing literature to inform the development of the survey instrument. The questionnaire comprised close-ended questions, structured into three distinct sections: the first section gathered demographic information about the participants (12, 13), the second section evaluated participants' knowledge regarding the opening and registration of new dental practices, and the third section explored their perceptions of business management within the dental profession.

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure a representative sample of the study population, which included final year dental graduates, house officers, and postgraduate trainees. Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, in compliance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. The survey was administered digitally via Google Forms, facilitating the collection of responses from a total of 183 graduates and postgraduates who ultimately participated in the study.

Data collected from the survey were analyzed using SPSS version 25, allowing for a comprehensive statistical assessment of the responses. The analysis included descriptive statistics to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample, as well as more complex inferential statistics to explore the relationships between participants' backgrounds and their knowledge and perceptions of business management in dental practice. This approach ensured a rigorous examination of the data, adhering to the highest standards of research integrity and methodological soundness.

RESULTS

The study surveyed 183 participants, revealing a demographic distribution predominantly skewed towards younger individuals with a mean age of 28.44±6.03 years. Gender distribution showed a significant female majority at 72.1% compared to males at 27.9%. Regarding marital status, a majority of the participants were single (63.9%), while 36.1% were married. The participants' designations were varied, with the majority being Post Graduates (59.0%), followed by House Officers (27.9%), and Final Year Students (13.1%), indicating a diverse range of experiences and stages in their dental careers (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Participants (n=183)

Variable	Description	n (%)
Age	Mean±SD	28.44±6.03 years
Gender	Male	51 (27.9%)
	Female	132 (72.1%)
Marital Status	Single	117 (63.9%)

Variable	Description	n (%)
	Married	66 (36.1%)
Designation	Final Year Student	24 (13.1%)
	House Officer	51 (27.9%)
	Postgraduate	108 (59.0%)

Table 2: Knowledge on Establishing a New Dental Practice

Variable	Totally Aware	Slightly Aware	Not Aware
Requirements for Dental Practice Setup	48 (26.2%)	123 (67.2%)	12 (6.6%)
Awareness of License by HCE/SHCC	39 (21.3%)	72 (39.3%)	72 (39.3%)
Procedure to Register Business/Practice in Pakistan	33 (18%)	57 (31.1%)	93 (50.8%)
Marketing Skills for Business/Practice	33 (18%)	117 (63.9%)	33 (18%)

Table 3: Perceptions on Business Management in Dental Curriculum

Variable	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral
Business Management as a Curriculum Subject	108 (59%)	57 (31.1%)	18 (9.8%)
Business Management Knowledge for Successful Practice	105 (57.4%)	69 (37.7%)	9 (4.9%)
Importance of Financial Management Knowledge	123 (67.2%)	51 (27.9%)	9 (4.9%)

In assessing knowledge regarding the establishment of a new dental practice, only 26.2% of the respondents reported being totally aware of all the requirements needed, while a significant 67.2% were only slightly aware, and a small fraction (6.6%) were not aware at all. When it came to specific knowledge about licensing by Health Care Establishment (HCE)/Sindh Health Care Commission (SHCC), the awareness was similarly distributed, with 21.3% totally aware, 39.3% slightly aware, and another 39.3% not aware at all.

