



IMPROVING STUDENT PERFORMANCE

A coordinated set of teaching and learning strategies can have lasting impact on student achievement

The Challenge

At the beginning of Women for Health programme, the findings from an initial assessment of the quality of teaching demonstrated that the programme's focus Health Training Institutions lacked not only the resources but the essential skills and attitudes that promote quality in teaching and learning. This resulted in a high student drop out and low pass rate. Some of the key problems were:

a. Poor Quality of Teaching and Learning methods

The training institutions did not appear to foster a culture of enquiry learning enabling the students to become confident, competent adult learners. The teaching methods used, which were almost entirely didactic lecturing, did not help the students to learn and lack of formative assessment left the tutors and students unaware of their progress. The over-reliance on lecturing with students taking notes also created challenges for students with poor spoken language and writing skills in English who are not able to follow lectures well enough to write good notes.

b. Limited student access to libraries and IT facilities

The use of libraries and access to modern technology can greatly enhance students' academic performance. However, when the Women for Health programme began their support of the Health Training Schools, it was usual for the school libraries to only open from 8am to 3pm daily. This was exactly when the students were attending lectures, thereby limiting their access to library service. In addition, the libraries contained insufficient up-to-date text books and visual materials. Access to the internet was extremely limited, both for tutors and students.

c. Low Tutors Motivation

Poor access to relevant teaching materials and equipment, lack of challenge and insufficient management and support had resulted in a significant number of unmotivated tutors and clinical instructors.

d. Inadequate links between theoretical knowledge and clinical practice

The linkages between theory and practice were very weak; so that students were unable to make sense of much of the learning and were unable make the linkages for themselves. Moreover, inadequate curriculum planning led to students not being aware of the curriculum content for the year, thereby limiting their ability to take responsibility for their own learning.

The Response

The programme developed a range of responses to the above challenges, including the following:

a. Improved Quality of Teaching

In order to improve student learning outcomes, W4H held series of capacity building workshops for the training institution staff on appropriate teaching and learning methodologies and performance management with follow-up support and supervision. This included a teaching observation checklist that can be used by the teachers, peer mentors and monitors.

b. Support for Students

Additional coaching and mentoring is now provided for students who have poor achievement. This includes additional English language support, effective note taking, the use of text books and help with reading and answering exam papers.

c. Improved Teacher Motivation

Efforts to improve tutor motivation has included access to training and capacity building and support for attendance at professional seminars; access to teaching and learning materials, such as projectors and demonstration room equipment as well as access to the internet; improved working environment, including improved office accommodation and furnishing; and additional allowances for providing extra coaching. Moreover, the attention provided by the programme in general acts as a significant motivator for the staff.

d. Improved Libraries

More efforts have been made for libraries to increase their staff and opening times, with libraries being open in the evenings when students have finished class. W4H has also purchased computers for use in the library, and a range of up-to-date reference books.

e. Improved Linkages

The capacity of tutors and clinical preceptors has been strengthened to facilitate students' reflection on the linkages between theory and practice and vice versa and how to make those linkages for themselves. The capacity of the curriculum committee has also been developed to review the school curriculum based on what student needs to learn over the entire school year. This can be used to help students to plan their learning and make the links between what they are learning.



The Results

- The training institutions have been transformed into places where student learning has increased and the performance results have shown great improvement from 40% in some schools to 70% in their final qualifying exams.
- All the supported institutions have reviewed their school curriculum and improvement in the libraries services to the students.
- New teaching methods have been adopted with 50% of tutors practicing appropriate teaching methods and extra coaching
- The attitude of tutors towards their student has improved with tutors establishing more cordial relationships with their students and being more concerned for their students' achievement.
- The relationship between the clinical personnel and the academic staff of the schools has greatly improved and they now hold quarterly meetings to discuss the academic and clinical performance of students

Lessons Learnt

- Tutors need to feel confident in a full range of teaching methods if they are to cater for the learning needs of all their students
- Training on improved teaching skills also helps to transform the tutors' attitude towards students' academic and social concerns
- Students need to be able to take responsibility for their own learning
- Effective functioning, well-equipped and accessible libraries and IT facilities are an essential component of student learning

Key Words: coaching, mentoring, teaching quality, libraries, linkages

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