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An analysis of intensive mode pedagogy in management education in India

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Abstract

Purpose – Management education is at its peak in India. But pedagogy and modes of delivery are not always innovative compared to top international Business Schools. It is through experimentation that the paper may be able to discover what works best in our context. The purpose of this paper is to determine the effectiveness of intensive mode of delivery vs traditional semester-wide teaching of management courses among MBA students of a leading Business School, through one such experiment.

Design/methodology/approach – A total of 19 dimensions were used in this study. The questionnaire was tested on two different groups. An independent sample *t*-test was conducted for each dimension, to find out if the group that was subjected to this experiment had opinions different from the group that did not undergo the accelerated version.

Findings – The results indicated perceptions on most of the dimensions disconcerting, barring increase in commitment, engagement, focus, and concentration with intensive mode. Further, this negative perception augmented towards intensive delivery mode, after experiencing traditional delivery.

Practical implications – The literature does appear to show controversial outcomes related to intensive mode but more studies are in support of intensive modes of delivery format. The issue of whether students learn better in a semester/trimester of traditional length or with a compressed schedule is a key concern to the innovations in higher education scheduling today. Findings of this study pose a serious threat to all those management institutions which are planning to attempt to speed up the delivery of programmes and courses within them in order to reduce cost or other reasons.

Originality/value – In education literature, significant amount of research has been carried out using a time compressed in developed countries. This study is one of the first studies, which focuses on determining the effectiveness of intensive teaching against traditional trimester/semester wide teaching among MBA education in India.

Keywords India, Education, Management education, Pedagogy, Traditional mode, Intensive mode

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Globalization, similar to its significance in other spheres of life, has great relevance in the context of higher education. Over the years, higher education in business management in India has reached at its pinnacle with all its exposure to fierce competition at different levels of stakeholders resulting in diversified and manifold challenges to this sector. These challenges are stretching from contemporary curriculum development, pedagogy and modes of delivery, quality assurance and ethical value propositions to accreditation and governance.

In last few years, a large number of students have enrolled for higher education in India (Agarwal, 2007); consequently India has turned out to be one of the largest systems of its kind in the world in education industry. The character and composition of students is also changing. At the postgraduate level in management education



in particular, students are highly professionals undertaking study either on a full time, or part-time basis which may be through distance or on-campus learning mode. Students are joining these higher management courses after getting industry exposure of two to ten years or even more.

In an environment going through swift changes, it is not surprising that teaching methods and mode of delivery have also been changing. A very practical example of this is consideration of shifts from traditional to “intensive” modes of teaching. In literature, intensive courses also recognized as accelerated, time-shortened, block format, compressed, or alternative course (Scott and Conrad, 1992; Wlodkowski, 2003). In such courses, the number of sessions or the length of course or class time is trimmed down compared to the customary format of the schedule. Concept of accelerated programmes began around 40 years ago in USA in business courses, but such courses have surfaced in all academic disciplines. As Beal (2007) pointed out 197 accelerated baccalaureate degree programmes in nursing were launched between 1971 and 2007. Accelerated learning programmes are not limited to the USA but countries like Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Ireland, Germany, and Australia have also accepting this new trend (Wlodkowski, 2003). In education literature, significant amount of research has been carried out using a time compressed or shortened delivery of differing college-level courses (Wlodkowski and Westover, 1999).

Anderson *et al.* (2009) have found that diverse obstacles to a student’s success are not essentially related to the amount of time that the student is exposed to course material, but rather other extraneous forces and influences on the student. Some other researchers (Bailey, 2009; Wielicki, 2005; Wlodkowski *et al.* 2001) also pointed out a similar idea concerning the time compressed delivery. Wlodkowski (2003) explicated that accelerated programmes are among the emergent revolutions in higher education and mentioned that these programmes challenge the status quo, because they redefine the origin of academic structures, from content and numbers of instruction sessions, to the requirement for faculty tenure. This kind of format requires a paradigm shift for instructors as well as students. The awareness levels towards their mutual responsibilities need to be enhanced. Such courses demand great interaction, significant self-learning, and increased responsibility. Collins (2005) stated that the aspect of critical thinking is one of the elementary elements of intensive courses.

