

Adaptation of Online Andragogy in Healthcare Education

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INTRODUCTION

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic swiftly extended worldwide starting in December 2019, necessitating the universal adoption of stringent protocols and guidelines to contain its spread. Every nation experienced substantial economic, social, and intellectual setbacks as a result of this unprecedented crisis.¹ Restrictions were imposed on the mobility of individuals across various sectors in accordance with directives issued by the World Health Organization and in compliance with guidelines from the Ministry of Health. During this period, the education sector, like many others, faced significant challenges. Government guidelines mandated the temporary closure of both private and public institutions, including educational establishments, as a precautionary measure to mitigate the spread of the virus in the community, primarily due to transportation and social distancing requirements.²

The conventional approach to medical education, characterized by traditional classroom instruction, has historically held precedence. However, the landscape of medical education worldwide has undergone significant transformation in recent years. Numerous innovative pedagogical approaches emphasizing experiential learning have emerged and successfully integrated into the curriculum.³

In order to ensure the continuity of education, educational institutions were compelled to transition to online teaching and training. This marked a sudden departure from the traditional classroom teaching method, which had been the predominant mode of healthcare education for many decades.⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the exploration of alternative teaching methods to overcome the challenges posed by lockdowns and to sustain education. The National Medical Commission (NMC), the regulatory authority for medical education in India, had previously emphasized the adoption of modern educational technologies such as e-learning, electronic literature search, skills laboratories, and simulation. However, the actual implementation in educational institutions remained quite limited.⁵

The pandemic forced educational institutions and instructors to swiftly adapt to a completely online mode of teaching, presenting a host of challenges. Utilizing technology and ensuring the delivery of high-quality education proved to be difficult, as many faculty members had limited technical knowledge and were unfamiliar with the various online teaching tools.⁶

In this process, the responsibility of providing the necessary technology to facilitate online training sessions primarily fell on the institutions. A significant burden was placed on untrained instructors to execute these online training sessions. As the pandemic continues to impact the population in waves and troughs, online teaching has become an enduring reality. Medical institutions are increasingly adopting a hybrid teaching approach that combines both physical and online components. This shift has permanently altered the dynamics between learners and instructors. Therefore, it is essential to explore the perspective of instructors regarding the adaptation of online teaching methods in healthcare education.⁷

OBJECTIVES

1. To gain insight into the challenges encountered by instructors when using online teaching methods
2. To assess the opportunities and limitations of integrating online teaching mode into the long-term andragogy (adult education) in medical education.

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach, involving interviews with 80 full-time instructors from medical institutes who had been utilizing online teaching methods for the past two years. To gather insights into their perceptions and experiences with online teaching in healthcare education, the participants were presented with a 20-item open-ended questionnaire.

The questionnaire was distributed to the participants through Google Forms, allowing them five days to respond. It's important to note that participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, and responding to the questionnaire was regarded as implicit consent. To encourage candid responses, participants were assured of the confidentiality of their data.

Out of the 80 participants, 76 instructors completed and submitted the questionnaire, making them eligible for inclusion in the study. Subsequently, the collected data underwent a rigorous coding process, and key themes were derived based on the responses provided by the participants.

Results:

The responses from the instructors have provided valuable insights into the practical challenges and opportunities associated with Online Teaching Methodology. These perspectives can inform the development of policies for integrating online teaching into medical education and address the concerns expressed by instructors.

Discussion:

The key themes derived from the data are summarized as follows:

1. Interaction:

In terms of instructor-learner interaction, participants expressed mixed views.

Some believed that online teaching facilitated better and more open interaction, as students felt more comfortable asking questions and seeking clarification without the need for face-to-face communication.

Introverted students were also more likely to participate via text-based options, which they might not have done in traditional classroom settings.

Conversely, some participants felt that online teaching lacked a personal connection, making it challenging for instructors to assess student understanding without direct eye contact.

2. Concentration:

The majority of participants observed that some learners remained passive during online sessions, as they could keep their video settings turned off.

This made it difficult for instructors to gauge student interest and concentration during sessions.

Background noise caused by unmuted participants also disrupted sessions, leading to unpredictability and potential disengagement for both instructors and learners.

Instructors reported feedback from learners about the monotony and difficulty of online teaching due to the absence of non-verbal communication.

3. Technical Issues:

Instructors faced various technical challenges during online sessions, as online teaching tools were still in their early stages during the COVID pandemic.

Issues included network connectivity problems, audio/video disturbances, and application crashes, resulting in delays and difficulties in completing the syllabus within the required timeframe.

4. Reach:

Many participants noted a significant advantage of online teaching methodology, namely, its ability to reach a large number of learners simultaneously.

Online teaching sessions could accommodate multiple student batches concurrently, saving time and allowing instructors from various geographical locations to participate.

This approach provided students with the opportunity to receive instruction from experts who might not have been able to travel to the institute for traditional classroom teaching.

Conclusion:

This study provides a comprehensive perspective on the challenges encountered by instructors in the online teaching mode. While online teaching initially became a necessity during the early phases of the COVID pandemic, it has since evolved into a deliberate choice. Like other teaching methods, online teaching has its limitations, but when harnessed effectively, it offers exciting opportunities to overcome geographical barriers and provide excellent education.

Learners can access sessions from around the world from the comfort of their homes. Enhanced planning for more interactive sessions can further improve the utility of online teaching. While bedside and face-to-face learning remain integral to medical education, online teaching can serve as a valuable adjunct to the learning process.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

ETHICAL CLEARANCE

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SUMMARY

This research paper highlights the evolution of teaching methodology in healthcare due to the COVID pandemic. Further it explains how the faculty and the students are affected by the new online teaching methodology.

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