Medical Students' Lived Experiences with Administrative Systems: A Phenomenological Study at CMH Kharian Medical College.

Aamir Mahmood Farooqi[1], Hira Khalil[2], Waleed Ahmed Butt[3], Urfa Zaryab Mir[4,*], Aasma Qaiser[5], Farheen Zehra[6]

ABSTRACT:

Objective: To explore medical student's lived experiences and emotional challenges related to organizational administrative systems at CMH Kharian Medical College.

Methodology: This phenomenological qualitative study involved was conducted at CMH Kharian Medical College over four months from August 2025 to November 2025. Purposive sampling was used to obtain 22 MBBS students from different academic years. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted in English or Urdu. Interviews focused on student's experiences with administrative departments, including academic affairs, examinations, accounts and student services. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized. Data were analyzed by using NVivo 12 Pro to identify significant statements, formulate meanings and to develop themes.

Results: Analysis revealed seven major themes. These included difficulty in understanding administrative procedures, poor and inconsistent communication, rigid administrative rules, interdepartmental transfers and inefficiencies, emotional exhaustion and administrative anxiety, perceived lack of empathy and respect and feelings of powerlessness leading to a culture of silence. These challenges contributed to stress, fear of clerical errors, frustration and reluctance to voice concerns, negatively affecting student's academic focus and emotional well-being.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that administrative systems significantly influence medical student's academic and emotional experiences. Addressing issues related to transparency, coordination, flexibility and empathetic communication may help develop more student-centered administrative practices and improve the overall educational environment.

Keywords: Administrative systems, Medical education, Organizational Culture, Student experiences.

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Introduction:

Medical colleges function within highly structured, organizational and administrative systems that are designed to support academic delivery, clinical training and institutional management.[1] With the help of different departments the system of a medical college is regulated by essential processes such as student admissions, registration, documentation, attendance monitoring, examination scheduling, clinical rotations, fee management and communication etc.[2] The concept of a good administrative system of any school, college or universities is to provide support to students in their academic progress and to give them a better learning environment that should be streamlined in every institution but the in reality, their efficiency and responsiveness are different among institutions[3]

At the same time, medical education is highly demanding, with its main focus on intuitional curriculum, ongoing formative and summative assessments and early clinical exposure.[4] It is not only tiring for students but also for administration. The main reason for this is to connect institutional policies with the daily academic activities of students. If there are problems in administrative processes, that can definitely affect student's continuity of learning, access to academic resources and following of rules and regulations. When these systems work well, they often go unnoticed. However, when they are inefficient or unresponsive, they can become a major source of stress, frustration and disruption for students.[3]

The most common issue in our country is the design of administrative systems in medical education that are more friendly for policymakers rather than for the students who interact with them daily. Delays in documentation, unclear or changing procedures, inconsistent communication across departments, rigid timelines and perceived lack of empathy from administrative personnel are frequently reported informally by students. These experiences are although common but systematically rarely documented or analyzed within the academic literature.[5]

Existing research in medical education has predominantly focused on curricular design, teaching methodologies, assessment strategies, faculty development and student performance outcomes.[6] Relatively little attention has been given to the organizational and administrative aspects that support the educational system. According to literature the administrative systems are mostly assessed by quantitative measures such as efficiency, processing time and rate of

1. Senior Demonstrator at department of Medical Education CMH Kharian Medical College, NUMS.
2. Assistant Professor in Department of Medical Education. CMH Kharian medical college, NUMS
3. Demonstrator at department of Medical Education CMH Kharian Medical College, NUMS.
4. Assistant Professor at department of Biochemistry CMH Kharian Medical College, NUMS
5. Associate Professor in Department of Medical Education. CMH Kharian medical college, NUMS
6. Senior Demonstrator at Department of Medical Education Niazi Medical and Dental College, Sargodha

**=corresponding author :*
Email: urfazaryabofficial@gmail.com
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compliance. However, these measures mostly neglected the student's personal experiences and emotional responses during administrative interactions. This gap is more noticeable in developing countries, where limited resources, traditional organizational practices and inflexible hierarchies, can make these processes even more challenging.[7] To understand and to solve all these issues it is very important to know the live experiences of students related to administrative systems, because these experiences are not just only procedural but also emotional and relational. Research showed that one of the contributing factor of tension, anxiety, hopelessness and sense of disengagement is to administrative inefficiencies.[8] In contrast, administrative systems that are transparent, responsive and student friendly can build trust, strengthen the sincerity of students with their institutions and promote a more supportive educational environment.[9]

For institutional leaders, particularly heads of administration and academic administrators, insight into students' lived experiences is very important for meaningful system improvement. Administrative systems can play an important role in shaping medical students' academic continuity and well-being, yet student's lived experiences with these systems remain largely unexplored.[10] Most existing evaluations focus on procedural efficiency rather than how administrative processes are experienced and interpreted by students. Understanding these experiences is essential to identify hidden challenges and inform more student-centered administrative practices within medical colleges. Accordingly, this study aims to explore medical students lived experiences and perceptions of organizational administrative systems within a medical college and to examine the challenges and emotional responses associated with these administrative interactions, with the intention of generating insights that can guide the development of more responsive and student-centered administrative practices.