The time compressed courses have had mixed responses in education literature. On the positive side, the justification for introducing intensive courses in management education is embedded in the idea that faculty members/practitioners do not have enough time to teach using more effective, active learning methods in the usual, traditional schedules. Keeping in mind students’ groundwork and management into consideration, it is believed that students are likely to prepare and organize better for intensive sessions if they get their course material well in advance (Burton and Nesbit, 2002) and the students’ time management skills improve (Grant, 2001). Students may achieve better in the shortened format because there is less time gap between learning and examining the courses.

According to Hoover *et al.* (2010), recruiters increasingly question the effectiveness and relevancy of business education and believe that there is an undue focus on theories and a lack of behavioural and experiential practices. Apart from this, these recruiters look for communication and interpersonal skills, team skills, and problem solving skills in aspirants. This focus from the corporate world provides a sound platform for intensive learning formats for workplace performance. Collins (2005) also pointed out that intensive programmes were developed to be more practical and

are in foundation more in tune with the demands of the workplace. Spaid and Duff (2009) mentioned individual student development and group development as important benefits of students in accelerated courses. Swenson (2003) advocated that educators when engaging in accelerated courses should create room for students to actively engage in their own learning, enable ways for the student to include reflections of life and work in the process, and ensure sufficient time for reflection.

On the other side, however, there has been some conflict and criticism of intensive courses. Carrington (2010) found that students gain knowledge more when they take courses which are scheduled over longer time periods. On the other hand, students criticized that intensive courses are more hectic and challenging (Daniel, 2000) with too much work. Scott (1993) spotted out two most frequently mentioned faculty concerns, namely lowering academic standards to meet time constraints, and lack of clarity on how to structure intensive courses differently than traditional ones.

Similarly, Wlodkowski (2003), also mentioned criticisms from faculty, such as prioritizing convenience over substance, perceived unfeasibility of covering required content in less time, infringement of educational consistency, crammed and poorly developed learning due to its fast pace. Due to the condensed format of the programme, the quality of course instruction and achievement of learning outcomes needs to be monitored regularly (Wlodkowski and Kasworm, 2003). Researchers (Traub, 1997; Wolfe, 1998) emphasized the compressed mode increases intensity of workload and fatigue as well as there is inadequate time for reflecting and analysing what is taught. Shafer (1995) also argued that the intensive nature of the courses do not produce learning outcomes of consistent educational value, resulting in cramming by students.

The literature does appear to show controversial outcomes related to intensive mode but more studies are in support of intensive modes of delivery format. The issue of whether students learn better in a semester/trimester of traditional length or with a compressed schedule is a key concern to the innovations in higher education scheduling today, yet little research is available to guide these efforts, especially in India. It is through experimentation that we may be able to discover what works best in our context. This study sought to determine the effectiveness of intensive teaching vs traditional trimester-wide teaching of management courses among MBA (PGDM) students of a leading Business School in India, through one such experiment.

2. Literature review

In this section we have reviewed the literature related to intensive delivery of courses from two viewpoints, namely comparison with semester-length traditional courses; and perceptions and effects of intensive courses.

2.1 *Studies related to comparison of intensive courses with traditional semester formats*

Scott (1993) compared learning experiences of students' in a set of British literature and marketing courses through intensive and semester-length courses and shown that students and faculty felt intensive classes engendered a continuous learning experience which allowed students to connect and combine ideas better. Students stated that such mode enable them to concentrate entirely on a small number of classes which helps them to plan their schedules better. Apart from these, study found that longer class sessions fostered more in-depth discussions. Intensive mode involved more mental investment and commitment, improvement in students' academic performance, relaxing instructors'

expectations and enhancement of classroom relationships. Results indicated that presence of most or all of the high-quality attributes directs the students' perception towards intensive courses and it is considered as more powerful learning experience.

Researchers indicated no difference in evaluation in different mode of delivery. In a comparative study in both the condensed and traditional semester format, Caskey (1994) compared students' grades in algebra and accounting classes and found no significant difference. Similarly, Messina (1996) found that end of course grades for students in weekend courses are alike to those during a traditional semester. Anastasi (2007) evaluated students' performance in psychology courses carried out in intensive and semester modes and found that final grades of undergraduates in an intensive format were found to be the same or better than the same courses offered in semester format. Boddy (1985), using regression analysis showed that the short semester was superior to the long one for computer science, but did not differ significantly for American History and School Law.

