

The centre for professional development, the national university-Sudan: Evaluating the achievements

Wisal OI. Gameel,
Asim QM. Ali

Centre for Professional Development,
National University-Sudan,
Al Mujahdeen, Khartoum, Sudan

Abstract

Background: The National University-Sudan is a private university, in Sudan that has been established in 2005. It consists of eight colleges: Medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, nursing, medical laboratories, physiotherapy, and administrative sciences. The Centre for Professional Development (CPD) was established in 2010. The aim was to provide and organize training for academic, administrative, and information technology staff. The plan was to have a basic phase focusing on the provision of basic concepts and skills. With the basic phase coming to an end, this paper is a review of both the achievements of the center and the setbacks, in the period between 2011 and 2013. **Methodology:** Data were collected from the needs assessment forms, meetings, activity evaluation forms filled by participants by the end of each activity, attendance sheets, the annual CPD reports, and discussion with different faculty members. The collected data were analyzed using Excel program. **Results:** On comparing the faculty attendance per college in 2011–2012 and 2012–2013, a decline in the attendance was found in radiography (from 59.09% to 28.48%) and in medicine (from 28.52% to 15.8%). On the other hand, the faculty attendance from dentistry rose from 20.91% to 33.3%. The same trend was found in pharmacology with a rise from 21.43% to 36.67%. In nursing and physiotherapy, there was an increase in the percentage of trained staff to 6.75% and 1.25%, respectively. In both years, participation from the faculty of administrative sciences was weak. **Conclusion:** There was an increase in the total percentage of faculty members attending from 2011 to 2013. Yet, the details of academic staff attendance show a lot of variation between the 2 years with some faculties attending more activities while others have a declining attendance. While the use of attendance records was useful in reflecting the response of the academic staff to the CPD activities, it did not reflect the actual role played by the CPD as an advisory body to individual faculties or staff members.

Key words: Evaluation, faculty attendance, professional development

INTRODUCTION

Background

The National University-Sudan was established in 2005 as

a college for medical and technical studies. It started with six faculties: Medicine, pharmacology, dentistry, radiology, nursing, and physiotherapy. In 2014, it became a university with eight faculties. The need for provision of continuous training for academic faculty was acknowledged in 2009 with the decision to establish an education unit. In 2010, the name was changed to the Centre for Professional Development (CPD). This change was based on the fact

Address for correspondence:

Dr. Wisal OI. Gameel, Centre for Professional Development,
National University-Sudan, Al Mujahdeen, Khartoum, Sudan.
E-mail: wisalgameel@gmail.com

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that the concept of professional development encompasses continuous education and/or life-long learning as well as provision of opportunities for personal and professional development for academic, administrative, and information technology (IT) staff within the university.

The aim of the center was to update and upgrade the capabilities of the university staff to improve the educational service provided for the future health professionals. To improve the quality of medical education in the National University, instructors and technical staff need on-going quality professional training which will eventually enhance students' achievement.^[1,2] One of the most shared challenges in higher education institutes is leveling teaching practices and methods by all instructors to label students' experiences unified.^[3-5]

By the end of the 1st year, the center managed to secure a separate suitably furnished quarter with independent staff. The objectives were clearly stated to include: Promotion of the culture of life-long learning, empowering the staff with new knowledge and skills, providing opportunities for reflection and feedback on professional practice within the university and promotion and support of research within the university. The first phase of the program was a basic phase, the objective of which was to introduce the participants to the basics of medical education. Workshops and sessions on teaching and learning, curriculum and course design, assessment, and research methodology were organized by the center. Presenters were from the university faculty staff and experts in the field in the country and outside the country.

Scope of work

In any higher education institute, there are four domains of particular importance. Accordingly, the CPD had identified the following areas of professional development: (1) Teaching and learning, (2) assessment, (3) research, and (4) leadership and career advancement. Training sessions, workshops, journal clubs were all themed under the above-mentioned categories. They were tailored carefully to fit different competencies and levels of experience expected in our academic and technical staff. On a different note, the relationship between the CPD and administrative offices in the university required additional roles and services, all explained in Figure 1.

