



Students' Perception of Pharmacy Curriculum in Albania

Klejda Hudhra*, Iris Hoxha, Ela, Delina Xhafaj

Faculty of Pharmacy. University of Medicine Tirana, Albania.

Research Article

Please cite this paper as: Klejda Hudhra*, Iris Hoxha, Ela, Delina Xhafaj, Students' Perception of Pharmacy Curriculum in Albania. *IJTP*, 2014, 5(2), 956-959.

Corresponding Author:

Klejda Hudhra (Harasani)

Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Medicine Tirana; Albania

Rruga Kongresi i Manastirit, 133, 1005

Email: klejdah@yahoo.com

Telephone: 00355 696028843

Abstract

Objective: Our objective was to determine students' perception of the current Pharmacy curriculum in the University of Medicine, Tirana (Albania).

Methods: A 10 questions survey regarding different aspects of Pharmacy curriculum (2008-2013) and personal data was developed by faculty staff and filled by Pharmacy students in their last year of graduation, before their final practice exam. To summarize the data, descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used. Main outcome measures were: frequency of students' satisfaction with different aspects of Pharmacy curriculum and perceived indispensable and not indispensable subjects of Pharmacy curriculum.

Results: The survey response rate was 99% (107 students), showing their high interest in participating. A majority of the students (79.4%) agreed that there is a need to change the pharmacy curriculum; however, they assess the current curriculum with an average of 7.32 (SD 1.388) on a scale from 1 to 10. A significant number (66%) of the students in our study were satisfied with the knowledge gained to practice their future profession as pharmacists.

Conclusion: Pharmacy students' perception suggests need for a change in the current curriculum, especially towards active learning activities and students' evaluation methods. Their suggestions on different aspects of the actual curriculum would be useful in future curriculum assessment.

Keywords: pharmacy students; curriculum; perception; Albania

Introduction

During the last decades, Medical Higher Education in Albania has faced significant changes: social, economic, technological and political⁽¹⁾. Among the challenges, the need to restructure medical curriculums according to the European Union standards and to adapt to the Bologna system⁽¹⁻³⁾. The University of Medicine Tirana⁽⁴⁾, (formerly named Faculty of Medicine Tirana), is the only public institution providing training as a pharmacist in Albania. Few studies have been conducted in our country to assess curriculum appropriateness and students' perception about it in the medical field^(2,5). The Pharmacy degree program was founded in 1960 and initially consisted of 4 years of full-time studies⁽⁶⁾. From 1992, it is a five years curriculum, where in the first and second year basic sciences subjects predominate followed by biomedical and pharmaceutical sciences during the third and fourth year and legislation and pharmacy practice subjects in the last year.

Among the new approaches that are being adopted by faculty members are teaching basic and professional subjects as integrated courses, introduction of team-based learning and inter-professional education⁽⁷⁻⁹⁾. Nevertheless, reluctance is often perceived to changing/revising conventional teaching and assessment methods, both by academic staff and by students.

Many studies emphasize the importance of students' perception and their participation in evaluating the need for curricular change and in reforming specific courses⁽¹⁰⁻¹³⁾.

A student perspective study on the current Pharmacy curriculum of our faculty is necessary in the light of possible changes due to the adaptations within the Bologna process and accreditation requirements.

Our study aims to determine students' perception of the Pharmacy curriculum in the University of Medicine, Tirana (Albania), delivered during the academic years 2008-2013 and give students' feedback to help improving different aspects of the curriculum.



Material and Method

A 10 questions survey regarding different aspects of Pharmacy curriculum (2008-2013) was developed by faculty members based on accreditation requirements^(14,15) and other similar studies^(16,17). Main outcome measures were: frequency of students' satisfaction with different aspects of Pharmacy curriculum and perceived indispensable and not indispensable subjects of Pharmacy curriculum. Five questions contained statements followed by answers given on a Likert-type satisfaction scale ranging from very satisfied to very unsatisfied (including without response), and blank spaces for students' suggestions. Students' opinion was requested with regard to the subjects (courses) of the Pharmacy curriculum that they considered indispensable and those considered not essential for their training as a pharmacist. They were asked also about the need for changing the current curriculum and to evaluate it on a scale from 1 to 10. An open question on their perception of "what lacks the Pharmacy curriculum" was introduced in the survey to identify the opportunities for improvement. Personal data regarding gender and average grade during all the study period were also collected.

