

Original Research Article

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION OF BLOCK 1 ELECTIVE PROGRAM IN A TERTIARY CARE INSTITUTION – STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Background: The aim is to analyse the perspectives of students and faculty regarding the implementation of Block 1 elective program and to identify challenges in a tertiary care institution.

Materials and Methods: A cross-sectional mixed-method study was conducted among 202 Phase III Part I MBBS students and 76 faculty members. Data were collected using pre-validated structured questionnaires distributed. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis.

Results: Most students (over 90%) were aware of electives and their purpose, and 86.6% reported achieving intended learning outcomes. Faculty perceived electives as relevant, with 70% agreeing that learning objectives were met. However, several challenges emerged. Key issues included lack of standardized modules, short duration, faculty workload, poor student engagement, and inadequate orientation. Students reported confusion in topic selection (36%) and limited autonomy. Qualitative analysis revealed the importance of experiential learning, interactive teaching, and research exposure, but highlighted gaps in planning, assessment, and structure.

Conclusion: While Block 1 electives are perceived as valuable, significant challenges hinder optimal implementation. Addressing standardization, duration, faculty training, and student orientation is essential for enhancing effectiveness in alignment with CBME goals.

Keywords: Electives, CBME, Medical Education

INTRODUCTION

Electives are a key component of the Competency-Based Medical Education (CBME) curriculum aimed at fostering self-directed learning, career orientation, and skill development among medical undergraduates. As per National Medical Commission (NMC) guidelines, Block 1 electives are conducted during Phase III Part I in pre- and paraclinical disciplines or research settings. Despite their potential benefits, implementation at institutional levels poses several challenges related to planning, execution, and evaluation. Understanding stakeholder perspectives—particularly students and faculty—is critical for optimizing the effectiveness of elective programs. This study explores these perspectives and identifies barriers to successful implementation.^[1-5]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross-sectional mixed-method study was conducted involving 202 Phase III Part I MBBS students and 76 faculty members at Coimbatore medical college, Coimbatore during October 2025 after Institutional Human Ethics Committee approval (IHEC No: 191/2025). To enrich the quantitative findings, focus group discussions were conducted separately with students and faculty. These discussions explored perceptions in greater depth, particularly regarding implementation barriers, clarity of objectives, supervision quality, and assessment practices. Participation was voluntary. Separate structured questionnaires were developed for students and faculty to explore awareness, perceived achievement of learning objectives,

adequacy of duration, autonomy in topic selection, perceived academic value, and challenges encountered.

The tools were peer-validated before dissemination. Questionnaires were circulated electronically using Google Forms, ensuring ease of access and wider participation.

The responses received were analysed using SPSS software. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative responses from open-ended questions underwent thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and shared concerns.

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings

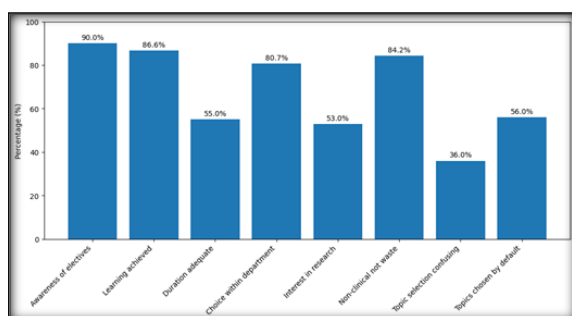


Figure 1: students' perspectives about block 1 elective program

The analysis of students' responses revealed a high level of awareness regarding the elective program, with 92.6% of participants being aware of its purpose, and importance. A majority of students (86.6%) reported that they were able to achieve their intended learning goals during the elective posting. While 55.4% perceived the duration of electives to be adequate, qualitative responses suggested a need for extended duration. Interest in research activities during electives was observed in 53% of students. Notably, 84.2% of students considered block 1 electives to be useful, indicating their relevance in undergraduate training. However, certain concerns were identified, including confusion during topic selection reported by 36.1% of students and the tendency of 56.4% of students to choose topics by default rather than informed preference.

