

EDITORIAL

ADOPT VAE PROGRAMME FOR BASIC MEDICAL SCIENCES:
THE 21ST CENTURY METHOD TO HONOUR WORK AND EXPERIENCE

Tehseen Iqbal

DG Khan Medical College, Dera Ghazi Khan, Pakistan

Mao Zedong Quotes: All genuine knowledge originates in direct experience.

We are so slow a follower of the West that we lag behind about 50 years, at least in higher education. The only way to get the highest degree of PhD in Pakistan is to leave your home, go to a big city where a university is located and then follow a tedious, trodden path. Developed countries have moved forward and devised many routes to get a PhD that suits many types of students. Validation of the Acquired Experience (VAE) is the 21st century way of ratifying and recognizing experiential learning, a method of non-formal education. It matches the work and experience of the student/applicant with the 'outcomes of the requested degree'. For a PhD degree, his intellectual work will be assessed with the outcomes of the PhD course. Pakistan should not waste its precious, talented, learned and experienced basic medical scientists. Award them PhD through VAE program and engage them to train young medical scientists.

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Many of us have heard the phrase "we are followers of the West". No doubt, we are following the West but we are so slow a follower that we lag behind in every field, especially science. Take, for example, the basic medical sciences, which are taught for about half of the duration of a medical course. These are Anatomy, Biochemistry, Physiology, Pharmacology, Forensic Medicine, Pathology, and Community Medicine. We have only a few PhDs in these subjects. One reason for this is confusing policy about medical postgraduation in these subjects. Mainly, the medical universities are conducting postgraduate programmes while College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan (CPSP) is also conducting FCPS in some basic science subjects. Unfortunately, FCPS in Pakistan is categorized as PhD. This discourages young doctors to pursue a PhD programme. Nowhere in the world FCPS is considered as a PhD. That is why Pakistan's ranking is very low regarding the number of PhD's, hence is considered educationally a low ranking country. Funding for basic medical sciences is also very minimal. We earlier suggested a Medical Higher Education Commission to facilitate postgraduation in basic medical sciences.¹

According to the world over standard practice, the ranking of the medical universities is determined on the basis of number of PhD scholars produced by them. The PhD Programme in Basic Sciences in public sector medical universities of Punjab seems 'almost on the verge of closure'. The varsities admit students for PhD in Basic Sciences after passing MPhil making them eligible for the level-III qualification after 22-years of continuous education while the CPSP registers the students for FCPS in Basic Sciences after MBBS (18 years' education). Section 5 of the CPSP Ordinance 1962 only allows the students requiring hospital-based

training in clinical sciences including surgery, medicine, gynaecology etc., and not the basic medical sciences.²

There are international standards to categorize educational qualifications which are based on credit hours allocated for the course. It will be shocking for many people that for FCPS (at least in Physiology) there is no mention of credit hours, still College of Physicians and Surgeons (CPSP) has managed to equate FCPS with a PhD, well done PM&DC! Pakistan needs to follow international standards to step out of educational seclusion and find a respectable place in the comity of nations. 'Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education 2019' is adopted by UNESCO in Paris on November 25, 2019.³ This may be adopted by our regulatory bodies as 'gold standard' to recognize educational degrees, and Pakistan should immediately ratify this Global Convention.

The only way to get a PhD in Pakistan is to leave your home, go to a big city where a university is located and then follow a trodden path; get admission after passing an entry test, undertake a full time course work, write a synopsis, do a research work, write a thesis and defend it. This takes many years of hard work as well as putting a financial burden on the family. We are sticking to the only one method and the result is that there is harassment, mental torture, bribery and many other types of corruption reported in institutions conducting PhD programmes.⁴ Developed countries have moved forward and developed many routes to get a PhD that suits many students.⁵ Following these different routes will definitely create an environment of healthy competition, enhance available choices for working people, and facilitate people who cannot leave their place for PhD and it will also decrease the chances of corruption in higher education programmes. This is

initiative according to the 'Education For All' (EFA) which is a global movement led by UNESCO, aimed to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015.⁶

Validation of the Acquired Experience (VAE) is a programme of awarding degrees on the basis of practical work and experience. VAE is the 21st century's way of ratifying and recognizing experiential learning which is a method of non-formal education. In Pakistan, we are also partially following this method, e.g., if you have studied one course, some part of the other course is exempted. An MPhil degree holder is exempted from two years of course work if he wants to pursue FCPS in the relevant subject. In Europe, VAE programme is being conducted since 2002. Degrees issued through this programme are formally recognized in Europe, US, and signatories of The Hague Convention. The Lisbon Convention on Recognition also recognizes VAE degrees.

In France, VAE is taken as a human right: 'any person engaged in active life is entitled to validate the achievements of his experience, including professional, for the acquisition of a diploma, a title for professional purpose or a qualification certificate'. VAE matches the work and experience of the student/applicant with the 'outcomes of the requested degree'. For example, if one student applies for a PhD degree in his field, his intellectual work will be assessed with the outcomes of the PhD course. Outcomes of a PhD course as mentioned in the literature are: Goal 1: Graduates will demonstrate a detailed knowledge of their areas of specialization. Goal 2: Graduates will master the analytical/methodological skills needed to evaluate and conduct research in their areas of specialization. Goal 3: Graduates will demonstrate their ability to design and

conduct original research in their chosen fields of specialization. Goal 4: Graduates will be able to teach college-level courses in their areas of specialization. Goal 5: Graduates will be able to communicate the results of their research in a clear and effective manner (e.g., in conferences).⁷

Pakistan should not waste its precious, talented, learned and experienced basic medical scientists. We should award them PhD through this programme and make them supervisors to train young medical scientists to do their PhD. Our legislators should go through the French law: *loi de modernisation sociale du 17 janvier 2002 & décret 2017-1135 du 4 juillet 2017* and legislate similar law for Pakistan.

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Address for Correspondence:

Dr Tehseen Iqbal, Professor & HoD Physiology, DG Khan Medical College, Jampur Road, Dera Ghazi Khan, Pakistan.

Cell: +92-333-6144799

Email: prof.tehseeniqbal@gmail.com

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