To maximize the response rate, the survey was conducted before the practice final exam in the facilities supervised by three faculty members; questionnaires were distributed in hard copy format ensuring it was relatively short and clear.

The study population was all students enrolled in the fifth (last) year of the Master of Science in Pharmacy degree program at the University of Medicine, Tirana, Albania (N=108).

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, SPSS version 20. The open response question and students' suggestions and comments were analyzed independently by two researchers using thematic analysis.

Ethical approval has been granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee.

Results

One hundred and seven students (99%) agreed to participate in the survey, mostly females (90.7%), all aged between 23 and 25 years old. The most common average grade of the participating students (almost half of them) during all study period was comprised between 7 and 8 from a maximum of 10. A more detailed prescription of the study population is presented in Table I.

Table I. Study population (n=107)

Variable	No. (%)
Gender	
Female	97 (90.7 %)
Male	6 (5.6 %)
Unanswered	4 (3.7 %)
Average grade	
5 – 6	3 (2.8 %)
6 – 7	15 (14%)
7 – 8	54 (50.5%)
8 – 9	29 (27.1%)
9 – 10	2 (1.9%)
Unanswered	4 (3.7%)

A majority of the students (79.4%) agreed that there is a need to change the pharmacy curriculum (Figure 1), assessing the current curriculum with an average of 7.32 (SD 1.388) on a scale from 1 to 10.

Whilst the majority of students, 71 (66.3%) were satisfied with the knowledge gained during their 5 years program in Pharmacy, only 2 (1.9%) were very unsatisfied with it. In terms of course loads, 72.9% of the students thought they were reasonable, with 60.8% and 12.1% respectively satisfied and very satisfied. Over half of the students stated they were satisfied with the opportunities given to engage in active learning activities, however more than a quarter were unsatisfied with it. This level of discontent was the highest of all questions, suggesting a weak point with regard to students' participation in active learning activities. Almost the same results were obtained concerning the students' assessment methods, with comments suggesting for more and diversified methods to fully test the gained knowledge and acquired skills. The results of the first five questions are summarized in Table 2.

The subjects considered indispensable by the students for their training as future pharmacists were Pharmacology (for 82 students), Pharmaceutical Chemistry (76) and Pharmaceutical Technology (61) and other subjects mostly closely related to the pharmacist profession such as Pharmaceutical legislation, Ethics etc. as shown in Figure 2. On the other hand, the subjects regarded as not necessary were Food Chemistry (27) and mostly subjects from the first year such as Physics and Physical education as reflected in Figure 3.

Forty-eight out of 79 students (60.8%) when asked about the missing elements of the current curriculum responded that more practice-oriented subjects are needed and 9 students expressed the desire to integrate hospital pharmacy practice in the program. Some of the written suggestions of the students on the open question included:

"More clinical than scientific subjects are needed, hospital pharmacy practice would be interesting",

"I think that pharmacy practice should be more and distributed over a three years period to have a better integration of theory with practice",

"The course load in the fourth year of study is too heavy",

"Better organization of the schedule in the first and second year."

Although the apparent good results of students' satisfaction, their comments suggest that there are many aspects of the actual Pharmacy curriculum that can be improved, which is clearly shown in their positive attitude towards curriculum change.



Table 2. Students' satisfaction with different aspects of Pharmacy curriculum, in % (n=107)

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	Unanswered
The distribution of subjects (courses) over the years was appropriate to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills.	8,4	64,5	18,7	3,7	4,7
During the 5 years program I have gained knowledge that prepare me for my further professional training.	10,3	66,3	16,8	1,9	4,7
Course loads were reasonable.	12,1	60,8	18,7	1,9	6,5
I was provided opportunities to engage in active learning activities (e.g., laboratories, case studies, in-class activities).	13,1	54,2	26,2	3,7	2,8
The methods used for students' assessment (written examination, multiple choice, oral examination etc.) were suitable for testing the gained knowledge and acquired skills.	8,4	55,2	24,3	3,7	8,4

