

Pre-Clinical Fixed Prosthodontic Education

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The dental curriculum should be competency-based, the success of which is greatly dependent on students acquiring the necessary basic skills in order to practice dentistry safely and with confidence. Although a large part of the academic curriculum is focused on the acquisition of sound theoretical knowledge, the application thereof in a practical sense remains a pivotal component in dental education.

This practical teaching and learning starts in the pre-clinical laboratory (PCL), which equips students with an appropriate level of practical skill for them to apply when treating patients and offers a superior teaching and learning experience in comparison to a traditional bench-top laboratory. Fixed prosthodontic treatment modalities represent very skilled, lengthy and costly dental procedures. Hence training is limited to the final year students who have acquired the necessary basic dental knowledge and level of dexterity to progress to these more specialised dental treatments (such as crowns, bridges, inlays, onlays, veneers, post-cores, bite splints). The objectives of the pre-clinical fixed-prosthodontic course are to equip students with the basic theoretical knowledge and practical skills which they can use when treating patients in the clinics, safely and with confidence. It represents the first time that students are exposed to fixed-prosthodontic treatment modalities within their undergraduate dental degree program.

The ever-growing diversity of student classes and student preferences for various types of teaching and learning activities highlights the importance of adjusting and augmenting current teaching methods to meet the demands of modern education, by embracing additional methods to better facilitate student learning and improve outcomes. This educational paradigm shift is equally applicable to the PCL, in which new skills are acquired, based on sound theoretical understanding and application of knowledge. The PCL is where students get the opportunity of putting theory into practice and educators are tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that all students develop the necessary level of understanding and dexterity to apply when they treat patients in the dental clinic.

It remains one of the pillars of dental education to be able to offer students the best possible pre-clinical training and education based on effective simulation techniques which foster deeper learning, critical thinking and clinical reasoning within students. Attention should therefore be given to providing a safe and educationally conducive learning environment which incorporates all aspects of teaching and learning in a practical sense for this to take place in.

Given the high technological specificity of the PCL, the inherent financial implications of establishing and maintaining such a simulation laboratory, especially when coupled with the plethora of other constraints such as time, location, high costs of dental equipment and materials, pose real challenges for dental faculties in their pursuit of excellence for optimal student learning.

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