



Students' Opinions about the E-Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

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BACKGROUND: COVID-19 has affected research and students all over the world. Ongoing studies have been disrupted and upcoming studies cannot begin until they are adapted to the new reality.

METHODS: This is a cross-sectional study. The study was realized during the period March-May 2020. This study was included n = 340 (nurse, physiotherapy, midwife) students. In this study, we conduct a short questionnaire about the perception of quality of e-learning. The study was conducted with students of University of Shkoder, Department of Nursing. The survey was performed through an online form and all participants were virtual and anonym and were free to write everything about the quality of learning, methodology of teaching, and the difficulty during this process.

RESULTS: In this study, n = 340 students were included. One hundred and fifty eight of them were attending their nurse studies, 40 physiotherapy, 72 midwife, and 70 were master students. Thirty-seven percentage of the participants were nurse students in their 2nd year of studies, 10% were nurse students in the 3rd year of their bachelor degree, 21% of students were midwives in the 2nd year of the bachelor degree, 12% physiotherapy and (20%) in master's degree. Eighty-three percentage of students were female and 17% were male. The student included were 19–25-year old, minimum 19-year old, maximum 25-year old, average 23-year old. The most part of them were from rural areas (70%).

CONCLUSIONS: The majority of students were satisfied with the methodology of teachers, but they have identified a lot of problems and difficulties during this time. Most part of the problems was identified as technical and economic related with the students and professors.

Introduction

COVID-19 has changed our life style and we are adapting to the new reality. In this point, all actors of academic process were in front the new challenge. Hence, E-learning and online education are developing rapidly and it has become an important component of modern education. E-learning is the use of Internet technologies to enhance knowledge and performance. E-learning technologies provide students with control over content, learning sequence, pace of learning, allowing them to tailor their experiences to meet their individual learning objectives. However, in terms of educational environment and teaching approach, there exist significant differences between online education and traditional education so that the incentive mechanism of online educational platform at the current stage can hardly compare favorably with traditional education [1].

The traditional education is made in classrooms where the teacher and students are present to communicate and reflect about an item. Distance learning, electronic learning, and mobile learning offer methods which decrease the limitations of traditional education [2].

Many higher education institutions around the world have been using the Internet to develop teaching and learning in distance. Nowadays, the distance education has become a necessity for students and professors of the universities. Is fact that, e-learning is used in almost every level of education, especially higher education. Initially, distance education was created for students who were unable to attend school [3].

During the period of coronavirus, the process of education at all levels was changed. The same situation was for the nursing students and professors in health education. For more than a decade, medical schools have been working to transform pedagogy by eliminating/reducing lectures; using technology to replace/enhance anatomy and laboratories; implementing team-facilitated, active, and self-directed learning; and promoting individualized and inter-professional education. COVID-19 has the potential to affect students and professors throughout the educational process [4].

Studies in general confirm that the vast majority of the students have ready access to web-enabled personal computers and web features and own personal digital devices such as mobile phones. They also use a wide range of digital features and web features in their everyday lives, for communication

(e-mails, msn, etc.) or for forming social networks (blogging, Facebook, etc.) [5].

The facet of online teaching techniques is currently perceived by most individuals as an initial step toward transformation. Re-defining techniques in the teaching system would deliver a set of skills, knowledge, and practicality to students, some of whom are prospective teachers, who are behind the walls of their classrooms. Students are so absorbed in technology, and many of whom abuse it rather than make use of it to gain more knowledge. However, there are also some students who read avidly, make good use of the Internet, and become better versed than their teachers during discussions [6].

This study was important for all of us, students and academic staff because they evidenced all the problems during this period and we tried to measure our work. Hence, we have a real situation prescribed from the students.

The aim of this study is to evidence the perception and opinions of students about e-learning during the quarantine of COVID-19. The most important thing was to identify all problems, the advantages and disadvantages that appear during this process.

Methods

Design

This is a transversal, cross-sectional study. In this study, we conduct a short questionnaire about the perception of quality of e-learning. The study was realized during the period March-May 2020. The study was conducted with nursing students of their 2nd, 3rd year of study in bachelor degree and with the students in master degree of university of Shkodra, department of nursing. The survey was performed through an online form and all participants were virtual and anonym and were free to write everything about the quality of learning, methodology of teaching, and the difficulty during this process.