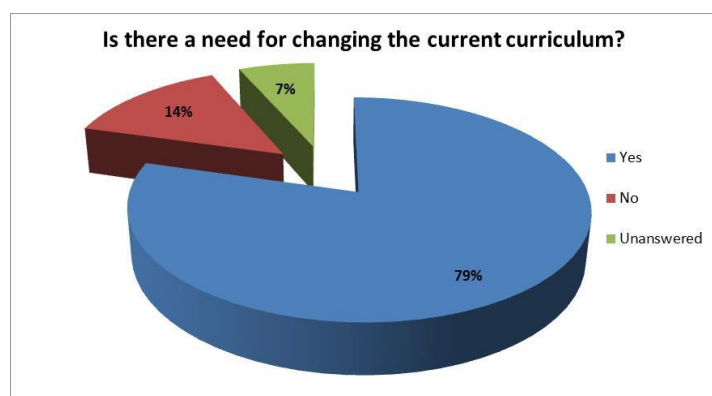


Figure 1. Students' perception on the need for changing the curriculum

Discussion

Students were mainly satisfied with the current Pharmacy curriculum, although they identify several problems which have to be addressed along with other indicators to help in curriculum optimization. There was general consensus among students that more practice-oriented and less scientific theoretical subjects distributed through all five years were necessary. Future studies would be of interest to see how students' perceptions change when they face the real work as pharmacists in Albania or other countries.

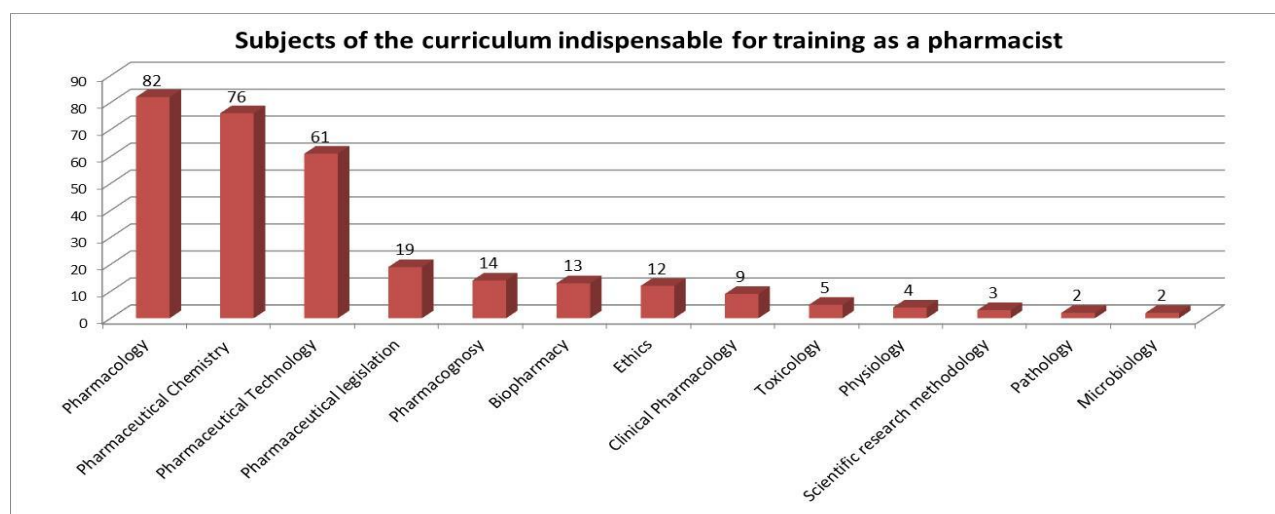


Figure 2. Students' perception on the indispensable subjects of Pharmacy curriculum

Conclusion

Pharmacy students' perception suggests need for a change in the current curriculum, especially towards active learning activities and students' evaluation methods. Their specific suggestions on different



aspects of the actual curriculum would be useful in future curriculum assessment.

