



BRIDGING THE GAP IN MEDICAL EDUCATION: EVALUATING MBBS STUDENTS' VIEWS ON AETCOM AND THE FOUNDATION COURSE

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ABSTRACT **Background:** The transition from high school to medical school is challenging, and the National Medical Commission (NMC) introduced Competency-Based Medical Education (CBME) to ease this shift. The Foundation Course and AETCOM (Attitude, Ethics, and Communication) modules aim to equip students with essential skills for medical practice. **Objectives:** The aim of the study was to evaluate MBBS students' perspectives on the effectiveness, challenges, and potential improvements in the AETCOM and Foundation Course. **Methodology:** A cross-sectional, questionnaire-based study was conducted among 705 MBBS students across India. Data was collected via an online feedback form and analysed using descriptive statistics. **Results:** While 67.4% of students found AETCOM beneficial, many recommended making it more practical. Similarly, 63.3% supported the Foundation Course, but students suggested incorporating hands-on training like CPR and suturing. **Conclusion:** The study highlights the need for a more interactive, skill-based approach to improve engagement and learning outcomes in these foundational courses.

KEYWORDS : CBME, AETCOM, Foundation Course, Medical education

INTRODUCTION

The transition from high school to medical school is a significant milestone for students, often accompanied by various challenges. Recognizing this, the National Medical Commission (NMC) introduced Competency-Based Medical Education (CBME) to shift from traditional medical teaching to a more student-centered, skill-oriented approach. A key component of this transformation is the Foundation Course, designed to ease first-year MBBS students into the rigorous academic and ethical standards they will navigate throughout their medical education. By fostering essential skills such as communication, professionalism, and ethics, the course serves as a cornerstone in shaping well-rounded healthcare professionals.

While the Foundation Course has been largely appreciated for helping students transition smoothly into medical school life, students' responses reveal a mixed picture. Some have shared that the course effectively bridged the gap between their previous education and the demands of medical studies, providing a solid foundation in both academic knowledge and professional values [1][2]. However, others felt that some parts of the course, especially the theoretical components, could be more engaging and interactive to better capture their attention and connect with real-world applications. This feedback is essential in fine-tuning the course and ensuring that it caters to the needs of the students.

The integration of AETCOM (Attitudes, Ethics, and Communication) modules within the Foundation Course aims to address these very aspects by promoting essential interpersonal and ethical skills. Yet, even as CBME encourages reflective learning and continuous assessment, the implementation of these foundational courses presents challenges. It was reported that active participation and interactive teaching methods significantly enhance learning outcomes, supporting our suggestion that integrating the course within regular academic schedules may improve student reception [3]. Some studies highlight that while CBME students exhibit certain competencies, the reflective capacity and application of the Foundation Course and AETCOM principles often require further emphasis to truly resonate with the students [4][5]. This underscores the need for a more tailored approach to integrating these foundational components within CBME, ensuring that students gain not just knowledge but also the skills and mindset required to thrive as compassionate and competent healthcare providers.

OBJECTIVES:

This study aims to gather MBBS students' perspectives on the effectiveness and challenges of the AETCOM and Foundation Course. It also explores their suggestions for improving these components of medical education to better align with clinical needs and student learning preferences.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This cross-sectional, questionnaire-based study was conducted in Pt.

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Study Design

A questionnaire-based cross-sectional study.

Study Population

The study included 705 MBBS students aged 18–24 years from various medical colleges across India.

Methodology

An online feedback form, created using Google Forms, was distributed among MBBS students from various institutions to evaluate their views on the AETCOM and Foundation Course. The questionnaire sought to assess student engagement, their perception of the courses' effectiveness, and suggestions for improvement. After securing informed consent, participants were registered, and their responses were collected for analysis. The feedback was processed into visual representations such as pie charts and bar graphs, offering a comparative analysis of both positive and negative responses, thus providing valuable insights into areas for potential enhancement of the AETCOM and Foundation Course. Detailed information was recorded, including:

Full Name, Age, Gender, Background (Urban/Rural), College Name and Address, Batch, Professional Year

Responses Collection And Processing

The questionnaire was disseminated through social media platforms among medical institutions across India, ensuring broad participation from MBBS students. The responses were systematically gathered and processed for analysis.

Analysis

The collected data were analysed to explore various relationships, including:
The influence of professional year on students' opinions regarding AETCOM and the Foundation Course.

The relationship between different batches and variations in thought processes.

An assessment of students' analytical abilities based on the suggestions and ideas they provided.

RESULTS

This study analyzed responses from 705 MBBS students across various medical institutions.

1. Demographic Profile

The demographic analysis of respondents provided valuable insights into the student population participating in the study:

Gender Distribution: 55.3% of respondents were female, while 44.5% were male.