Sample

In this study, $n = 340$ students were included, whereas 158 were attending their nurse studies, 40 were attending physiotherapy, 72 were midwife, and 70 were master students. Thirty-seven percentage ($n = 125$) of the participants were nurse students in their 2nd year of studies, 10% ($n = 33$) were nurse students in the 3rd year of their bachelor degree, 21% ($n = 72$) of students were midwives in the 2nd year of the bachelor degree, 12% ($n = 40$) were physiotherapy, and 70 (20%) in master's

degree. Eighty-three percentage ($n = 283$) of students were female and 17% ($n = 57$) were male. The student included were 19–25-year old, minimum 19-year old, maximum 25-year old, average 23-year old. 7.0% of them were 18-year old, 24.3%, 19-year old, 39.2% were 20-year old, 20.1% were 21-year old, and 9.4% of students were >21-year old. The most part of them were from rural areas (70% of them). The students were from different cities such as Shkodra 51% ($n = 173$), and 49% from the other cities (Malësia e Madhe, Lezha, Kruja, Mati, Kurbin, Durrësi, Bulqiza, Kukësi, Kruja, Tropoja) and outside the borders of Albania.

Data collection

The study was conducted with nursing students of their second, 3rd year of study in bachelor degree and with the students in master degree of University of Shkodra, Department of Nursing. The questions were mostly closed, with some opportunities to offer short answers. Furthermore, they were designed to allow us a certain control of the answers and also an opportunity to establish some correlations between the perceptions, and the use of digital technologies in this process. Administration of the questionnaire was carried out online and all participants were virtual and anonym and were free to write everything about the quality of learning, methodology of teaching and the difficulty during this process. The methodologies used by professors were the clinical didactic sessions online before the zoom meeting, creating and using available virtual cases; homework, video demonstration, powerpoint lectures by online platform of the university (LMS), e-mail, WhatsApp, Google Classroom, Zoom Meeting. This survey was conducted for the lectures as Internal Disease, Toxicology, Neonatology, Pediatric, and Ophthalmology. All data collected were elaborated with Microsoft Excel 2010 program.

Ethical considerations

This record respects the rules of data protection. Students were informed in advance through email about the questionnaire. They could then decide whether, or not to participate. Questionnaire responses were strictly anonymous to ensure students' privacy.

Results

Due to the situation created as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education has defined the process of organizing distance or online learning, through various methods of this teaching. The COVID-19 pandemic made its impact felt strongly in all components of our life and especially in education. Initially, it was

thought that the time of this global pandemic would be short, but unfortunately, the opposite happened. Hence, the “distance education” was established continuously. In this study, we represent the effects of COVID-19 on teaching and learning seen from the student’s point of view. The situation is new because adapting to the online learning method is a bit difficult, so information or other effective ways of teaching are needed. It is important to note that online learning is not something new for the academic fields, especially for health studies. For our country and our university, it can certainly be something innovative. E-learning is one of the fastest and most technological forms of learning today. Online education or e-learning makes learning easier, more basic, more practical, eliminating many difficulties related to the perception of time, space, or implementation of COVID-19 protection protocols. For us was a new experience with different problems and challenges. To evaluate our job, we have conducted this study.

When the students were asked about the perception of e-learning, 64.8% evidence that the methodology is good, 28% very good, and 6.9% says bad. About the realization of the program of the courses and seminars, they admit that all the subjects are realized in 100%, but about the laboratories for different subjects, only 5% of students state that they are not realized (Table 1).

Table 1: The perceptions of students about the e-learning process

Quality of process	Badly (%)	Poor (%)	Good (%)	Very good (%)
1. Evaluation about the e-learning method	6.9	0	64.8	28
2. Methodology and performance of lectures using e-learning	0.7	7	15.9	82
Realization of e-teaching process	Yes (%)	No (%)		
3. Realization of lectures	100	0		
4. Realization of seminary	100	0		
5. Realization of laboratory hours	95	5		
6. Respecting the online teaching schedules by professors	99.3	0.7		
7. Dissatisfaction with online teaching	1.4	98.6		
Completed level of schedule	25 (%)	50 (%)	75 (%)	100 (%)
8. The rate of realization of courses (percentage of schedule)	0	2.1	7.6	90.3

Is fact that laboratories are realized with the video demonstration such as “Use of EpiPen by the patient” or nursing manipulations about the different nursing procedures.