Van Scyoc and Gleason (1993) compared courses in microeconomics conducted in a traditional 16-week semester with a three-week semester format. Results indicated improved performance on achievement test in the compressed mode. Further, there was no difference in retention when evaluated after a few months of course delivery. Comparison of a course taught by one instructor in a three week, a five week, and a semester-length course format was done by Homeyer and Brown (2002). The researchers considered student attitude, knowledge and skill development, no significant differences were established in pre/post test scores on the basis of course length.

Daniel (2000) compared test scores in accelerated vs traditional format and found that students in the non-traditional formats scored similar to those in the traditional ones. Further, she stressed that students in intensive formats seem to retain more or the same amount of information as traditional course students after the courses are over. While Scott (1993) established that intensive course formats required more mental investment and commitment from instructors as well as students, which they felt was lacking in semester long courses. A comparison of accelerated and traditional courses across multiple departments was carried out by Kucsera and Zimmaro (2010) and found that for both formats instructor ratings were rather consistent, but that course ratings differed strikingly, with intensive formats clearly in the lead.

2.2 *Studies related to perceptions and effects of intensive courses*

Wayland *et al.* (2000) in their study investigated the gap between expectations of students and the academic reality students faced, found that students completing an intensive summer course expected to study much less in terms of independent study than they actually did. Poellnitz (2007) mentioned that faculty members were positive about the accelerated format, and students were positive about faculty, but a majority percentage of students felt that the accelerated format was more demanding thus more stressful in comparison to the traditional format.

Grant (2001) inferred that the intensive courses may make a positive impact on interaction between students. Faculty perceptions of intensive summer courses was studied by Kretovics *et al.* (2005) and results indicated variations in viewpoint of faculty members related to pedagogical issues on intensive courses. "Additionally, in general, more faculty believe that they are able to establish rapport with students more quickly in compressed courses (74.7%) and that students are more focused on learning outcomes (64.5%), that students participate more in class discussions (62.3%),

that students attend more regularly (69.7%), and that summer school students are academically stronger (46.6%)” (Kretovics *et al.*, 2005).

McLeod *et al.* (2005) found that students enrolling in summer courses do so strategically and generally enrolled in intensive sessions to immerse themselves or to complete required courses more quickly. Welsh (2012) mentioned that students believe that intensive courses require less time to complete, and encourage less reading thus results in less learning nonetheless it helps them to secure higher grades.

Smith (1987) found that some faculty had serious reservations about whether standards were equalled between compressed and semester-length courses. Lee and Horfsall (2010) emphasized, “From both faculty and student responses, findings indicated that the benefits of acceleration for learning rested largely on an intensified, active learning cycle of theory, practice, and feedback and a stronger social learning experience derived from peer support, guidance and feedback” (p. 196).

Some researchers have tried to establish relationship between intensive pedagogy and demographic factors. Adults appreciated the efficiency of accelerated learning formats and students valued completing courses and attaining degrees in less time than usual (Scott and Conrad, 1992). Scott (1993) reported that students with other liabilities, such as work commitments, had more negative experiences in intensive courses than did students who did not work. Whereas Fall (2001) found that adult students whose employers did not compensate them felt contentment with intensive courses more than did students whose tuition was reimbursed by their employers. Further, it was shown that female students felt higher satisfaction with course format, while male students considered more contentment when focus was on academic performance.

Caskey (1994) also concluded “that students, particularly older students, can achieve in an intense format and perform as well in subsequent courses as students who elect traditional formats”. Daniel (2000) also found similar results where popularity for intensive courses varies with highest rates found among adult, part-time students, and lower though still significant levels of popularity found among “traditional” undergraduate residential students. Burton and Nesbit (2002) in their study in Australia also revealed relationship between students’ work situations and preference for the intensive course format. They reported a weak but positive relationship between students who working either full or part-time basis and their satisfaction with intensive mode courses.

Hence, overall attitudes about intensive teaching were mixed. The discrepancies in learning experiences of students related to intensive pedagogy have encouraged questions such as why some intensive courses are doing well and while others are not.

In this study, we have attempted to explore what works best in our Indian context. This study sought to determine the effectiveness of intensive teaching (two weeks) vs traditional trimester-wide teaching (ten weeks) of management courses among MBA students of a leading Business School in India.

