

**Perceptions of Medical Students Undertaking a Problem-Based Learning Curriculum:  
Experiences during the Pre-Clerkship Phase**

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**Background:** Student's perceptions of pre-clerkship phase concerning their experience of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) curriculum are variable.

**Objective:** To determine how students in the pre-clerkship phase perceive problem-based learning and the changes in these perceptions with increasing experience.

**Setting:** College of Medicine and Medical Sciences, Arabian Gulf University, Bahrain.

**Method:** Students were interviewed in focus groups and responses were used to develop a structured questionnaire, with 25 sets of questions on five components of the PBL process, which was distributed to 148 students. Response rates were 96%, 76% and 46% for years 2, 3 and 4, respectively.

**Result:** Students perceived PBL as interesting and it develops self-confidence. During tutorials, most of the students were willing to challenge each other but not the tutor. Students preferred discussions with peers to consulting seniors. As the seniority increase, students tended to discuss more during the second tutorial and tended to ask more questions. While preparing for end-of-unit examinations students attempted inter-problem integration less than intra-problem integration.

**Conclusion:** Students perceived PBL as an interesting, though difficult, method of learning, which helps to develop their self-confidence but may result in gaps in their knowledge. The tendency to focus on clinical aspects of a given problem at the expense of its basic science concepts should be discouraged by careful construction of the problems and tutor guides. While students challenge their peers during discussion, all students do not prepare adequately for the second tutorial. Integrated learning can be further enhanced through focusing on the themes identified in the unit booklets and the use of integrated questions on these themes.

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