Age Group: The most common age among students was 20 years, accounting for 23.4% of the total participants.

Year of Study: 51.5% were first-year students (1st Prof), 31.1% were in their second year (2nd Prof), 11.8% were in their third year (3rd Prof - 1), and 5.6% were in their final year (3rd Prof - 2).

Residential Background: A majority of students (59.3%) were from urban areas, while 40.7% had rural backgrounds.

2. Students Perception of AETCOM and the Foundation Course

Table 1 : AETCOM (Attitude, Ethics, and Communication Skills)

Question	Response		
	YES (%)	NO (%)	MAYBE
Do you believe AETCOM is needed?	67.4 %	10.6 %	22%
Is AETCOM conducted seriously by colleges?	79.6%	10.5 %	9.9 %
Should AETCOM be conducted every year?	60.7 %	22 %	17.3 %
Do you believe the foundation course is necessary?	63.3 %	14.2 %	22.6%
Is the foundation Course conducted seriously?	59.3 %	20.1 %	20.6%
Should the foundation Course be conducted every year?	39.4 %	40.7 %	19.9 %

Student Feedback on AETCOM:

While **22% of students were uncertain** about the necessity of AETCOM, **67.4% considered it valuable for medical practice**, whereas **10.6% found it unnecessary**.

79.6% of students believed that institutions conducted AETCOM seriously, while **10.5% disagreed**, and **9.9% were unsure**.

Students recommended making AETCOM more practical by incorporating real patient interactions and ethical case discussions.

There was a demand for structured assessment methods to ensure better engagement and learning outcome.

Table 2 : Foundation Course

Question	Percentage of Students Agreeing				
	1/5	2/5	3/5	4/5	5/5
Found the Foundation course helpful	18.6%	19.9%	34.6%	12.6%	14.3%
Found AETCOM helpful	21.8%	23.1%	26.8%	15%	13.2%
AETCOM satisfaction rate	9.8%	9.5%	28.4%	20.1%	32.2%
Foundation Course satisfaction rate	25.2%	12.5%	26.4%	13.8%	22.1%

Student Feedback on the Foundation Course:

- 59.3% of students believed the course was conducted seriously**, while **20.1% disagreed**, and **20.6% were uncertain** about its effectiveness.
- Many students recommended reducing the course duration while making it more interactive.
- They emphasized the need for more hands-on clinical skills training such as suturing, CPR, and exposure to outpatient departments (OPD).
- There was a demand to integrate the Foundation Course into regular teaching hours rather than treating it as a separate module.
- Students suggested revising the course content to focus on essential skills for a smoother transition into clinical years.

DISCUSSION

This study provides critical insights into MBBS students' perceptions of AETCOM and the Foundation Course, highlighting their significance and areas for improvement. The findings align with existing literature on medical education reforms and student experiences.

AETCOM was regarded as essential by 67.4% of students, reinforcing its role in professional development, particularly in structured ethical training. However, concerns were raised about its practical

implementation, with students advocating for real-patient interaction. This aligns with previous studies emphasizing the importance of competency-based education in ethical reasoning and clinical decision making. The need for structured assessments further supports the effectiveness of this approach in improving professional competence.

Regarding the Foundation Course, 63.3% of students acknowledged its necessity, yet only 39.4% favoured its annual implementation. Previous studies have similarly reported that extended theoretical sessions can lead to disengagement. Our study highlights the need to streamline the course by prioritizing essential skills to optimize competency. Additionally, 59.3% of students agreed that the Foundation Course was structured appropriately, yet concerns about engagement persisted. Research suggests that interactive teaching methods significantly enhance learning outcomes, supporting the argument for integrating more practical and case-based learning into the course. Moreover, reducing the course duration while increasing interactivity could improve student engagement, aligning with existing literature on medical education strategies.

These findings underscore the need for curriculum refinements in both AETCOM and the Foundation Course. Strengthening practical applications, integrating real-world ethical dilemmas, enhancing clinical exposure, and implementing structured assessments could significantly improve these courses. Future research should evaluate the long-term impact of these courses on professional competency, communication skills, and patient interaction outcomes to ensure that medical education evolves to meet the demands of modern healthcare.

CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into MBBS students' perceptions of AETCOM and the Foundation Course. While a majority (67.4%) acknowledged AETCOM's importance in medical practice, concerns were raised about its practical applicability suggesting the need for a more hands-on, patient-centered approach. Similarly, although 59.3% acknowledged the serious implementation of the Foundation Course, many advocated for curriculum refinements, including better integration into regular teaching, increased clinical exposure and a more interactive learning experience. These findings underscore the necessity of evolving medical education to bridge the gap between.

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