On the other hand, when they are asked about the rate of realization of courses, 90.3% of students admit that they are realized in 100%, 7.6% of them are pronounced for 75% of realization of programs, and 2.1% think that the programs are realized in 50% of h. When they are asked about the methodology and performance of professors using e-learning, 82% state very good, 15.9% good, 0.7% poor, and 0.7% badly (Table 1).

99.3 % of the students affirm that the professors respect the teaching schedule and only 0.7% disagrees. When the students are asked if they are dissatisfied with teaching, 98.6% of them refer as satisfied and only 1.4% of them were compliant (Table 1).

The students comment on their complaints with the phrases such as “Teaching and learning in the auditorium is more effective” or “It is not effective for everyone.” A lot of problems were evidenced by them. They admit that they did not have every day the possibility to connect in Zoom Meeting; they did not have internet access or did not have the computers, Laptops, Ipods, Iphones, because they have sisters and brothers that use them also for learning at the same time. A big problem was also the power outage or the possession of a mobile phone personal for communication. The students were asked “Would you want to change anything related to teaching by the professors” and 97.2% of them did not want to change something but, 2.8% says yes. They want to change the situation if it was possible, some of them wanted to change the time of lectures, to reduce the number of lectures too, as well as to be present in the classrooms in order to communicate face to face with the professors.

Students express their dissatisfactions in different ways and expressions, for example, they say: “I have had difficulty understanding the lesson,” “Not every student had the opportunity to attend every seminar and lecture due to internet/power outages,” “Online learning is not effective at all,” “Our profession requires practical training.”

Using the online format and virtual activities seems functional, but outcomes of these changes will require subsequent evaluation. The transition from the workplace or medical and nursing school setting to home results in isolation, an increased use of email, and struggles with establishing boundaries between work and home, which could affect faculty, students, families and support staff. Sometimes this results to be very stressful for both actors of this process. Additional unknown academic issues will require attention, including standardized platforms and procedures. Several studies also found out that there is also flexibility of online teaching and online learning. By having the flexibility to participate in online learning anytime and anyplace, students who are enrolled in online classes can participate in the online course components during convenient times.

Discussion

Is fact that the distance learning has created a huge difference in the way educators and students think about teaching and learning. Distance learning opens up educational opportunities, allowing teachers and students to learn in more appropriate settings and at a time when they are free. It enables people to extend the time of their education from a limited number of school years, thus enabling them lifelong education. Distance learning also changes the relationship between power

and authority between faculty and students. There is equality and open communication between students and professors, which is not the case in traditional education, and what is very important is that students increase their opportunities to get to know different cultures and educational experiences. Hence, we can affirm that the e-learning have the different advantages such as improving the way of approaching learning and teaching, increasing significantly the quality of learning and teaching, reducing the spending on learning and teaching. So through satellite links, students can follow and own courses, seminars, and content from various forms of learning and teaching from the field, professions, and subjects that they do not have in the place where they live. Through the electronic board teachers can consult with their colleagues in the same city or even in the whole country. The computer network enables students from different countries to learn and jointly solve certain learning problems. Computer programs and modern telecommunication techniques make possible the simultaneous use of multimedia resources: sound, moving photography, text, illustration. This process makes possible for students to progress according to their individual skills and abilities. Also enables permanent learning and teaching and permanent professional perfection and it is cheap, eliminates the cost of physical class. By the other hand increases the teaching capacity of teachers, utilizing more hours during the day, eliminates borders, enables communication across geographical and administrative borders. It improves participants' digital skills, enables the enrichment of the process in new forms such as (video, etc.). During this process increases the independent work of students and satisfaction of their participation. Enables the exchange of richer curricula, as it accesses knowledge and teachers from around the world. But also we can affirm that the online learning have their disadvantages such as books and curricula are not suitable for this type of teaching, teachers are not trained to teach online. Online platforms are sometimes overly accessible and can be misused. Loss of direct contact and receiving a lecture-back of lecturers on student behavior. The subject of physical education is lost. Social interaction between students decreases. In contest of COVID time, another subject for the discussion and evaluation is the situation of mental health problems and the obesity, caused from isolation. Talking about the health problems we also consider the student with different needs. Our programs and curricula are not prepared and adapted for this new situation. In our country the difficulties about the electricity, the quality of internet, the presence of computers and android phones were another subject of discussion. Also the number of children in one family that need to learn at the same time with internet and the poverty in different areas are another difficulty. In Albanian families we have more than two children. During this period, the socio-economic level of the population is decreasing and so it will be more difficult to continue in this process

