

## **Credit Transfer: a strategy for African medical schools during wartime, epidemics, and natural disasters Sudan's plight is an example.**

Mohamed Elimam Mohamed Ahmed<sup>1</sup>, Mohamed Elamin Ahmed Mohamed<sup>1</sup>, MD. Wail Nuri Osman Mukhtar<sup>1</sup> MD MScHPE. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1758-1713> Gamal Mustafa Abdallah Ahmed<sup>1</sup> MD MScHPE, Khansa Kamal Ahmed Omed<sup>1</sup>, MD. MohamedAhmed M Ibnouf<sup>2</sup>, FRCSEd, PhD.

1- EDC committee for credit transfer, Faculty of Medicine, University of Gezira,

2- Professor of Surgery, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Omdurman Islamic University, Sudan. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8231-9899> e-mail: maibnouf@gmail.com

Corresponding author

Prof Mohamed Elimam Mohamed Ahmed, MBBS, MSc HPE, MD, FRCS, SIUF

mohammedelimam@gmail.com Tel: 00201115556385, +249912362293

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7164-8387>

Keywords; credit transfer, war, epidemic, medical education

### **Introduction**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees the right to education without discrimination. However, this right is usually violated in wartime. In 2020 and 2021, the Global Coalition to Protect Education reported over 5,000 military attacks on schools and universities. In Sudan, the ongoing devastating war since April 15, 2023, has led to major forceful displacement of citizens, and schools in the semi-safe areas were used as concentration camps over congested with displaced families. In this context, introducing credit transfer (CT) in Sudanese universities is crucial to ensure the progression of students' academic journeys. In this editorial we highlight this vital issue and present the initiative of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Gazira, Sudan where this issue was studied and a proposal was formulated to be forwarded to the deans of the Sudanese medical schools, the Sudan Medical Council and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

### **Objectives:**

To explore the potential benefits and challenges of the credit transfer system in higher education in Sudan for its relevance and applicability in the ongoing conflict and afterward. Also, to present a summary of the initiative of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Gazira in this issue.

**Definition:** Credit transfer is a process that allows students to transfer credits earned from one institution to another for accomplishing the requirements for graduation <sup>(1, 2)</sup>. This process is relevant for students who wish to change their academic environment for justified reasons <sup>(3)</sup>.

### **Calculation of the credit transfer:**

A credit hour is a standard measurement of the academic work as in the course lectures, discussions, and assignments, plus the estimated study time spent on reading, solving assignments and preparing for exams. One credit hour represents one hour of direct instruction or two to three study hours outside the classroom per week <sup>(4, 5)</sup>.

- 1- Compile the contact hours of lectures, labs, tutorials, etc. with the estimated hours for preparing assignments, research and studying for the exam and round the sum to the nearest complete number.
- 2- To get the average week load, divide the sum of these hours by the number of the semester weeks and round the sum to the nearest complete number.

### **Summary of the 'PROPOSAL OF CREDITS TRANSFER REGULATIONS:**

#### **Methods for development of CT proposal:**

The Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Gezira has assigned a committee. Several meetings were held. Interviews and personal communication with the academic administrators, education experts, faculty members, and students were conducted and surveys for introducing credit transfer in the education practices were distributed. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed. A document of the proposed regulations was written, discussed and passed in consensus. The proposal will be endorsed to key stakeholders in the Faculty Board, Gezira University Senate and the Sudanese higher education sector to ensure its relevance and applicability.

#### **Definitions**

**Name of the regulation:** The Credit Transfer Regulations.

**The University:** Refers to the University of Gezira (U of G.)

**The faculty:** Refers to the Faculty of Medicine (U of G.)

**Credit Transfer:** Refers to the process of transferring credits earned from the results of teaching, training and evaluation of an academic semester(s), subject(s) matter or course(s) work within the context of the faculty curriculum in the enlisted educational institution(s) recognized the FMUG.

**Credit transcript:** Refers to a summary of individual learner achievements expressed in terms of credit equivalence or credit award and grade.

#### **Objectives of credit transfers are to:**

- 1.1- Facilitate transitions for students who wish to change their educational environment.
- 1.2- Recognise and evaluate prior learning experiences to avoid duplication of coursework.
- 1.3- Provide opportunities for students to accomplish their academic goals.
- 1.4- Save timing for education in epidemics and or national disasters.
- 1.5- Reduce the risk of student drop-out, and avoid repeating learning already undertaken and creating re-entry possibilities.
- 1.6- Offer greater choice and flexibility in choosing courses and institutions. If the medical school has elective courses (vocational, work-based and academic), better career decisions and choices will be expected.

### **The consensus summarised the advantages of CRT as follows:**

#### **A/ 1- Learners will be able to:**

- recognize and progress in achievement, according to their needs in similar schools of medicine located in safe areas.
- accumulation and transfer results of their academic attainment to their medical school
- students can continue planning for them for their future their goals

**2-Distant learning programs:** encourage more people for further professional development without sticking to fixed classrooms.

