DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR THE TRAINING OF NURSING STUDENTS ON COMMUNICATION WITH THE BLIND PERSON

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Abstract

Distance education (DE) is an effective teaching method because it promotes learning with active involvement of students through an interactive scenario and possibilities for discussion that allow knowledge exchange. This innovative method may affect the performance of future nurses when dealing with visually impaired people. Thus, this study aimed to assess the perception of nursing students about DE with a view to training them to communicate with blind persons. This is a descriptive study with qualitative approach. The Course on Health Communication of Nurses with Blind Patients was offered between the months of August and September 2015 in a virtual learning environment in a public university. The course has a 60-hour workload divided into four modules, three boards and one chat. In order to select the participants, the course was advertised in three public universities in Ceará, Brazil. A total of 104 registrations were made. In order to collect data, an instrument with seven questions related to the previous experience with DE courses and training on disabled persons, difficulties and facilities to access to the virtual environment, classes, interaction tools and suggestions for content modification was made available at the end of the course. Data analysis preceded the reading, association of similar responses and description thereof. Of the 104 registered participants, 34 answered the instrument. Concerning the experience with DE, 11 had already done courses in this modality. Only one participant had already been trained in the matter of disabled persons. Difficulties of access to the virtual environment, class content and complementary materials were reported by nine and six participants, respectively. Board and chat activities were considered important to solve doubts and exchange experiences by all who attended them, but four students did not take part in the chat. Concerning the content addressed in the course, nine students suggested to pursue a deeper understanding of issues related to blind patients and family approach, health services, public policies and technologies used for education and communication. As for the positive points, students reported the empowerment on the topic, since the theme is not addressed in undergraduate courses; enhancement in relation to humanized care; benefits related to the adopted methodology, the availability of content, chat tools and boards; and choice of DE for professional training. The negative points were associated with technical problems to access the virtual environment. Nursing students proved to be aware of the importance of the training on communication with blind patients for professional growth and care for these customers. Chats and boards were considered excellent tools for interaction and learning on DE. Despite the difficulties pointed out, DE proved to be a feasible and attractive tool for the training of this public with regard to the communication with blind persons.

Keywords: Education Distance, Disabled Persons, Nursing.

1 INTRODUCTION

Distance education (DE) is an effective teaching method for promoting learning with active involvement of students through an interactive scenario and the possibility of discussions that allow the exchange of knowledge [1]. This innovative method may have positive effects on the performance of future nurses to effectively communicate with visually impaired persons.

Distance education is possible through the use of hypermedia that includes a set of means for simultaneous and interactive access to content, images, audio and animations. Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) represent a type of hypermedia in the format of a website that allows access to any user and that can be used as a space to offer educational courses. These spaces are relevant in the teaching-learning process [2].

Distance educational practices propose a scenario of construction and sharing of knowledge. The subjects participating in the learning process experience moments of exchange of experiences and
reflections, conditions that promote and potentiate changes. In the case of health professionals, this new modality of education allows training, improvement and updating and lead to improvement of care [3].

Technological advances mark the work of nursing professionals. It is, therefore, justified to use them to teach skills that associate the practice of humanized care with interventions [4].

In order to strengthen relations between nurses and society, educational practices should be implemented to sensitize and prepare these professionals for health care directed to population groups with special communication needs, such as the visually impaired.

Health professionals should acquire skills to improve care for the blind. They do this by searching for knowledge about the peculiarities and needs of this public, in order to communicate better with them and implement effective strategies to develop competencies in health care [5].

The **Course on Health Communication of Nurses with Blind Patients in the modality of Distance Education (DE)** has been offered with a 60-hour workload, divided into four classes (1) Introduction to Distance Education (DE); (2) Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication; (3) The issue of visual impairment and the principles of health communication with the patient; and (4) Communication during the Nursing Consultation with Blind Persons. The contents are disclosed in slides and complemented by the reading of articles on the themes presented. Tools are provided for discussion in boards in the first three classes and a chat in the second module. In the last class, verbal and non-verbal communication were exemplified in a video showing a nursing consultation with a blind patient; the scenario had the typical furniture and equipment of nursing offices and the actors were a nurse, a blind person and his companion [6,7].

The **Course on Health Communication of Nurses with Blind Patients** in the modality of Distance Education has been available to nursing students. The objective of this article is to present the evaluation carried out by the students.

