

Covid-19 pandemic and E-learning in Nursing Education: A Blessing in Disguise

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In 1665, University of Cambridge was closed due to the bubonic plague. While it was closed, Sir Issac Newton developed the theories in calculus, optics, and gravity. It was known as the “Year of Wonders” for Newton because he was unable to attend university and still went on to make incredible discoveries. Therefore, it is said that “Within crises are the seeds of opportunity” and I would say that the Covid-19 pandemic can also be viewed as one of the opportunities for the blooming of e-learning not only in nursing education, rather in every field.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges concerning education and academia as the students and faculty members were asked to remain at home for their safety. However, the prime concern for academicians during the pandemic was to identify the ways that can be opted for continuing teaching and learning while being off-campus, as there was great uncertainty about the reopening of the educational institutes.

In February 2020, the first case of Covid-19 was reported in Pakistan which immediately led to three weeks of complete lockdown in March 2020. There was a very short time for institutional, faculty, and student readiness for online learning. Planning, execution and implementation of the faculty development programme for shifting from complete face to face learning to e-learning, and the technological and infrastructural supplies were some of the biggest challenges to making a shift from traditional to online learning.

Although, e-learning is well-recognized and documented as a promising and effective mode for teaching undergraduate medical and nursing students,

especially blended learning¹. However, the situation was different in Covid-19 as the approach that was required to be opted by almost all nursing educational institutions was fully online. Nursing students are required to be taught theoretically as well as have a clinical component, with the integration of theory into practice, as the ultimate goal of nursing education is to equip nursing students with the knowledge as well as skills to be able to perform as professional nurses². Additionally, internet accessibility of outstation students emerged as one of the greatest concerns for making cross-national online nursing education more challenging.

Despite the challenges of using e-learning in many academic institutions in especially low and middle-income countries, such as lack of infrastructure, insufficient resources for public access and lack of specialists to implement e-learning platforms, the Covid-19 pandemic has provided opportunities to promote e-learning in the nursing profession³. Initiatives were taken by the administrators and faculty members to continue provision of education online by taking multiple inventive strategies including, availability of equipment/resources, development of learning management system, arrangement for faculty capacity development short courses online in collaboration with Coursera through HEC regarding e-learning, student orientation to e-learning methodologies, and constant feedback. The importance of e-learning was overlooked until before the Covid-19 pandemic, however, these experiences of conducting online learning in the nursing profession can be useful for students and faculty members⁴. Before the pandemic, there were only limited institutes that were using blended learning in nursing education. However, now a vast variety of educational institutes have developed institutional capacity by arranging resources required for e-learning i.e. development of learning management system, virtual classroom, and by building their faculty members’ capacity to conduct online teaching and learning in nursing education.

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The gains of introducing online learning in Covid-19 for students include access to educational content, like PowerPoint presentations and audio-visual content, at the convenience of students providing them flexibility and self-control, which eventually improved their learning and attitude towards e-learning, feeling of being connected with the educational environment, documentation and monitoring education, and increased perceived usefulness⁵.

Ongoing student feedback that was obtained during the pandemic also supports that students feel more connected with peers and faculty members during off-campus hours. On the other hand, the exposure of e-learning during pandemic provided an opportunity to faculty members to update their educational content and modify teaching and learning methodologies appropriate to the generation Z.

Even though, there was initial resistance from the faculty members to the use of e-learning tools for lack of familiarity and comfort, however, over a period of time, faculty members have developed competencies in e-learning by acquiring new skills for teaching online⁵.

The feedback of faculty members also depicts increased comfort levels and increased confidence in using e-learning tools. Over all, as an administrator and policymaker, I believe that online learning has positively impacted the nursing profession by introducing and incorporating various e-learning resources with the right educational policies. It is essentially important to continue using e-learning in nursing education to empower faculty and student.

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