

Comparing Pathways to Success: A Comparative Study of Work-Readiness in Undergraduate and Graduate-Entry Pharmacy Programs

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Abstract

Background

Work-readiness, a blend of competencies and attributes favourable to employers, is vital in various professions, including pharmacy. Four significant determinants of an individual's work-readiness include personal characteristics, organisational acumen, work competence, and social intelligence. In the context of pharmacy, the Australian Pharmacy Council's accreditation standards define fitness-to-practise from both personal (capability) and competency perspectives.

Summary of Work

The study compared indicators of work-readiness between final year students in 4-year undergraduate B.Pharm and 2-year accelerated graduate-entry M.Pharm programs between 2018-2020. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, with quantitative analysis of similar competency-based assessments, including simulated case marks, overall tutorial performance, and final unit marks. Triangulation of data was carried out through focus groups and analysed using inductive content analysis, mapping to self-determination theory to explore students' perceptions of work-readiness.

Results

Analysis revealed no significant differences in competency-based assessment performance criteria between B.Pharm and M.Pharm programs. Focus groups exhibited high confidence levels in both programs with no major disparities in four emerging themes: Learning on Clinical Placements, Work Experience, Simulation-Based Learning and Assessment, and Community Pharmacy Focus.

Discussion

The lack of disparities between the two programs challenges conventional perceptions about the differences in undergraduate and graduate-entry education. This suggests that both programs effectively nurture the required attributes for work-readiness. Themes emerging from the study reflect essential aspects of work-readiness, reiterating the importance of real-world experience and simulation-based learning in the curriculum.

Conclusions

Both undergraduate and graduate-entry programs equally prepare students for entry-level pharmacist work-readiness. The balanced focus on theoretical knowledge, hands-on clinical experience, and attitudinal aspects could be contributing to this alignment in competencies.

Take-home Messages

Since both educational paths appear equally effective, emphasis might shift to individualised learning experiences. Such understanding paves the way for more adaptive, student-centred approaches in pharmacy education and may serve as a model for other health professionals.

References (maximum three)

Caballero CL et al (2011) J Teach Learn Grad Employability, 2:41-54