- make clear the amount and level of learning already achieved by enrolled employees,
- help employers compare the achievements and plan future training for other employees

**3- Partners and stakeholders of high education**

- are inspired to show more solidarity and engagement with the needs of the university.

**4. Prerequisites for credit transfers in medical education:**

4.1- The school of medicine should be enlisted in the Sudan Medical Council (SMC), Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and other accrediting bodies.

4.2- Ensuring that the curriculum in the credit transfer system is comparable to the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) and the core curriculum objectives.

**5. Precautions for implementation of the credit transfer:**

5.1 The limit of credit transfer: The initial maximum period is one semester with its designed credit hours; however, this can be increased after monitoring and evaluation.

5.2 The Credit Transfer Committee with the course committee and the concerned department, is entitled to manage the credit transfer, make the final decision, revise the credit transfer, and evaluate the student's results.

5.3- Evaluation of the course equivalence: the department in concern can conduct a thorough evaluation to determine the equivalence of courses, and grade the student evaluation in the same batch standards. This may involve reviewing the course syllabus, the learning objectives, and the assessment methods to ensure that the content and competencies are comparable and match the faculty standard settings.

5.4- Documents and transcripts: The students should be given an official transcript and documentation of their coursework from both medical schools. This document should include detailed information on the completed courses, awarded grades, and other relevant details. It should contain information on course codes, title duration, grades received, honours awarded, and degrees conferred.

**6. Monitoring and evaluation:** are functions of the faculty board and the course committee. This may involve evaluating the transfer credit policies and procedures and making decisions based on the university evaluation system.

**7. Endorsement and amendment:**

7.1- **Transparency and communication:** Maintain transparency throughout the credit transfer process communicating the requirements, procedures, and outcomes and providing student guidance and support to make the right decision.

7.2- **Representations:** The responsible initiating person for endorsement of the reciprocal credit transfer agreements is the Faculty Board or the delegated body.

7.3- **Validation:** Implementation of credit transfer should be in keeping with the academic bylaws of the university and its regulations to be approved by the university senate.

7.5- **The costs of tuition:** exam and other costs are the responsibility of the student applying for credit transfer, the faculty can assist within its financial capability.

**8. Cancellation or withdrawal of Credit Transfer:** This is subject to refusal by the opposite partners, or failure to comply with the regulation of the university, SMC and the accrediting professional bodies.

**Discussion:**

Credit hours measure the time commitment and depth of each course. Credit transfer is not widely accepted in the UK, where there is little research evidence of institutional practice and students requesting transfer arrangements. In contrast, in Norway, Sweden and the USA, transfer to another course, or even another high education institute is very common <sup>(6)</sup>. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is transparent and smooth in its processes of transfer and evaluation of credits <sup>(3)</sup>. Some education providers vary in their recognition of credit transfer <sup>(7)</sup>.

Students often need to plan their coursework carefully to graduate on time. The number of credit hours for a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) programme varies depending on the university and country. University College London offers an integrated MBBS program that takes either five years (if you already have a BSc) or six years (if you don't). The programme is 4.688 study hours to be accomplished in 191 weeks including the examinations <sup>(8)</sup>. On the other hand, credit transfer in Scotland between vocational education and training and university degrees is more frequent but often problematic <sup>(9)</sup>. Although CATS is important to achieve lifelong learning policies, research showed that it is still lagging in the UK's high educational system <sup>(10)</sup>. It is important to note that credit hour calculation can vary across institutions and programs due to differences in academic structures and curriculum designs. To make the credit transfer system feasible, reliable and applicable in Sudan we need:

- 1- **Online framework** to help search for comparable courses between the schools of medicine in Sudan to help the students and their supervisors before making a decision.
- 2- **Intercollege Reciprocity Agreements for credit transfer** <sup>(1, 11)</sup>. Therefore, as in the literature universities in Sudan should develop systems which provide uniform course designations for transfer credit across institutions<sup>4</sup> because it is a system not only for domestic use but, it facilitates international student mobility, as it allows for the recognition of qualifications and study periods <sup>(1)</sup>.

**Potential benefits and strengths of Credit transfer:**

- 1- Students can benefit from CT courses in enrolment in short, compacted courses that condense the knowledge and skills in a shorter timeframe, to earn credit hours within a short period, to facilitate their academic progress. This is probably in line with the goals of students having substitute and supplementary results.
- 2- Some students can enrol in two courses at a time to earn transfer credits and some may join flexible **online courses** in the same time frame, to gain credits. To succeed in such a plan; students must keep contacting their mentors. Credits are only to be transferred from one medical school to the medical school which awards the final degree.