Methodology:

Study Design and Setting: A qualitative phenomenological study was conducted to explore medical student's lived experiences with organizational administrative systems in CMH Kharian medical college. It was a semi structured interview-based study. The study was conducted over a period of four months, from August 2025 to November 2025, following approval from the Institutional Ethical and Review Board of CMH Kharian Medical College with letter number CKMC/IERB/AC-00269.

Participants:

A purposive sample of 22 medical students representing different MBBS years and genders participated voluntarily. The study included MBBS students currently enrolled at CMH Kharian Medical College who had direct experience interacting with administrative systems and were willing to share their experiences. Students who were on prolonged leave or did not consent to participate were excluded. All participants were able to communicate in either English or Urdu.

Data Collection: Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions. The rationale behind this was to help participants to recall specific administrative experiences and issues along with their feelings and reactions, and to give detailed explanation that how these experiences are affecting their emotions and academic activities. The confidentiality of the interviews was maintained by assigning codes (P1-P22) to participants. The language of interviews was according to the personal preferences of the participants (English/Urdu) and all interviews were recorded with consent. The recordings were transcribed word by word.

Data Analysis:

To analyze the data Braun and Clarke's (2006) Six-Step Thematic Analysis Framework was used

i. Familiarization with the data
ii. Generating initial codes
iii. Searching for themes
iv. Reviewing themes
v. Defining and naming themes
vi. Producing the report

NVivo 12 Pro (QSR International) software was used to organize and code the data. To generate the meaningful themes, codes were reviewed and refined.[11] To ensure the credibility of the findings, member checking was conducted with a few participants.

Results:

From the thematic analysis seven major themes were emerged:

Theme 1: Difficulty in understanding administrative procedures.

Subtheme 1.1: Unclear Instructions (P2, P5, P7, P11, **P16)**. Many students felt that the instructions, whether written or spoken, were not clear and were difficult to understand.

Subtheme 1.2: Frequent Changes in Procedures (P1, P6, P9, P14, P18). The administrative procedures were frequently changed, often without informing them in advance.

Subtheme 1.3: Reliance on Informal Sources (P3, P8, P10, P15, P17). Due to unclear official guidance, many students depend on peers or seniors for information

Theme 2: Poor and Inconsistent Communication.

Subtheme 2.1: Conflict in Information Across Departments (P4, P6, P9, P12, P19). Students shared that they often received different answers from different offices when asking about the same issue.

Subtheme 2.2: Outdated Notice Boards (P2, P7, P11, P14) Students noted that important notices were either displayed late or remained outdated.

Subtheme 2.3: Limited Use of Digital Communication (P5, P8, P13, P16, P20). Many participants felt that there was a lack of timely digital communication, such as emails or online portals.

Theme 3: Rigid Administrative Rules

Subtheme 3.1: Lack of Flexibility for Individual Cases (P4, P10, P15, P18). Many students believed that rules were applied strictly, without considering their personal circumstances

Subtheme 3.2: Strict Timelines and Deadlines (P1, P6, P12, P17, P21). Participants felt that deadlines were too rigid and did not accommodate their academic workload or personal issues.

Theme 4: Interdepartmental Transfers and Administrative "Ping-Pong".

Subtheme 4.1: Department to department referral (P3, P7, P9, P14, P18). Department to department referral without proper solution.

Subtheme 4.2: Wasted Time and System Inefficiency (P5, P10, P13, P16). These repeated referrals caused wastage of time along with frustrating.

Theme 5: Emotional Exhaustion and Administrative Anxiety.

Subtheme 5.1: Continuous stress from Administrative Tasks (P4, P8, P12, P15, P20). Many students felt mentally drained due to ongoing administrative demands in addition to their studies.
Subtheme 5.2: Fear of Clerical Errors (P2, P6, P9, P17, P21). Many students worried that errors in administrative records could affect their exams, attendance or academic progress.

Theme 6: Perceived Lack of Empathy and Respect
Subtheme 6.1: Lack of Responsiveness from Administrative Staff (P5, P7, P11, P16). Participants felt that their issues were not taken seriously by administrative staff.
Subtheme 6.2: Limited Support During Personal or Academic Challenges (P6, P10, P14, P18). Students shared that their situations were not understood when they faced illness, family problems, or academic stress.

Theme 7: Feelings of Powerlessness and Culture of Silence.
Subtheme 7.1: Limited Ability to Challenge Decisions (P4, P9, P13, P17). Many students felt they were not in a position to question or challenge administrative decisions.
Subtheme 7.2: Acceptance of Unfair Practices (P2, P8, P12, P19). Students often accepted issues rather than filing complaints, believing that it would not make a difference.
Subtheme 7.3: Reluctance to Speak Up (P5, P11, P15, P21). Many students avoided speaking up or reporting problems due to fear of possible negative consequences.