3. Research methodology and objectives

Our sample for this study comprised of two groups. One was students from one year full time management programme with a minimum of five years’ of work experience (Group 1) and second was students from two years full-time MBA programme, with a minimum of two years of work experience (Group 2). We took 60 students from each programme as the sample for our study. The first group of students had undergone an intensive (accelerated) teaching method in their one term in which each course was

taught in two weeks instead of the traditional ten weeks while the second group had not any exposure of intensive delivery. The first group also had undergone a traditional mode of delivery in their next term where courses were taught in the traditional ten weeks. Thus, this group was tested twice with the same questionnaire at the end of two different terms: first time at the end of term one when they had exposure to intensive teaching mode of delivery, and second time at the end of their next term when they experienced the traditional mode.

A total of 19 dimensions were used, gleaned from past studies, and brainstorming, for relevant dimensions. Questions concerned various dimensions of the course learning, and impact on students' stress levels, comprehension, understanding of application, preparation, commitment, etc. All dimensions were measured using a five-point likert type scale: 1 represents high rating on that dimension while 5 indicates a low rating.

This study compares intensive mode of delivery with traditional mode of delivery and analyses the impact of intensive teaching on students' perception. The study exclusively focuses on exploring answers to the following questions:

- (1) What is the students' perception towards intensive mode of delivery?
- (2) Is there a difference in perception of students among the two groups (those who have undergone an intensive delivery mode with those who have no exposure of intensive mode)?
- (3) Is there a change in perception of students towards intensive mode of delivery with change in pedagogy, i.e. from the intensive mode to the traditional mode?

3.1 *Research hypotheses*

The research hypotheses are stated as follows:

- H01.* There is no difference in perception of students' towards intensive mode among the two groups.
- H02.* There is no change in perception of students towards intensive mode with change in pedagogy (i.e. from intensive mode to traditional mode).

3.2 *Research objectives*

- To analyse students' perception towards intensive mode of delivery
- To compare intensive mode of delivery with traditional mode of delivery
- To examine level of satisfaction with intensive mode and traditional mode of delivery
- To identify the difference in perception among two groups of sample
- To discover difference in perception with change in pedagogy

3.3 *Method of analysis*

An independent sample *t*-test was conducted for each dimension, to find out if the group that was subjected to this experiment had opinions different from the group that did not undergo the accelerated version. The views of students about the experiment itself were also analysed by looking at the mean ratings on each dimension.

4. Results and discussion

The sample comprises of 99 male students and 21 female students. In terms of work experience 54 students have less than four years, 51 have between four to six years and 15 students have more than six years, respectively. Out of 120 students, 40 students were aware of the concept of intensive mode of delivery. Table I depicts the perception of Group 1 students' towards intensive mode of delivery on various dimensions.

There were three to four dimensions which respondents of the programme that underwent the accelerated version rated as effective. These were commitment, engagement, focus and concentration. This indicates that there may be a case for offering accelerated or compressed courses when there are no other options. On the other hand, the negative ratings dominated for almost all the other dimensions, such as flexibility, desire to learn, comprehension, skill development, accuracy of assessment, and application of knowledge. One dimension that seems to dominate the negatives is related to "learning", which is a part of comprehension, skill development, and application, among the dimensions we used.

When a *t*-test was done between the Group 1 and Group 2 on various dimensions of impact of delivery, there was no significant difference in ratings on many of the dimensions. Table II depicts result of *t*-test. *H01*, therefore could not be rejected.

The following dimensions are where significant differences (at 95 per cent confidence level) were found – reduces desire to learn, poorly organized, less flexible, less integrated, less enjoyable, more stressful, and reduces retention. Uniformly, the group that underwent accelerated learning had more negative perceptions than the sample Group 2 that did not do so. This indicates that their actual experience was not pleasant, either due to the radical change from what they had experienced in previous (undergraduate) academic work, or due to other factors specific to this educational institute considered in this instance. There is also a possibility that the