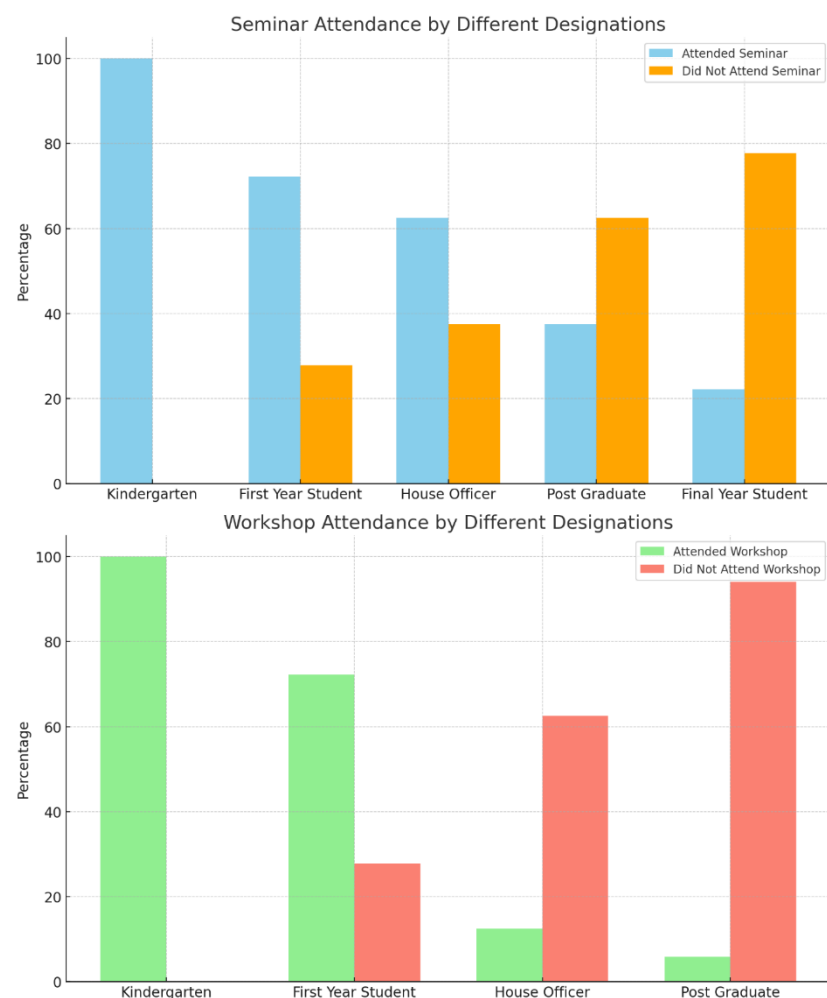


Figure 1 Seminar and Workshop Attendance

Knowledge about the procedure to register a private business/practice in Pakistan was notably low, with 50.8% not aware at all, 31.1% slightly aware, and only 18% totally aware. Furthermore, when questioned about marketing skills for private practice, 18% were totally aware, 63.9% were slightly aware, and 18% were not aware at all, reflecting a gap in marketing knowledge among the participants (Table 2).

Perceptions regarding the inclusion of dental business management in the curriculum were strongly positive, with 59% of participants strongly agreeing and 31.1% agreeing that it should be added as a subject, indicating a broad consensus on its importance (Table 3). Additionally, a similar sentiment was observed concerning the role of business management knowledge in establishing a successful private practice, with 57.4% strongly agreeing and 37.7% agreeing on its significance. The importance of basic financial management knowledge before starting a private practice was recognized by a substantial majority with 67.2% strongly agreeing and 27.9% agreeing on its necessity.