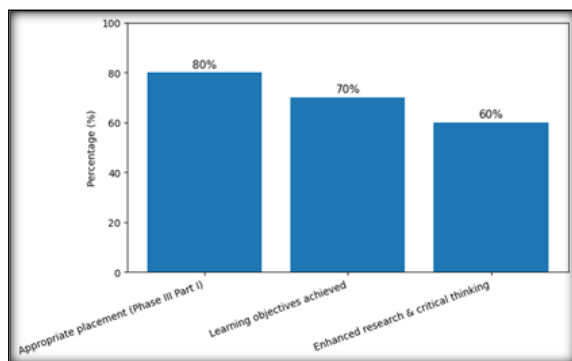


Figure 2: faculties' perspectives about block 1 elective program

Faculty responses indicated an overall positive perception of the elective program. Approximately 80% of faculty members agreed that the placement of electives in Phase III Part I was appropriate. Around 70% reported that the learning objectives of electives were successfully achieved, and nearly 60% believed that the program contributed to the development of research acumen and critical thinking skills among students. Additionally, the majority of faculty perceived the elective topics offered in their departments to be appropriate and beneficial for student learning.

Qualitative Findings: Thematic analysis of qualitative data highlighted several strengths of the elective program. Key positive aspects included active student participation and engagement, as well as opportunities for hands-on and experiential learning. Interactive and case-based teaching approaches were frequently appreciated, along with exposure to clinical and laboratory environments. The program also contributed to career orientation and provided insights into various specialties, while fostering interest in research and academic activities. A variety of teaching-learning strategies were employed during electives. These included experiential learning methods such as DOAP sessions and procedural training, small group discussions, and case-based learning approaches. Self-directed learning and digital methods, including assignments and online resources, were also utilized. In addition, simulation-based teaching and project-based learning were incorporated to enhance student engagement and skill acquisition.



Figure 3: challenges faced by students in block 1 elective program

Assessment methods used during electives were diverse and aligned with competency-based approaches. These included written assessments such as MCQs and short-answer tests, practical evaluations through OSCE/OSPE, and reflective tools such as logbooks and portfolios. Oral assessments, including viva voce and presentations, were commonly used. Formative feedback

mechanisms were also employed to guide student learning and improvement.

Despite these strengths, several challenges were identified. A major concern was the lack of standardized curriculum and clear guidelines for elective implementation. Issues related to poor student engagement and attendance were frequently reported.

Faculty members highlighted workload and time constraints as significant barriers, particularly when balancing routine work & responsibilities. The short duration of electives was another commonly cited limitation. Additionally, inadequate faculty training and orientation regarding the elective program further hindered effective implementation.



Figure 4: challenges faced by faculties in block 1 elective program

DISCUSSION

This study highlights that although Block 1 electives are well-received by both students and faculty, multiple systemic and operational challenges affect their implementation.

High awareness and perceived usefulness among students indicate successful initial orientation; however, confusion in topic selection and limited flexibility suggest gaps in structured guidance. Faculty responses reflect a positive attitude toward electives but emphasize logistical challenges such as workload and lack of standardization.

The prominence of experiential and interactive learning aligns with CBME principles, yet variability in implementation indicates the need for uniform guidelines. The lack of standardized modules and structured assessment further contributes to inconsistencies in learning outcomes.

These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that elective programs require better planning, faculty development, and integration with curriculum goals.

CONCLUSION

Block 1 electives are an important component of undergraduate medical education and are perceived as beneficial by stakeholders. However, challenges related to standardization, duration, planning, and faculty preparedness limit their effectiveness. Addressing these issues is essential for aligning elective programs with CBME objectives and enhancing student learning experiences.

The following recommendations are given at our institutional level for effective implementation of block 1 electives

- Standardise elective modules with clear learning objectives, outcomes, and CBME alignment while retaining flexibility across departments.
- Optimise duration and timing of electives to allow meaningful engagement without conflict with routine clinical postings.
- Enhance experiential and clinical learning through hands-on activities, case-based learning, simulations, and research exposure.
- Strengthen student orientation and autonomy by providing pre-elective information, learning resources, and flexible topic choices.
- Build faculty capacity and integrate assessment through faculty development, protected teaching time, mandatory attendance, and structured formative assessment.
- Increase man power.

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