	Mean	SD
Engaged	2.65	1.338
Focus	2.78	1.263
Skilldev	3.57	1.170
Comprhision	3.53	1.186
Knowledge	3.53	1.282
Assessment	3.50	1.172
Commitment	2.78	1.290
Applyknowledge	3.67	1.230
Desiretolearn	3.60	1.278
Challenging	2.37	1.288
Workload	2.05	1.268
Organized	3.57	1.140
Flexibility	4.02	1.112
Integration	3.42	1.197
Enjoyable	3.83	1.237
Concentration	2.95	1.281
Attendance	2.60	1.138
Stress	1.72	1.010
Retention	3.75	1.188
Valid N (listwise)		

Table I.
Mean and standard
deviation of Group 1
on various
dimensions

Table II.
Results of *t*-test
between two
Group 1 and
Group 2

		95% confidence interval of the difference				
		Mean Gr1	Mean Gr2	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Engaged	Equal variances assumed	2.65	2.85	-0.815	118	0.417
Focus	Equal variances assumed	2.78	2.63	0.705	118	0.482
Skilldev	Equal variances assumed	3.57	3.28	1.372	118	0.173
Comprhson	Equal variances assumed	3.53	3.25	1.340	118	0.183
Knowledge	Equal variances assumed	3.53	3.28	1.124	118	0.263
Assessment	Equal variances assumed	3.50	3.38	0.527	118	0.599
Commitment	Equal variances assumed	2.78	2.78	0.000	118	1.000
Applyknowledg	Equal variances assumed	3.67	3.30	1.591	118	0.114
Desiretolearn	Equal variances assumed	3.60	3.03	2.457	118	0.015*
Challenging	Equal variances assumed	2.37	2.28	0.372	118	0.711
Workload	Equal variances assumed	2.05	2.17	-0.510	118	0.611
Organized	Equal variances assumed	3.57	3.03	2.568	118	0.011*
Flexibility	Equal variances assumed	4.02	3.35	3.091	118	0.002*
Integration	Equal variances assumed	3.42	2.73	3.231	118	0.002*
Enjoyable	Equal variances assumed	3.83	2.97	3.841	118	0.000*
Concentration	Equal variances assumed	2.95	2.62	1.450	118	0.150
Attendance	Equal variances assumed	2.60	2.28	1.515	118	0.132
Stress	Equal variances assumed	1.72	2.40	-3.150	118	0.002*
Retention	Equal variances assumed	3.75	3.00	3.279	118	0.001*

Note: **t*-value significant at 95 per cent confidence level

students were not adequately prepared for the accelerated version of teaching, and therefore, the negative perceptions were dominant. If a comprehensive session on why this method of delivery was being tried had been a part of their experience, the group may have been more receptive to the idea. There were no pressing reasons (such as a lack of regular faculty) for the institution to launch compressed courses in this case. This may also have influenced the perceptions of the group that underwent the accelerated version of the courses.

To test *H02*, as mentioned above the sample Group 1 was exposed to same questionnaire twice, i.e. end of term one when they had exposure of intensive teaching mode of delivery (T1) and at the end of next term when they experienced traditional mode (T2). Table III shows the result of paired sample *t*-test.

Results indicate that students found significant difference on ten dimensions. There is significant statistical difference (at 99 per cent confidence level) on engagement, focus, challenging, workload, concentration and stress dimensions. While on assessment, flexibility, enjoyable and attendance dimensions the statistical difference was significant at 95 per cent confidence level. Thus, students perceived intensive mode of delivery very challenging, more workload, more focused, more concentration, high stress and more engaging. This points out that after experiencing traditional mode students indicated more disconcert towards perception of intensive mode. It seems students are more comfortable with usual way of delivery of courses through traditional mode and are not readily accepting intensive mode.

Therefore, *H02* stands rejected, and we conclude that significant change has taken place in the perception towards intensive delivery mode, after experiencing both traditional and intensive delivery.