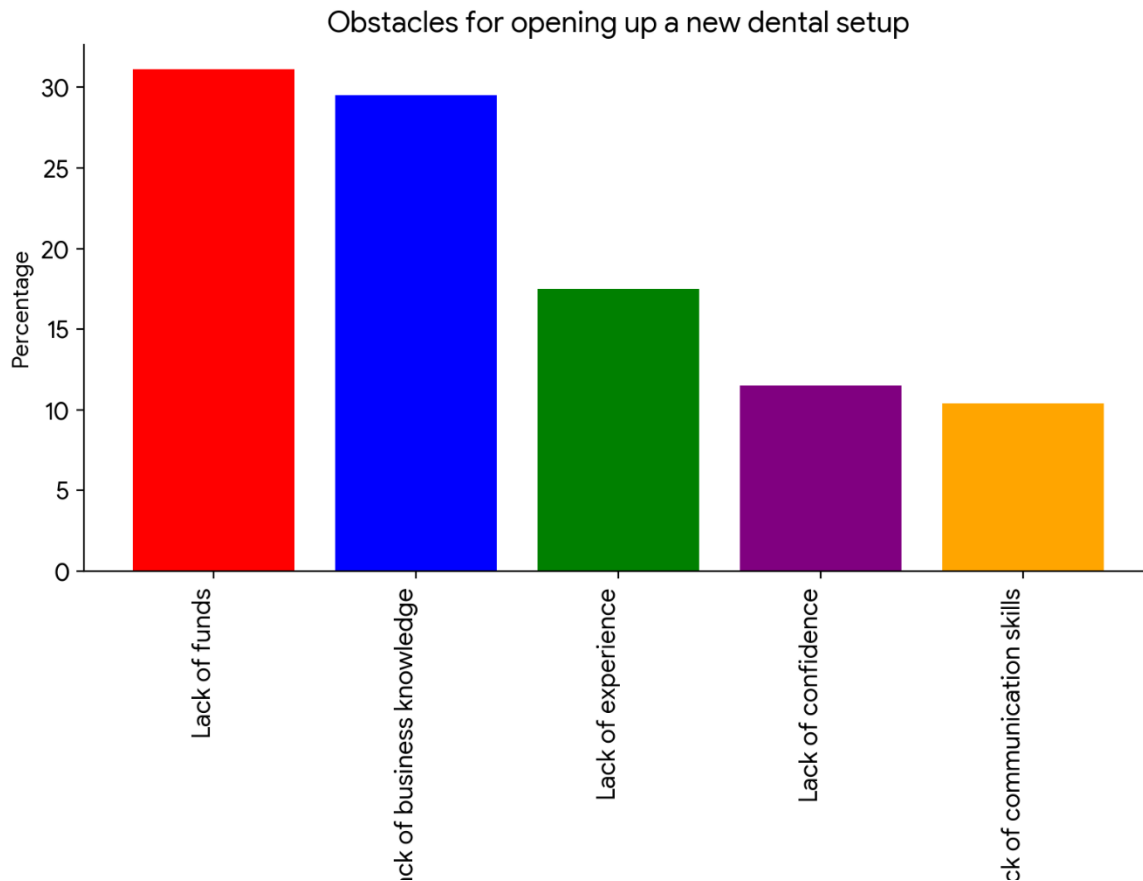


Figure 2 Obstacles for Opening up a new dental setup

DISCUSSION

The investigation into the perspectives of postgraduates and dental graduates from Abbasi Shaheed Hospital regarding the integration of business management into the dental curriculum reveals a consensus that aligns with broader scholarly discourse. This consensus underscores the imperative for dental practitioners to possess a diversified skill set, encompassing not only clinical proficiency but also business acumen. The study reflects the diminishing opportunities for dentistry professionals in Pakistan, where the success of a private practice hinges on the dentist's satisfaction derived from financial gains and competitive advantages (3). It underscores the multifaceted responsibilities of young dentists, including societal engagement, expertise in treatments, communication skills, awareness of new trends, patient satisfaction, clinic promotion, staff management, professional association involvement, and financial sustainability.

A significant finding of this study is the identification of financial and business management skills as the primary barriers to establishing a new dental practice. This observation corroborates the broader understanding that launching and managing a new venture demands more than professional expertise; it requires a foundational knowledge of finance and business management (16). The survey further revealed a notable lack of knowledge among participants regarding the procedures for starting a new dental business, with a majority only slightly familiar with the processes and a considerable portion completely unaware. This gap signifies the urgent need for educational interventions aimed at equipping dental graduates and postgraduates with the essential skills to initiate their practices (17).

The apparent disengagement from business management seminars and workshops, despite recognizing the importance of such skills, suggests a potential disconnect in the availability or promotion of these educational opportunities by dental institutions. Enhancing access to business management training, through both extracurricular activities and integrated curriculum components, could significantly benefit aspiring dentists (18).

Dental education faces the challenge of balancing clinical competence with business savvy amidst its evolution. The integration of business management elements into the curriculum, as suggested by our findings, could better prepare graduates to navigate the commercial aspects of dental practice. However, this integration requires careful consideration and ongoing evaluation to ensure it complements the primary objective of producing skilled and compassionate dentists without detracting from it (20).

This study not only underscores the critical need for comprehensive training in finance and business management for dental professionals but also identifies barriers that need to be addressed. By increasing awareness and providing targeted educational programs, workshops, and seminars, the dental workforce can be better equipped to face the challenges of establishing and managing successful dental practices (21, 22).

Furthermore, this research contributes to the ongoing debate on dental education by offering context-specific insights from Abbasi Shaheed Hospital's postgraduates and dental graduates. It highlights how business management education can prepare graduates for the rigors of contemporary dental practice (23, 24), laying the groundwork for future discussions, curriculum development, and adjustments in dental education to meet the evolving needs of dental practitioners (25, 26).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study illuminates the perspectives of dental professionals from Abbasi Shaheed Hospital on the integration of business management into the dental curriculum, advocating for a holistic approach that readies graduates for the complexities of modern dental practice. The findings enrich the ongoing dialogue about dental education, emphasizing the need for a curriculum that is both comprehensive and responsive to the changing landscape of dental practice.

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