The effect of hidden curriculum management program on the professional behavior of students in nursing and midwifery faculty

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Curriculum is the main element of the higher education system and is the most fundamental tool for providing students with the knowledge, experience, and skills needed to deliver community services. Students are familiarized with a variety of scientific, social, political, and so on skills and attitudes through curricula and in particular the hidden curriculum (HC). Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to determine the effect of HC management on the professional behavior of medical sciences students in Zabol. **Materials and Methods:** This study was conducted with the participation of 69 students including nursing midwifery and emergency medicine At the beginning of each semester, the students received Goze's professional behavior questionnaire to familiarize themselves with the assessment method and identify potential expectations. In addition, the Professional Ethics Workshop was conducted at a 6-h session per semester for professors and instructors, and the students' assessment was explained to them at the meeting. The data obtained from professional behavior questionnaire were analyzed by SPSS using descriptive and inferential statistics. **Results:** The findings showed that the mean score of professional behavior in nursing students was 60.12 ± 0.70, in midwifery students 50.22 ± 8.75, and in emergency medicine students 40.23 ± 9.87, respectively, performed after three semesters and the transfer of HC in the internship reached 67.11 ± 13.10, 56.14 ± 12.16, and 50 ± 10.14, respectively. The results were statistically significant ($P < 0.0001$). **Conclusion:** This study indicated that the student is indirectly learning to adhere to the principles of ethical values and take commitment and responsibility for the care of the patient.

KEY WORDS: Hidden curriculum, Iran, Management, Professional behavior, Zabol

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is one of the main components in educational planning which is a key factor in conducting educational plans. Despite the importance of good teaching, the outcomes are far from ideal.[1] Teachers provided with proper training on up-to-date information and new research on classroom management, on emerging technology tools for the classroom, and on new curriculum resources and more could become a successful factor to their schools. The best professional development is ongoing, collaborative, and connected to and derived from working with students and understanding their culture.[2] Curriculum is, in the simplest terms, a description of what, why, how, and when students should learn. The curriculum is not, of course, an end in itself. Rather, it seeks both to achieve worthwhile and useful learning outcomes for students and to realize a range of societal demands and government policies. It is in and through the curriculum that key economic, political, social, and cultural questions about the aims, purposes, content, and processes of education are resolved.[3] In relation to medical education, Hafferty defines three interrelated dimensions of education: The formal curriculum, which is education as stated, intended, formally offered, and endorsed; the informal curriculum, which is unscripted, predominately *ad hoc*, includes the significance of role models, and is a highly interpersonal form of teaching and learning; and the hidden curriculum (HC), which is described as a set of influences that function at the level of organizational structure and culture and includes customs, rituals, commonly held "understandings," and the "taken for

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granted" aspects of a profession. Both the informal and HC offer a fundamental distinction between what students are taught and what they learn.[4] The elements of HC possessed in schools are values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms and values which are important parts of school function, ceremonies, and the quality of interpersonal communication.[5] HC refers to unscripted, *ad hoc* learning that occurs outside the formal, taught curriculum and can have a powerful influence on the professional development of students. While this learning may be positive, it may conflict with that taught in the formal curriculum.[6] It is believed that the HC refers to practices that affect the values and expectations of the teachers and the community.[7] The HC will be useful for those who want to learn more whether in the classroom setting or out of classroom. It means that the students as well as the teachers will make use of this curriculum according to their intellectual needs.[8] The students also learn various skills and gain attitudes such as respect and proper relationship with patients, staff, faculty members, and clients. They also learn patience, sympathy, commitment, equality, obedience, and accountability in their performance.[9] They can also learn the knowledge, skills, concepts, and attitudes whose development is risky and threatening (neglect, negligence, and carelessness in caring for the patient and harming him). The importance of studying the effects of HC is due to the sustainability and stability of the learning that it produces.[10] Today, the ethical approach is one of the most important approaches to curriculum design. In this approach, curriculum is an effective tool for the development and growth of moral virtues and social skills of learners and prepares them for appropriate coping with new issues and problems.[11]

In the medical science education, HC has the most impact in clinical education environments. There is a bulk of definitions on HC: Hafferty and Frank, in medical education, have stated that this education is a process of transferring the ethical culture and transferring the norms and rules related to the emotions and behavior of medical students in the clinical setting as a moral environment.[12] Cohen also points to the role of professors in professional ethics and believes that today's educational environments have undermined the commitment to medical values by playing non-professional roles.[13] Gleican believes that there is a fundamental distinction between what students are taught in educational environments and what they learn, which implies a HC and involves learning at the level of interpersonal interactions.[14]

The process of professional socialization requires students to internalize or learn the knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors, values, and ethical standards, and this process forms part of their professional identity.