Work organization

The manager of the center reports directly to the president of the National University. Professional training is provided to administrative and IT staff as well as academic staff. Frequent meetings with deans of faculties and heads of departments are used for feedback from both sides.

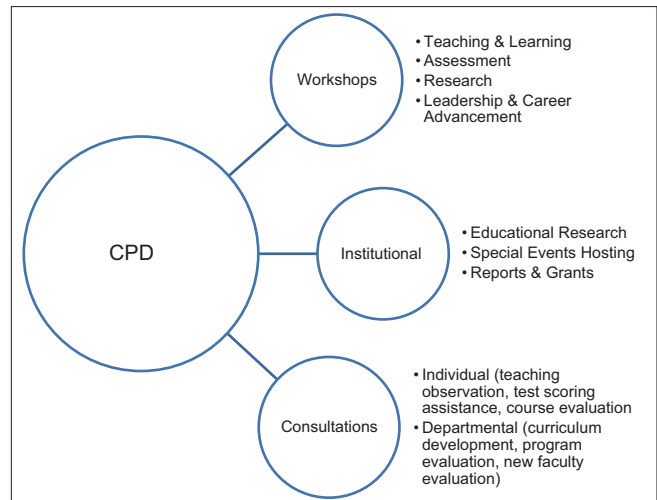


Figure 1: Centre for Professional Development domains of service and ancillary activities

At the beginning of each academic year, the center sends out a needs assessment form to the faculties to decide on the academic and training needs of their staff. A different form is sent to administrative and IT departments. According to the result of analysis of the needs assessment forms, a calendar is made and distributed to all faculties and departments of the university. A room for flexibility is maintained to accommodate lectures by visiting lecturers and to cater for certain needs requested by a specific department or faculty. The monthly journal club program has a separate calendar which is sent to the deans to nominate the staff member to present their journal club. In most activities, all of the staffs are invited, except when the activity was organized specifically for a certain specialty.

Feedback is collected both by questionnaires in each activity and verbally as well. The center has a team work policy that encourages involvement and participation of all members of staff in organizing the activities within the center. In addition to the formal calendar, the center provides professional advice to the staff in designing of courses, reviewing the curriculum, and other aspects of professional practice in the university. The center provides opportunities for professional development for staff from other organizations in the country. Certificates of attendance are issued for participants in the main activities with specific credit hours.

By the end of each academic year, the data from the attendance of staff and feedback questionnaires are used to write an annual report that is submitted regularly to the president of the university.

The objective of this study was to evaluate the achievements of the center over the period 2011–2013.

METHODOLOGY

The faculty attendance Of CPD activities was used as a tool to reflect the interest of faculty in the professional development and hence as a means for evaluation of the role of the CPD in the university.

Data were collected from attendance records, questionnaires, annual reports, and verbal comments taken over 2011–2013. The analysis of the results compared the attendance of each faculty members to other faculties. Activities were classified into research workshops, teaching workshops, and journal clubs. Attendance of each type of activities was compared to the rest to identify trends in faculty members’ interests. All data were analyzed using Excel program.

RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

The CPD worked with 51 academic staff members comprising 69% of the National University 73 faculty members. Figure 2 shows a breakdown of CPD users by the college.

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate participation difference per faculty when comparing the attendance of the academic staff in academic years 2011–2012, and 2012–2013 out of total CPD users.

DISCUSSION

All programs covered by the CPD from 2011 to 2013 were categorized into three main categories: Excellence in teaching, excellence in research, and journal clubs.

Academic year 2011–2012

A total number of 25 sessions were offered in the academic year 2011–2012.

Teaching

The excellence in teaching series consisted of 9 workshops, under the following titles:

- The curriculum in the National University
- Tutoring and facilitation
- Design a power point presentation
- Problem-based learning

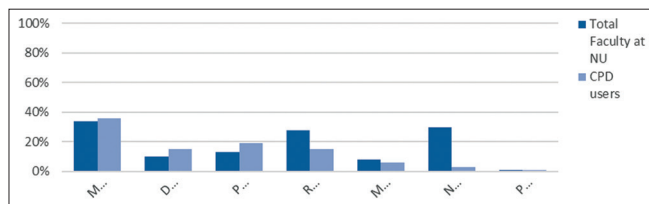


Figure 2: Centre for Professional Development users versus total faculty at National University 2011–2013

- Course design
- Instructional methods
- Multiple choice questions (MCQs): Part one
- Communication skills
- MCQs: Part two.

