

# Open And Distance Learning(ODL) During COVID-19 : Challenges And Obstacles Among Nursing Students

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## *Abstract:*

*Many countries, including Malaysia, have recently issued normative criteria that must be followed by all populations in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has turned into a global health crisis. As a result of the policy, several universities have chosen to use the open and distance learning (ODL) system to pursue non-face-to-face learning. E-learning is the most convenient way used by educators throughout the world to conduct academic sessions using various mediums as requires only internet access and telecommunication devices such as smartphones and laptops. However, there are many challenges and obstacles face by nursing students during ODL, such as poor internet connection and a lack of online educational resources; stress and anxiety during ODL learning; Social distancing; Financial constraints, and burnout from the workload of assignment. In conclusion, the Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on nursing students as a result of the barriers and challenges they faced when participating in online distance learning. Along with the challenges that nursing students are currently facing, lecturers must be prepared to equip themselves with knowledge and skills as well as new practices of teaching and learning that is relevant to the development and needs of the 21st century, thinking skills across all disciplines among nursing students should be given priority. The thinking skills of teachers and students, especially in the context of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) is a matter of necessity or priority in determining the successful transformation of education as outlined in the Blueprint 2013-2025.*

*Keywords: Challenges and obstacles, nursing students, Open and Distance Learning (ODL), Stress, Covid-19.*

## INTRODUCTION

Many countries, including Malaysia, have recently issued a set of normative criterias that all populations must follow during the Covid-19 Pandemic, which has turned into a global health crisis. As a result of the policy, several universities have chosen to use the open and distance learning (ODL) system to pursue non-face-to-face learning. Online learning, often known as E-learning, is the process of learning through the internet. E-learning is the most convenient way used by educators throughout the world to conduct academic sessions using various mediums and only internet access and telecommunication devices such as smartphones and laptops. Distanced education, or we now call it ‘Open Distance Learning (ODL),’ has been established since the olden times, covering many studies at all levels. According to Ascough (2013), online education includes the following characteristics: it gives a different learning experience than in the classroom since learners are diverse. Next, the learning environment’s social dynamic has changed, the discrimination and prejudice towards online learning has been reduced. ODL has been more sophisticated and more accessible to everyone. It is practiced fully for those who are in preschool, primary school, high school and universities due to the growth in technology and to keep the rate of positive cases of Covid-19 low. This pandemic has affected almost 90% of all the students enrolled to school worldwide (UNESCO, 2020a; 2020b). The availability of appropriate material is critical, but this remained a barrier because the pandemic was unforeseen and the preparedness of health schools were inadequate.

Learning is challenging given the current pandemic condition and students reported feeling extremely stressed, even though they believed that normal class lecture is easy to understand. Furthermore, nursing students commonly encounter high levels of stress in their learning, especially during practical sessions, especially those semester one nursing students. Nursing students need to learn the practical session by watching the video. The rapid spread of Covid-19 and the catastrophic health effects of the infection have created a series of concerns, particularly for students. This is because students are under stress as a result of online learning and increased workload. Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, when the government imposed the Movement Control Orders (MCO), stress has become the most commonly reported barrier to academic success. A large number of students, including

university students, were confined to their homes as a result of the lockdown. Stress is highly common among university students, particularly among nursing students. Different students react to stress in different ways because they are in distinct areas, resulting in difficulties that are also different. Given the importance of the stress issue in education, a lecturer must first understand why it occurred to remedy the problem.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter focuses on literature regarding the relationship between critical thinking and concept mapping with academic achievement, especially in nursing. The researchers have conducted a thorough search for research articles, dissertations and books that would apply to the study. Copies of potentially relevant studies were then obtained. The data sources used were the computerized databases of (a) the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), (b) ProQuest Online Education / Nursing Journals, (c) Dissertation Abstracts International and (d) Psychological Abstract. The keywords used for the search were a combination of the following keywords: “online learning,” “open and distance learning,” “nursing students,” “achievement,” “nursing education,” “teaching strategy,” “challenges and obstacles” and “critical thinking”.