**Challenges in Credit Transfer:**

- 1- Discrepancy in the curriculum designs across different medical schools <sup>(3)</sup>.
- 2- Credit Limits: Many schools limit the number of credits that can be transferred. Therefore, students need to select the courses to transfer.
- 3- GPA Impact: Transferred grades may affect a student's GPA. If a student performs poorly in a course, they might consider retaking it instead of transferring the grade.

- 4- Major-Specific Requirements: Some programs have specific prerequisites or core courses that must be taken at their institution.
- 5- Transferring credits can save you time and money, but figuring out each school's policies can be a massive headache <sup>(11)</sup>.

A university may consider where the credits are to be earned, the grade received in the course, how long since the credits were earned, and how similar the coursework compared to its counterpart course <sup>(11)</sup>.

The general requirement is to complete at least one academic year (in most cases) with an academic transcript. The transfer should be for a good reason, like being unable to complete the degree at first medical school, and not because the student has failed or was dismissed, but because the student is unhappy with the current teaching system or the environment that he/she lives in, and that has a bad impact on his/her performance. Students who want to see the list of medical schools that accept credit transfers can check out the link “[How To Transfer Between Medical Schools](#)”<sup>(12)</sup>. Nonetheless, evidence showed that the university's investment in developing the staff capabilities, and improving the social and academic environment including the student hostels has very low student transfer and dropouts <sup>(13)</sup>. Such capabilities might not be available for universities in Sudan, which renders the introduction of CT crucial.

Most North American transfer systems are built on the basic model of bilateral course-to-course articulation, however, jurisdictions in Australia, and Europe, are working on developing transfer credit models that suit their contexts. Currently, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System adopt a workload one year of 1500 to 1800 study hours equivalent to 60 credits <sup>(6)</sup>.

### Conclusion:

The ongoing devastating war since April 15, 2023, in Sudan, has led to the forceful displacement of citizens and major sabotage of all public and private institutions. In this context, introducing credit transfer in Sudanese universities becomes crucial to ensure the seamless progression of students' academic journeys. In peace, this process would fairly reduce part of the financial problems and help maintain the continuity of education in underprivileged and underfunded, understaffed universities. Scholars in Sudan should work out a unified system that weighs cost/benefit and balances student needs with future national needs.

### References

1. Sam El Mais. Medlink Students Blog. Medical School Transfers: Complete Guide, retrieved from Study Guides, <https://blog.medlinkstudents.com/medical-school-transfers/> Updated on 14/06/2024.
2. Medical Education Credentials. ECFMG Policy on Transfer Credits. <https://www.ecfmg.org/2024ib/transfer-credits.html>. Last update: August 21, 2023
3. Sam El Mais. Understanding Medical School Transfers: A Guide for Realistic Expectations. Medical Schools. <https://blog.medlinkstudents.com/understanding-medical-school-transfers-a-guide-for-realistic-expectations/>. Updated on 21/05/2024
4. Junor, S. and Usher, A. (2008). Student Mobility & Credit Transfer - A National and Global Survey, Educational Policy Institute, June 2008 <http://www.educationalpolicy.org/publications/pubpdf/credit.pdf>, ED529950.pdf

5. Brandon Lee. Demystifying Credit Hour Calculation: Essential FAQs Answered (godegree.com). Cited June 17, 2023.
6. Finola Finlay, Associate Director, BCCAT. Special report: Credit Transfer: Models and Systems in BC, North America, and Beyond. October 2009. In CreditTransferModels2009.pdf (bccat.ca)
7. Howieson, C. and Raffe, D. (2013). 'The Paradox of Scotland: Limited Credit Transfer in a Credit-Based Lifelong Learning System.' Oxford Review of Education, 39(3): 366-384.
8. Medicine MBBS BSc Prospective Students Undergraduate University College London.
9. Cathy Howieson & David Raffe. The paradox of Scotland: limited credit transfer in a credit-based lifelong learning system. Oxford Review of Education, 2013; Volume 39, -issue 3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2013.806250>
10. David Watson, Green Templeton. Credit risk? Reviving credit accumulation and transfer in UK higher education. Leadership Foundation for Higher Education. Published online November 2013 ISBN: 978-1-906627-56-0.
11. Brandon Galarita. How To Transfer College Credits, Plus Alternatives to Help You Earn Credits. Education. Forbes Advisor. In How To Transfer College Credits, Plus Alternatives To Help You Earn Credits – Forbes Advisor. Updated: Jul 29, 2022, 3:41 pm.
12. GMC Transfer Guidelines to Qualify for UK Medical Practice. In Medical School Transfers: Complete Guide (medlinkstudents.com) Updated on 14/06/2024
13. Barbara M. Kehm<sup>1</sup>, Malene Rode Larsen<sup>2</sup> & Hanna Bjørnøy Sommersel. Student dropout from universities in Europe: A review of the empirical literature. Hungarian Educational Research Journal (HERJ) Hungarian Educational Research Journal, Vol 9 (2019), No 2. DOI:10.1556/063.9.2019.1.18 1