Research

The excellence in research series consisted of 11 workshops, under the following titles:

- Health research methodology
- Writing a research proposal
- How to write a scientific paper
- Study design
- Sampling
- Tools of data collection
- Data management
- Designing a questionnaire
- Referencing, final report, writing the abstract
- Common errors in biomedical research
- HINARI and PubMed.

Journal clubs

The journal club series consisted of 5 sessions, under the following titles:

- Interventional radiology
- ICT
- Computed tomography imaging
- Radiology technologist
- JClA.

To enable thematic comparison, Figure 5 presents faculty participation levels in research categorized sessions when compared to teaching sessions in the academic year 2011–2012.

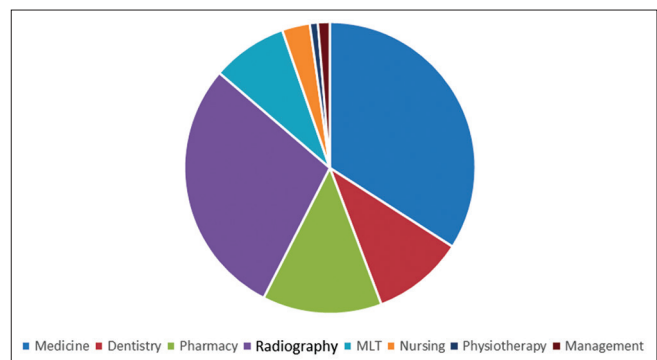


Figure 3: Centre for Professional Development users by the college in 2011–2012. Remark: The faculty of radiography had the highest record of trained staff of 59.09% which constituted 28.76% of the total trained staff over the year. The faculty of medicine had 28.52% of its staff trained. That was about 34.07% of the total staff trained in that year. On the other hand, faculties of dentistry and pharmacology had only 20.91% and 21.43%, respectively, of their staff trained over 2011. The faculties of nursing and physiotherapy had one member of staff at that time. But while the nursing attendance was 3.10% of the total trained staff, the physiotherapy attendance was only 0.88%

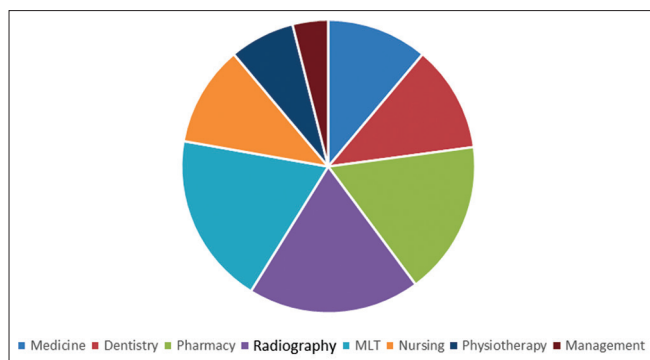


Figure 4: Centre for Professional Development users by the college in 2012–2013. Remark: The percentage of trained staff from the faculty of medicine dropped to 15.80% constituting only 20.58% of the total number of staff attending Centre for Professional Development activities in 2012. The radiography participation dropped as well to 28.48% trained staff which was 15.11% of the total trained university staff. On the other side, the dental faculty participation rose to 17.68% training 33.33% of their staff. A similar rise was observed with the pharmacology, forming 24.76% of the faculty staff trained resulting in training of 36.67% of their staff members. The medical laboratory technology trained staff rose from 38.00% to 52%. The rising number of staff in nursing and physiotherapy may explain the rise in their attendance to 6.75% and 1.25%, respectively. In both years, the participation of academic staff from administrative sciences was weak. While this may be explained by the nonrelevance of the activities to their practice, their attendance was no better in activities focusing on teaching and research methodology