13. Nousheen Aslam. Role of students in enhancing quality of education in developing countries. *IJPTP*,

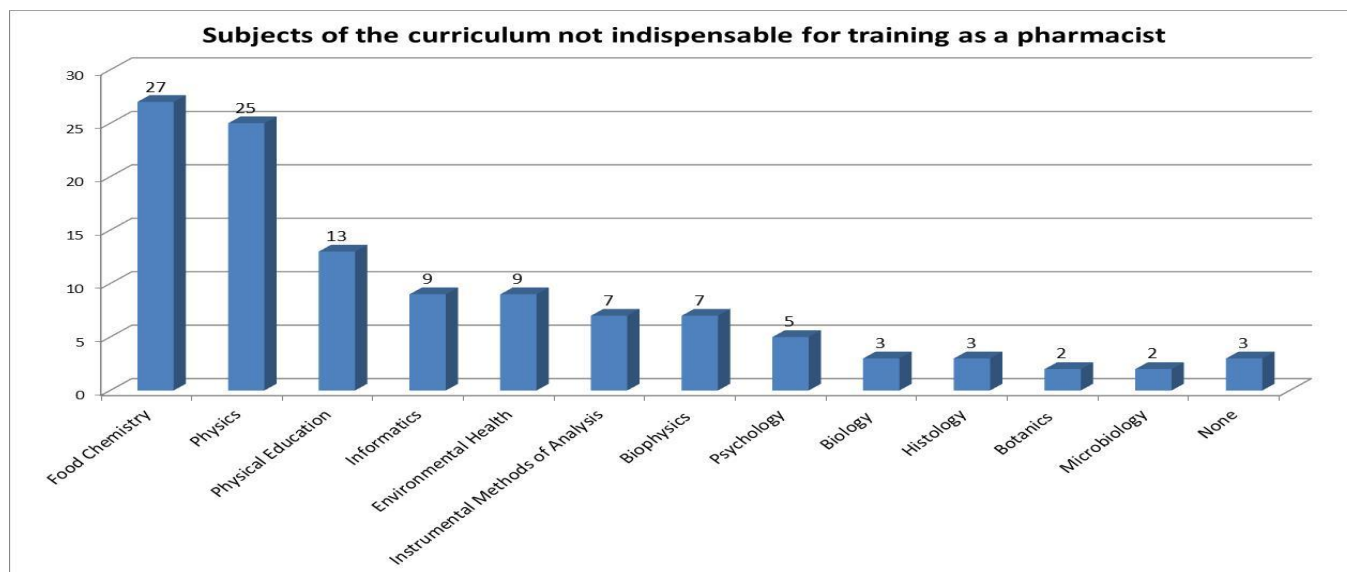


Figure 3. Students' perception on the not indispensable subjects of Pharmacy curriculum

References

1. Turkeshi E. Medical education in Albania: Challenges and opportunities. *Med Teach*. 2011;33(6):437-42.
2. Roshi E, Burazeri G. Revitalization of academic medicine in Albania. *Croat Med J*. 2005 Feb;46(1):10-5.
3. Communiqué of the Conference of the Ministers responsible for Higher Education, Berlin, 19 September 2003.
4. Decision of the Council of Ministers on the establishment of the University of Medicine, Tirana, Nr. 48, 23.01.2013.
5. Burazeri G, Civljak M, Ilakovac V, Janković S, Majica-Kovacević T, Nedera O, Roshi E, Sava V, Simunović V, Marusić A, Marusić M. Survey of attitudes and knowledge about science in medical students in southeast Europe. *BMJ*. 2005 Jul 23;331(7510):195-6.
6. <http://umed.edu.al/fakultetet/farmacia.html>
7. Ofstad W, Brunner LJ. Team-based learning in pharmacy education. *Am J Pharm Educ*. 2013 May 13;77(4):70.
8. Giordano C, Umland E, Lyons KJ. Attitudes of faculty and students in medicine and the health professions toward interprofessional education. *J Allied Health*. 2012 Spring;41(1):21-5.
9. Joseph S, Diack L, Garton F, Haxton J. Interprofessional education in practice. *Clin Teach*. 2012 Feb;9(1):27-31.
10. Ryan G, Hanrahan J, Krass I, Sainsbury E, Smith L. Best practices assessment to guide curricular change in a bachelor of pharmacy program. *Am J Pharm Educ*. 2009 Feb 19;73(1):12.
11. French JC, Bickett MM, Iocono JA. Shifting through course evaluations: medical student comments driving surgery curriculum changes. *J Surg Educ*. 2013 May-Jun;70(3):368-72.
12. Netterstrøm I, Fiehn NE, Larsen T. Changing the curriculum and the role of the teacher and the students in the classroom--an analysis of the process of reforming a course in oral microbiology. *Eur J Dent Educ*. 2011 Feb;15(1):26-30.

2012,3(1),189-190.

14. Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education, State Quality Standards for Accreditation of Second Cycle Study Programs, Tirana 2012.
15. Order of the Albanian Minister of Education and Science nr. 135 dated 21.03.2011 "On the approval of state standards of quality for institutional evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions"
16. American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy, Graduating Pharmacy Student Survey, Public School Summary Report, 2012.
17. Ma. Eva C. San Juan. UIC Pharmacy Graduates' Competencies Towards Advanced Clinical Pharmacy Practice: A Perception Based Study. *IJPTP*, 2011, 2(3), 83-90.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Authors contributed equally to all aspects of the study.

PEER REVIEW

Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.