Adherence to professional ethics leads to better care for patients which in turn leads to better patient care and satisfaction. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the effect of HC management on the institutionalization of behavior and professional performance of medical sciences' students in Zabol University of Medical Sciences.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted with the participation of 69 students including nursing, midwifery, and emergency medicine [Table 1]. At the beginning of each semester, the students received Goze's professional behavior questionnaire to familiarize themselves with the assessment method and identify potential expectations. The professional behavior questionnaire has 27 items, with a five-point Likert scale (from at all to always), and each item has a value of between 1 and 5.

In addition, the Professional Ethics Workshop was conducted at a 6-h session per semester for professors and instructors, and the students' assessment was explained to them at the meeting. There was also an assessment of the professional behavior of professors, instructors, and students before the implementation of the HC. Strength points (timely presence in the department, respect for the patient, name and profile labels, self-confidence, and compassion for both the patient and the student) and weaknesses (lack of attention to patient talk, the use of scientific terms for explanation to the patient, less attention to patient education by the student, and not considering the patient's mental condition) were noted. Moreover, in professional ethics sessions, the importance, principles, and foundations of professional ethics were explained to the professors and instructors. The HC included the behaviors that learners received from the professors' viewpoints (dignity, respect, tolerance, accountability, education, and training) and their transfer to students was an important goal of the research.

The themes of the HC of professional ethics in this study were as follows:
- Greeting to the patient
- Introducing himself or herself to the patient
- Communicating with a gentle, dignified, and cheerful tone
- Communicating with the respectful words and behavior
- Active listening to the patient's talk and giving an appropriate response
- Explaining to the patient before doing the care (catheterization, taking blood pressure, temperature, medication, etc.)
- Taking consent form from the patient before invasive procedures if needed
- Taking responsibility to care and meet patient needs and accountability for their performance

- Observing patient rights
- Observing patient privacy
- Teaching the patient during admission and during discharge with simple and understandable language
- Recording all medical and care measures in the patient's case
- Reporting correctly in patient file.

The data obtained from professional behavior questionnaire were analyzed by SPSS software using descriptive and inferential statistics.

RESULTS

The findings of this innovative activity showed that the mean professional behavior in nursing students was 60.12 ± 0.70 and 50.22 ± 8.75 in midwifery students and 40.23 ± 9.87 in emergency medicine students, respectively, performed after three semesters and the transfer of HC in the internship reached to 67.11 ± 13.10, 56.14 ± 12.16, and 50 ± 10.14, respectively. The results were statistically significant ($P < 0.0001$). Before implementing the HC, 60% of the students were inactive in teaching the patient, 78% in the patient privacy, 48% in explaining the work to the patient, 55% in taking the consent form from the patient, and 52% in introducing themselves to the patients. After carrying out the HC, 96% were used to made the necessary observance in teaching the patient, 98% in observing the patient privacy, 100% in explaining the work to the patient before doing anything, 100% in taking consent form from the patient before the work, and 100% in introducing themselves to the patients. After the implementation of the HC, 92% of students stated that the curriculum could make important changes in the education and observance of ethics and in other students in clinical settings. On average, 86% of nursing, midwifery, and emergency medicine students stated that they were satisfied with their profession, and they saw this as a blessing from the almighty God that they were able to provide patients with services. Most students (97%) declared that HC

had a great impact on their professional behavior and improved cooperation between them (83%) Figure 1.