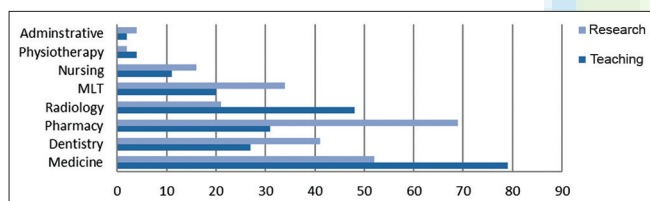


Figure 5: Participation in teaching versus research 2011–2012. Remark: Higher participation rates in research categorized sessions were observed among faculty members in dentistry, pharmacy, medical laboratories, nursing and administrative sciences. Academic staff in both medicine and radiography participated in teaching sessions almost twice more than research workshops

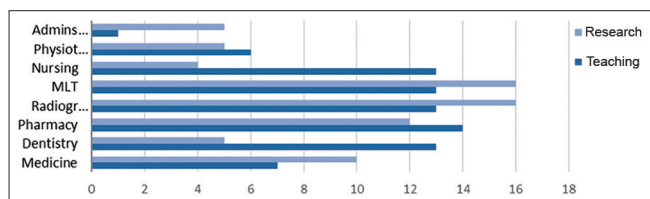


Figure 6: Participation in teaching versus research 2012–2013. Remark: Higher participation rates were observed in teaching categorized sessions among academic staff from dentistry, pharmacy, nursing and physiotherapy. Staff members in medicine, medical laboratories, and radiography participated in research sessions more than teaching workshops. The cause of this dramatic change in staff interest is still unclear.

Academic year 2012–2013

A total number of 13 sessions were offered in the academic year 2012–2013.

Teaching

The excellence in teaching series consisted of 5 workshops, under the following titles:

- Course design – aims and objectives
- Review of the nursing program curriculum
- Organizational behavior
- Oral presentation techniques
- Quality control in higher education institutes: National University-Sudan.

Research

The excellence in research series consisted of 3 workshops, under the following titles:

- Scientific publication writing course for health professionals
- Writing a research proposal and quality of paper
- Telomere and longevity of life.

Journal clubs

The journal club series consisted of 4 sessions, under the following titles:

- Quantitative evaluation of the brain structures in schizophrenic patients
- How to avoid back pain during work, carrying a school bag, and lifting objectives
- Effects of different mouthwash rinses on third molar surgery-related malodor
- Patient safety.

To enable thematic comparison, Figure 6 presents faculty participation levels in research categorized sessions when compared to teaching sessions in the academic year 2012–2013.

CONCLUSION

Studying the analysis of academic staff attendance of the CPD-activities showed an increase in the total percentage of academic staff attending from 2011 to 2013. Yet, the details of staff attendance show a lot of variation between the 2 years with some faculties attending more activities, e.g., dentistry while others have declined their attendance, e.g., radiography. This is reflected clearly in the percentage of trained staff in each faculty per year which is getting less in the 2nd year. While the medicine and radiography faculty members' attendance was declining, the dentistry and pharmacology attendance was on the increase in the academic year 2012–2013. The possible explanation for those changes; is the recruitment of new members of staff with more interest in their professional development. The same reason can explain the rising attendance from physiotherapy and nursing. The focus on both years was on methods of teaching and research methodology.

Participation of the faculties in the journal clubs was a challenge that eventually worked.

Although using the attendance managed to reflect faculty participation in formal activities, but it did not include the CPD advisory role at an individual level both in reviewing the curriculum and providing assistance for staff members in course design and career development.

The analyzed data of attendance did not include the part-time and visiting staff from other universities who were always welcomed to attend.

RECOMMENDATION

Reasons for nonattendance of CPD activities need to be investigated. Even though a questionnaire was distributed, no response was received. Verbally, the academic staff deny disinterest and claim that having a very busy schedule in National University is the reason behind their poor attendance. Other causes may be the lack of motivation and the weak participation of senior faculty members. All these possible explanations require more proper investigation into this matter to reach a solution that satisfies all.

Using the attendance worked as a tool to evaluate the achievements of the CPD and to identify areas of weakness. However, a different tool needs to be developed to evaluate the actual impact of the CPD on professional

practice. After all, the aim of the CPD is to bring about an actual change in academic professional practice.

The use of an incentive-financial or career promotion-may motivate more staff members to attend. Participation of senior staff is essential for the successful continuation of the program. It will be motivational for junior staff members as well as providing an expert input into the professional development.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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