## **THE ADVANTAGES OF ODL AMONG NURSING STUDENTS**

Online learning delivery methods have becoming increasingly common as a result of recent economic and technological advancements. Open and distance learning (ODL) as stated by Santhi, Mohd Ghazali, and Loo (2015) as the provision of flexible educational options regarding access and variety of ways of knowledge acquisition. Open distance learning (ODL) has many advantages, including flexibility, accessibility, cost, and potential for lifelong learning (Musingafi, Mapuranga, Chiwanza & Zebron, 2015). It is a means of enhancing learning by gaining or facilitating the information distributed using a range of technology methods such as audio chatting, video conferencing, and online databases (El-Hamed & Elgahsh, 2020). As compared to traditional classroom learning, online learning has various advantages. The eradication of time and space barriers is also one of them. Fariza Khalid, Md Yusoff Daud, and Aidah Abdul Karim (2015) from the Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, found that students

had a beneficial impact on the learning process used m-mobile applications. The student is in the responsibility of his or her own learning and self-development in ODL, which promotes a student philosophy in which courses are flexibly constructed to match individual requirements (Ahmad, Philips, Santhi, Wahid, 2013). However, there are also obstacles and challenges of ODL. Recent studies have looked into the challenges and opportunities of e-learning during the pandemic (Mailizar et al., 2020). Researchers are attempting to investigate the benefits and drawbacks of modern e-learning projects from the viewpoints of diverse stakeholders. Students' voices are crucial on this subject, according to Mailizar et al., (2020). Future research should evaluate students' opinions regarding online learning to examine the obstacles experienced by students.

## **THE OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES OF ODL AMONG NURSING STUDENTS**

### **i. Poor internet connection and a lack of online educational resources**

Integrating e-learning into teaching and learning may be a complicated process, with numerous challenges that must be overcome and are commonly referred to as obstacles to integrating e-learning (El-Hamed & Elgahsh, 2020). "Personal barriers," "attitudinal inhibitors," and "contextual inhibitors" are the three main types of obstacles and challenges that come with adopting e-learning (El-Hamed & Elgahsh, 2020). As a result, students and lecturers learn to adjust to online learning (Juniarta, Eka & Sitanggang, 2018). Furthermore, because online learning is entirely reliant on technological devices and the internet, teachers and students with poor internet connection may be denied access. Online learning's dependence on technological equipment and the provision of such equipment posed a major challenge for institutions, educators, and students (Yates, et al., 2021). The students were up against technological infrastructure, with the most significant issue being a poor internet connection, especially those from rural areas. It's especially alarming to learn that some students utilize their phones for online classes, 6–8 hours daily.

## **ii. Social distancing**

Darkwa and Antwi (2021) reported that learning in a classroom is more effective than learning online. In this study, the researchers compared classroom learning effectiveness during the Covid-19 Pandemic to the effectiveness before the Covid-19 Pandemic in the University of Cape Coast. Furthermore, the students performed better academically during face to face lessons as compared to when lessons were conducted online. However, the difference was not statistically significant. The research question regarding the effectiveness and performance of students before and during COVID-19, reported that when comparing course content before the coronavirus (classroom learning) to course content after the coronavirus (online learning) ( $M=3.133$ ,  $SD=0.940$ ), had the highest mean ( $M=4.303$ ,  $SD=0.643$ ) shows before the coronavirus (classroom learning). There was mean difference of 1.170 points. For the mean difference in classroom learning before COVID-19 and online learning during COVID-19, The t-value was 13.124 with 144 degrees of freedom. The t-value was statistically significant at the 0.05 alpha ( $p\text{-value}=0.000$ ). The study shows significant before and after coronavirus. The finding implies that classroom learning was more effective than online learning with respect to the lesson content. However, Shachar and Neumann (2010) found that students who learn online outperform those who learn in a traditional classroom. Students in face-to-face classes performed statistically and significantly better than those in online classes in terms of exam average and progress in post-test instructor questions(Arias, Swinton & Anderson, 2018).

## **iii. Stress and anxiety during ODL learning**

Despite the strict and rigorous training provided in both classroom and clinical setting, students still felt that there was more to learn while in school although they were afraid to make mistakes while performing nursing skills in the clinical setting (Jabien Labrague, 2013). Furthermore, the lecturers' high expectations exacerbated the students' nervousness, which included several tasks and strict deadlines. A similar finding by Skordis-Worrall, Haghparast-Bidgoli, Batura, and Hughes (2015) explored the perceptions and experiences of a group of students enrolled in an online course in Economic Evaluation. A mixed-method approach was adopted for the data collection, and thematic analysis was used to synthesize the data collected

and highlight key findings. The participants identified several positive and negative perceived attributes of online learning, which were well documented in the literature. The study found that the students reported the pace of learning in an online course is slower than in a classroom-based course, “I feel that I was much slower than what I had been in a classroom environment. Things take longer and I think the time built-in did not allow for this, which caused a lot of stress. . . I think the pace is a lot slower than it would be in a classroom based setting and so if the course allow for that personal time to reflect [it] would be helpful. . .” Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has culminated in a “social recession” a long-term pattern of social alienation that has resulted in a lack of emotional support and larger societal consequences, including increasing anxiety levels (Sundarasan et al., 2020).