DISCUSSION

In this study, it was shown that after three semesters of the implementation and transfer of HC, students' professional behavior has increased. This study suggests that students learn to adhere to the principles of ethical values and take responsibility for taking care of the patient. Parsanejad and Yadegri[15] postulate that university laws and regulations, professor and student interaction, university atmosphere, professors' teaching method, interpersonal relations of students, and physical structure of university could have a great impact on students' disciplinary behavior. In this study, students also reported that HC had an impact on their professional behavior, and this curriculum made significant changes in them. In 2012, Rogers *et al.*[16] show that HC has a very powerful influence on the formation of student professional development that is consistent with our study. Research by Mosalanejad *et al.*[17] also shows that the HC dimensions could bring many challenges to the students from the scientific, social, and educational dimensions, and the author concluded that today it is necessary to pay particular attention to this aspect of the curriculum to provide a ground for fundamental changes in the field of medical education in medical sciences. This is also consistent with our study. Furthermore, the results of the research by Mojallal-Choboglu and Tamjidtash[18] showed that the HC components are effective in consolidating the student's scientific identity. Psychologists and educational experts have always considered learning and academic success and their effective factors. In recent years, they attempt to identify the variables, by the help of which they can promote academic success.[19]

In this study, an average of 97% of the students was satisfied with their profession and saw it as a blessing from Allah almighty who serves the patients of the
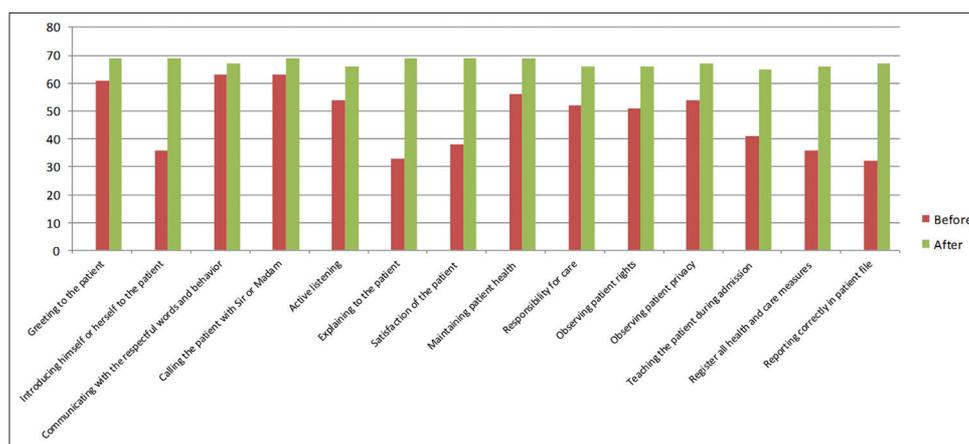

Figure 1: Frequency of professional ethics before and after hidden curriculum in students

Table 1: Demographic profile of students

Student demographics	*n* (%)
Field of study	
Nursing	27 (39)
Midwifery	38 (26)
Emergency	16 (23)
Gender	
Female	44 (63.8)
Male	25 (36.2)
Total	69 (100)
Age (year); mean (SD)	20.58 (0.55)

SD: Standard deviation

community and do their best to improve their health. However, the result of Nabavi study[20] interest in nursing was less in senior clinical students than in freshmen clinical students. The progress of students of medical sciences is associated with public health; then, it is recommended that managers of medical education and planners pay further attention to motivational factors.[21]

CONCLUSION

Overall, the results of this study indicated that HC affects students' professional behavior and enhances their performance and professional ethics. Understanding our current situation and our desirable situation in the professional ethics is necessary for the development of ethics in professions. Given the provision of good care and services to patients, it is needed to develop professional behavior by providing appropriate education in the members of each profession. Therefore, acting in the planning of the content of the obvious elements of the curriculum will increase its positive outcomes in the form of hidden elements of the curriculum.

The result necessitates the concurrence of student learning. In addition, universities of medical science can provide professors and instructors with proper management through workshops, so that they have a proper understanding of their roles and responsibilities that go beyond the superficial learning of knowledge and cognitive skills. This can provide them with a model of ethical and scientific ethos for students. The findings of this study indicated that HC concepts need more pay attention, which improves the student's professional performance in medical sciences groups and inducing positive thinking toward society, creates and characterizes personality traits and changing attitudes of students, and increases the morale of obedience and the spirit of critical thinking of positive learning such as professional ethics and conscience.

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