Letter to the Editor

Educational scholarship and Ph.D. curriculum of medical education in Iran: A serious critique and a proposal

Eshagh Moradi [1*]

[1] Education Development Center (EDC), Urmia University of Medical Sciences, Urmia, Iran

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***Corresponding author:**
Education Development Center (EDC), Urmia University of Medical Sciences, Urmia, Iran.
Email: moradi.i@umsu.ac.ir

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Medical education as a discipline currently accepts students with two M.Sc. and Ph.D. degrees in Iran. This Ph.D. course was approved by the Curriculum Council Committee in Medical Sciences in 1386 AH (2016 AD). The curriculum of medical education has a total of 50 credits (including core: 20, non-core: 8, and dissertation: 22), which subsume various courses and topics such as student assessment, curriculum planning, educational leadership, program and teacher evaluation, qualitative research, educational research, clinical teaching, and so on (1), which is very relevant, attractive, and of course valuable and can be responsible for the medical science community in the field of education. Obviously, due to its dynamic and complex nature, any curriculum may have defects over time, or it may need to be revised, or it may be content overloaded, but the important point is that considering the mission of this curriculum to educate graduates who can train human resources in the field of medical education and improve the quality of education and research, as well as taking into account the professional duties expected from the graduates of this field, there is a serious critique of the curriculum of this field, which is further discussed below.

According to the definition, educational scholarship is a set of scholarly activities that have characteristics including being continuous deep reflection, committed engagement in action, shared publicly, critique-based, critical enquiry process, dynamic process, learning focused, disciplinary, and context-oriented (2). It also has prerequisites and agreements before implementation that must be considered (3), and training is necessary.

One of the necessary competencies expected from graduates of Ph.D. in medical education in Iran is to be able to have activity and innovation in various units of the Education Development Center (EDC), and it is necessary to acquire knowledge and skills about these units. One of these units is the “educational scholarship” unit, which performs various activities such as consulting, writing, and activities in the field of innovative and educational projects. Also, according to the faculty development program, graduates of medical education should be able to teach this topic of educational scholarship in the form of a workshop or other educational methods, both practically and theoretically. So far, the issue is clear, but the serious critique of the curriculum is that no course credit related to educational scholarship has been considered in the Ph.D. curriculum of medical education, so there is no time and program to teach this important topic to Ph.D. students of medical education, while it is one of their necessary and expected competencies. The absence of an educational program will lead to a lack of learning, and as a result, the student will not be empowered in this field.

The proposal that is presented is that a 2-credit course (1 theoretical and 1 practical credit) with the title "Educational Scholarship" be placed in the curriculum of Ph.D. medical education (as a core course). During the theoretical credit, various definitions, characteristics, portals, and other topics of the educational scholarship will be taught, and as a practical credit, this competency will be expected from students to be able to develop, implement, and evaluate an educational scholarship proposal after

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completing this course and subsequently publish the results of their work (Table 1). This suggestion is made by the author who has held many various educational workshops (along with interaction and receiving feedback from the participants) on the topic of educational scholarship throughout the country (so far 30 workshops from 10 different universities), and his Ph.D. thesis was about educational scholarship topic and also considering that this action will not lead to curriculum overload.

Table 1. Status of "educational scholarship" course in the Ph.D. curriculum of medical education

Curriculum title	Proposed course title	Core or Optional	Course Credit	What to teach?	How to teach?	How to assess?
Ph.D. in Medical Education	Educational Scholarship	Core	Theoretical: 1 Practical: 1	- concepts, attributes, criteria, domains of educational scholarship - writing, critiquing, evaluating, implementing, and documenting the educational scholarship activities	workshop, by reflection and interactive lectures, giving continuous feedback, flipped classroom, and other relevant educational methods and techniques	Essay, MCQ, EMI, oral exam, practical assignments, writing and presenting a proposal, and other relevant assessment methods

Finally, educational scholarship is an outstanding subject; it has its knowledge, and determining a course unit for it, in addition to empowering and fulfilling the expectations of the students in the field, can lead to this science expanding more and more by promoting the culture of learning. Also, it can cause more scholarly and innovative educational plans to be offered, evaluated, and implemented in the medical sciences universities, and in the end, it will improve the quality and quantity of the educational system.

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