#### **iv. Financial constraints**

Some students may not have access to all digital gadgets, the internet and Wi-Fi due to financial constraints that preclude them from purchasing their own laptops. Inadequate digital tools, a lack of internet access, or unsteady Wi-Fi connections can all cause issues with e-learning. Financial constraints are constraints that must be accommodated instead of restricting a course of economic action. Students’ work performance and exam results may be sacrificed due to unstable financial and debt burdens. In terms of finances, students were concerned about their ability to manage their educational and financial commitments due to family income loss and lost opportunities to work to self-finance their studies (Sundarasan et al., 2020). As a result, specific countries, particularly those underdeveloped and developing worlds, have adopted e-learning as a new teaching and learning method. It is because that due to financial constraints and other obstacles, not all countries will be able to completely embrace online education (Darkwa & Antwi, 2021)

#### **v. Burnout from the workload of assignment**

Even though there are numerous chances for online learning, not all students and learners were able to adapt to it. Students, particularly those from B40 families (the bottom 40 percent of the Malaysian household income) experience stress and burnout as a result of the high cost of online learning. Some students may not feel comfortable with online learning, which can

lead to increased frustration and misunderstanding, especially when they receive their assignment. Other than that, the workload of the assignment also may contribute to stress. During the online learning phase, students experience increased academic burnout, where the students struggle to complete assignments in this new norm if they have internet access issues or inadequate learning resources. This contributes to the situation of students feeling unmotivated in their online classes. Aside from that, too many assignments assigned by lecturers can also make students experience burn out while taking distance learning courses. Therefore, the assessments must be taken into account. If lecturers were not given the right tools and resources, they would not be able to provide students with high-quality knowledge content. Nonetheless, to promote nursing care education, students and lecturers must keep up with the development of ICT and modern educational trends. Poor time management of students will also cause students' work to increase as students are not good at determining important work from less critical work. There may be a shortage of laptops, computers, and other IT equipments. Sometimes family members may have to share existing resources due to work from home and study from home policies (Piryani et al., 2020). There may not be enough physical space in the house and a quiet environment to record presentations as well as to carry out synchronous interactions (Piryani et al., 2020).

## **CONCLUSION**

Nurse educators are the primary motivators for nursing students to pursue education. Educators may succeed in teaching the fundamentals, but this does not guarantee that students will have the ability to examine and evaluate what they have learned. Critical thinking is required to achieve a thorough understanding of the complicated processes involved in students learning and this is why critical thinking is important to achieve success in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, it is essential for the teacher to understand the learning skills practiced and their role among the students during the learning process in their respective classes. In conclusion, the Covid-19 pandemic impacted nursing students as a result of the barriers and challenges they have faced when participating in online distance learning. Along with the challenges that nursing students are currently facing, lecturers must be prepared to equip themselves with knowledge and skills as well as new practices of teaching and learning that is relevant to

the development and needs of the 21st century especially the development of thinking skills across all disciplines among nursing students should be given priority. The thinking skills of teachers and students, especially in the context of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) is an essential in determining the successful transformation of education as outlined in the Blueprint 2013-2025.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

ODL is distinguished by its adaptability, accessibility, affordability, and chances for lifelong learning (Musigafi et al., 2015), hence the nursing students struggled to deal with Online Distance Learning (ODL) as this course involves hands-on skills over virtual demonstrations. Therefore, using videos are a good option when conducting online teaching for practical sessions. As students are unable to participate in discussion with friends and lecturers, they were forced to learn and understand the content taught on their own, which makes online learning an unpleasant experience. This causes impairments of the information-processing system of nursing students due to stress. In addition, poor internet also affects the ODL experience especially for those students lived in rural area. Therefore, the government should increase internet connectivity, accessibility, and reliability so that students and teachers could conduct and participate lessons remotely. The rapid spread of Covid-19 and the substantial health risks associated with disease have caused several issues, particularly for students. This is mainly because of the fact that students are under stressors of online learning and increased workload. Therefore, the use of stress management techniques regularly can help avoid most physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms of stress. Coping usually entails adjusting to or tolerating negative events or realities while maintaining a positive self-image and emotional balance. The education process is a very stressful experience (Manpreet & Maheshwari, 2015; Papazisis et al., 2008) and university students encounter a great deal of academic, personal, and social stress during their academic activities (Kurupparachchi et al., 2012). Although distance learning is theoretically regarded as a model for assisting informal education, further research into the practices of both ODL and face-to-face education systems, as well as the consequences of these practices on students and lecturers, is required (Darkwa & Antwi, 2021).



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