		Mean T1	Mean T2	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Engaged – engaged1	2.65	3.35	-3.286	59	0.002**
Pair 2	Focus – focus1	2.78	3.38	-2.836	59	0.006**
Pair 3	Skilldev – skilldev1	3.57	3.50	0.320	59	0.750
Pair 4	Comprhsion – comprhsion1	3.53	3.42	0.578	59	0.565
Pair 5	Knowledge – knowledge1	3.53	3.38	0.715	59	0.477
Pair 6	Assessment – assessment1	3.50	3.03	2.445	59	0.017*
Pair 7	Commitment – commitment1	2.78	3.18	-1.967	59	0.054
Pair 8	Applyknowledge – applyknowledge1	3.67	3.52	0.648	59	0.519
Pair 9	Desiretolearn – desiretolearn1	3.60	3.37	1.116	59	0.269
Pair 10	Challenging – challenging1	2.37	3.25	-4.537	59	0.000**
Pair 11	Workload – workload1	2.05	3.00	-4.457	59	0.000**
Pair 12	Organized – organized1	3.57	3.53	0.171	59	0.865
Pair 13	Flexibility – flexibility1	4.02	3.52	2.345	59	0.022*
Pair 14	Integration – integration1	3.42	3.33	0.394	59	0.695
Pair 15	Enjoyable – enjoyable1	3.83	3.28	2.344	59	0.022*
Pair 16	Concentration – concentration1	2.95	3.58	-2.857	59	0.006**
Pair 17	Attendance – attendance1	2.60	3.12	-2.408	59	0.019*
Pair 18	Stress – stress1	1.72	3.43	-7.739	59	0.000**
Pair 19	Retention – retention1	3.75	3.43	1.441	59	0.155

Table III.
Paired sample *t*-test
between T1 and T2

Notes: *,**Significant at 95 and 99 per cent confidence levels

Satisfaction with intensive mode

We have examined Group 1 students' satisfaction with two different modes of delivery. Results are shown in Table IV. Satisfaction of students with intensive mode of delivery was 2.43 while with traditional mode was 3.23 on a scale of 1-5 (where 1 was not at all satisfied while 5 was extremely satisfied). Results indicate that there is statistically significant difference in students' satisfaction in two terms (T1 and T2). Students were more satisfied with traditional mode of delivery as compared to intensive mode of delivery.

Conclusion

The current study seeks to address the impact of pedagogy in management education in India by focusing on traditional and intensive (accelerated) mode of delivery. Students were unhappy, on the whole, with accelerated learning in this case. They preferred the traditional model of delivery where courses run across the ten-week trimester followed generally in education institutes at MBA level. Most perceptions were negative, barring increase in commitment, engagement, focus and concentration. Overall, it was felt that learning tends to suffer through such a delivery. Findings of our study is in line with Poellnitz (2007) study where students described that the accelerated format was more demanding thus more stressful, while the traditional format was regarded as more conducive because it was more organized and comprehensible course material.

Table IV.
Results of Group 1
on satisfaction

		Mean T1	Mean T2	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Satisfaction – satisfaction1	2.43	3.23	-4.722	59	0.000*

Note: *Significant at 99 per cent confidence level

As discussed in literature review section a large number of studies indicated preference towards intensive delivery but its success rate depends on the numerous factors related with students, instructor's approach, methodology and assignments used, overall classroom environment, etc. Wlodkowski and Kasworm (2003) conferred that students should possess a high level of self-regulation skills in order to undergo intensive mode of delivery. Scott (1993) also revealed, "I came to understand from students, instructors, and my own observations, that intensive courses yield qualitatively different learning experiences than semester-long courses, but the quality of those experiences depends on the presence or absence of certain attributes" (p. 436).

Internalizing the learning and application was found difficult by most of the respondents, due to the compressed mode of delivery. If true, this will be a serious handicap in the attempts to speed up the delivery of programmes and courses within them. There is a serious discussion among academics on compressing MBA programmes from the traditional two years to one or one and a half years, for example. Though this does not necessarily mean accelerated delivery of individual courses, it may lead to this kind of delivery in some cases.

Those who underwent the course in accelerated fashion had more negative perceptions of it than the students who were asked about this mode without being subjected to it. On certain occasions, offering courses in an accelerated fashion becomes necessary, for example, when the faculty are visiting from within the country or abroad. If such courses are offered as an exception (say, one course per term or semester), we conjecture that the reaction may not be negative, because there is a compensatory value-add in terms of exposure to an exceptionally skilled industry visitor, or exposure to a cross-cultural teaching methodology. Of course, this conjecture would need to be tested through further research.

There may be scope for further innovations of a different kind, while retaining the existing mode of trimester-wide delivery, according to our findings. These findings differ from some of the earlier research. But what these innovations could be, is a subject for other studies.

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