Discussion:

This phenomenological study related to medical student's lived experiences with organizational administrative systems and identified seven interconnected themes that reflect both systemic challenges and their emotional impact. The findings suggest that, although administrative systems are designed to support academic processes, students often experience them as confusing, rigid and emotionally challenging. One of the key themes was feeling difficulty in understanding of administrative procedures, mainly due to vague instructions, frequent changes and dependance on informal sources of information. These findings point towards a lack of clear and structured communication within administrative systems. It's natural that when official guidance is unclear students tend to depend on peers or seniors, which can lead to confusion and misinformation. Similar findings have been reported by Paralkar (2021), who highlighted that ambiguity in institutional processes can increase student stress and reduce trust in organizational systems. From a phenomenological perspective, such uncertainty affects sense of control and predictability of students within their academic environment.[12]
One of another contributing factors to increase the difficulties of the students is miscommunication across administrative departments. Other findings by participants are discrepant information, limited use of digital communication platforms and old notice boards patterns. In today's digitally connected academic environment, these findings reflect non-sequential communication, that are unable to fulfill the expectations of students. Similar findings have been reported by Bukhari et al., who noted that ineffective communication not only delays the solutions of problems but also gives the perception of neglect.[5] Another type of burden on students is the lack of authentic digital systems. To get actual instructions and information students have to visit the offices repeatedly which is totally a wastage of time and energy from their academic work.[13] The theme of rigid administrative rules further highlights the experiences of students about the inflexibility within the system. Participants felt that strict deadlines and rule-based decisions are sometimes against their current circumstances especially when they eagerly need sick leaves, during their personal difficulties or heavy academic workload. This reflects bossy mode where problems are not considered genuine but overlooked. As a result, students think that they are treated unfairly, especially in the demanding context of medical education where timely support is essential.[14]
A very different terminology used by the students is "ping-pong,". According to them they are frustrated from their department-to-department transfer to confirm even a single and integrated notification. This is all due to inefficiencies within the system, a lack of accountability, poor coordination between departments and unclear distribution of responsibilities. Participants often shared that they were sent from one office to another without receiving a proper solution, at the end all this is wastage of time. From the perspective of students, such referrals give a perception of lack of departmental interests. As a result, the confidence of students from institutional processes is decreasing day by day.[15] These operational hurdles are closely linked to emotional stress and burnout. These is always fear of error in heavy tasks from both curricular and extracurricular side. Even the fear of a small mistake that can negatively impact on the attendance, academic progress and results of examination. These findings suggest that instead of support the administrative systems are becoming a source of constant psychological stress. Similar findings have been reported by Jorge et al., who highlighted that administrative stress has a significant emotional impact on medical students, who are already under considerable academic pressure.[16]
In addition, students experience lack of respect from administrative staff. Many participants felt that during their difficult time of academic and personal activities they were ignored or maybe they misunderstood it. Such type of emotional feelings can reduce their trust from their own institutions. Being a human it's a normal behavior to receive empathy in such type of circumstances, they may hold back from asking and perceived that administrative system is unsupportive. These findings emphasizes the importance of courteous dialogue and compassionate behavior in administrative roles, as these factors strongly influence the psychology of students.[17]
The final theme reflects student's feelings that their actions are pointless and instead of giving their point of view or thoughts they should remain silent. Many participants felt that they are completely unable to question administrative decisions especially if they feel that these are wrong. All related to fear of its, negative outcomes or the developed mindset that complaints will remain static. As the time passes, this will become normal to accept even the unfair situations and build a loss of trust between students and institution. Similar findings have been reported by Lainidi et al., who noted that a culture of silence can limit feedback, hinder system improvement and allow existing problems to continue.[18]

Limitations and Future recommendations:

It was a single centered study; may be in other institutions we can get more findings or maybe they are not applicable to others. Due to purposive sampling technique and self-

reported data more chances of biasness. Future research should involve the data from other institutions too to get their point of view along with mixed-methods approaches. It was student centered study next research should also involve the perspectives of administrative staff to decrease the gaps and to support the development of more student-centered administrative systems.

Conclusion: This crux of this study is that organizational administrative systems play an integral role in building up the academic and emotional experiences of students. There are several challenges that the students are facing on daily basis, including unclear procedures, poor communication, rigid rules and lack of empathy. All these are increasing the level of stress among the students. So from the findings of this study it is clear that the administrative systems are not only important to build an institution but also to make a positive impact on psychological health of students. Improving transparency, coordination and empathetic engagement within administrative practices may enhance student well-being to make a supportive educational environment.

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Authors' Contribution	
Aamir Mahmood Farooqi	Conception of study or design of study
Hira Khalil	Article text writing
Waleed Ahmed Butt	Acquisition of data
Urfa Zaryab Mir	Drafting the article
Aasma Qaiser	Article text writing
Farheen Zehra	Data analysis