if the plans will not be change for a long vision of on line education. In our point of view something will be change by us professors, teachers and government. We are conscious that the results of our works will be evaluated in future. The purpose of the on-line educational program should be to support learning. Clearly, the program should take into account the way students learn and also ensure good usability, so that student interactions with the program are as natural and intuitive as possible. For teachers and professors, updating electronic content is easier than updating printed material. Furthermore, we can affirm that for the medicine and nursing students is not the first time hearing about the E- health learning or on line education in health fields. The use of network technology to provide training in hospitals and health centers for physicians and nurses is the latest trend in the training and education in continuous. This is a big revolution for medicine. Tele-education represents health education on distance, using Information Communication Technologies, as well as continuous education of a health system beneficiaries and use of electronic libraries, data bases or electronic data with data bases of knowledge. Distance learning (E-learning) as a part of tele-education has gained popularity in the past decade; however, its use is highly variable among medical schools and appears to be more common in basic medical science courses than in clinical education. Distance learning does not preclude traditional learning processes; frequently it is used in conjunction with in-person classroom or professional training procedures and practices. Tele-education has mostly been used in biomedical education as a blended learning method, which combines tele-education technology with traditional instructor-led training, where, for example, a lecture or demonstration is supplemented by an online tutorial. Distance learning is used for self-education, tests, and services and for examinations in medicine, i.e., in terms of self-education and individual examination services. The possibility of working in the exercise mode with image files and questions is an attractive way of self-education [7]. Sharing experiences on line, applying learning to practice, resulting in the most effective and efficient learning experiences. Learning is a deeply personal experience: we learn because we want to learn.

Conclusions

The majority of students were satisfied with the methodology of teachers, but they have identified a lot of problems and difficulties. Most part of the problems were identified as technical, personal health, economic problems of students and their families cause from pandemic. Problems with the internet, lights, schedule, books, computer, concentration, stress of the situation were reported from students and teachers too.

Seeing the epidemiological situation regarding COVID-19, we need to change our student-professor relationship and provide as much student support as possible in order for the learning process to be more effective.

Recommendation

This process seems to be a challenge for students and academics in the future and in this situation, it is crucial that the academic educational community learns from the experience and prioritizes a forward-thinking approach.

We need to reflect, evaluate and share the experience in the future. We need to create long time-plans to reach more effective educational process. Following this, students can serve and have a positive effect as educators to their peers, patients, and communities, using the tools available through social media and other modalities to help influence behaviors in a positive way.

Students and educators can help document and analyze the effects of current changes to learn, apply new principles and practices to the future. Accepting the online learning structure would be helpful in meeting the needs of the students in terms of motivation and driving them toward the very essence of studying.

In the future, we have a lot of work to front the next academic years. Is time to find the solutions that can solve all these problems. The main solutions will be the standardization of programs and curriculums, the new strategies, augmenting funds, and the integration of e-learning into the curriculum. The government can offer the user friendly packages and to provide the access to technology by all students in different residence areas. The professors and teachers should have the possibility for skills training and support paying. E-learning costs and dedicated work time for e-learning should be considered. We

must work to support the mixed format of learning without compromising pedagogy. Students will learn about each other's role, will solves problems together, and will have positive perceptions of the online education as a venue for e-health learning. In this way, we will increase students' perception of their learning.

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