2 **METHODOLOGY**

This is a descriptive study aimed at describing the perception of nursing students about DE with a view to training them to communicate with disabled persons. The study had a qualitative approach, as this determines the strategies and procedures that enable researchers to conceptualize the experiences from the point of view of the people who provide the information [8].

The Course on Health Communication of Nurses with Blind Patients was offered between the months of August and September 2015 in a virtual learning environment. This environment was created to enhance learning and consolidate distance education.

Nursing students from three public universities in the northeastern region of Brazil participated in the study. The course was previously announced and a link to access the registration form was made available Online in the Google Drive® tool Forms. The inclusion criterion for participants was to have responded the pre- and post-test and have participated in 75% of the classes.

In order to collect data, an instrument with questions on sociodemographic information, previous experience with DE courses and training on disabled persons, and evaluation of the interaction tools and content.

The answers were grouped and analyzed in the light of the thematic literature, selecting significant points, with the objective of identifying the central idea. After this process, excerpts from the discourses were grouped into categories, according to affinity or similarity of themes. The reports were referenced with the abbreviations S1, S2..., to preserve the anonymity of participants.

The study respected the national and international standards of ethics in research involving human beings.

3 **RESULTS**

The sample comprised 34 students, 31 of whom were women and 33 single, aged between 18 and 37 years. Eleven participants reported previous experience with DE and only one had participated in a training course on disabled persons.
Difficulties to access the virtual environment were reported by nine participants, and six reported difficulty accessing the content of lessons and additional materials. Notably, the first class introducing DE included a demonstration on how to use the online tools and the VLE, but they still had difficulties and suggested the need to improve the information.

The speeches of participants are organized into two categories: Evaluation of interaction tools and Evaluation of Content, as presented below.

### 3.1 Evaluation of interaction tools

Teaching material and a Virtual Learning Environments containing means for dialogue in order to promote group reflection, intellectual production and the follow-up of the trajectory of students, are essential in the scope of distance education. Depending on the Virtual Learning Environments, several tools may help in the interactivity between students and teachers. Some examples are discussion boards, chats, web conferences, collaborative texts, messages, among other means that promote the exchange of experiences and knowledge among the users involved in the teaching and learning [9].

During the course, 22 students participated in the three boards, eight interacted in two boards and four in one. As for the chat activity, 30 students participated. The boards and the chat allowed communication between students and the tutor, favoring the exchange of experiences and debates about concepts presented during the course and brought up by participants, ensuring a broad view on the theme.

Boards consist in an asynchronous communication tool aimed at the discussion between participants and tutors on predetermined topics discussed during classes, encouraging the exposition of doubts and the exchange of experiences. It is used to correct possible misconceptions and to evaluate the participation and assimilation of knowledge by the students. The advantage of boards is the flexibility of schedules, allowing more freedom and autonomy to students who are able to exchange messages at their most convenient moment [10].

In turn, chats consist in synchronous communication in which teachers and students exchange information in real time, although in different spaces. This has the same purpose of the forums, that is, debate subjects determined by the tutors and address doubts [11].

The analysis of the answers showed that the participants agreed that chats and boards are indispensable tools for the good result of distance learning:

- It was quite important, these experiences enabled exchange of knowledge and consequently a much broader coverage of the theme (S1).
- The experience of participating in the chat and the boards was very motivating; they provided discussions on the addressed topics, leading to a more dynamic and holistic approach of the content (S14).
- The chat and the boards were very different, much more live than I thought. The opportunity to engage and discuss with other classmates and tutors brought me new concepts and more consistent opinions about the themes discussed and that gave me another view on the visually impaired persons (S23).
- This is the first time I participate in a systematic manner of boards and chats with the aim of studying, and for me it was a very positive experience. In the chat, I was apprehensive because I had to mentally formulate my answer and post in a timely manner so that my colleagues could have access to my collaboration (S2).
- It was very interesting, especially the participation in the chat, because it was very fast, we had to respond fast, think fast; the way the tutor passed us the questions was very dynamic (S3).
- The chat was a new moment, the first one I attended. In it, the content of the classes is presented more explicitly, demonstrating that the learning is having a more satisfactory result (S9).
- It would be nice to have a chat every class so that the students could interact more often about the topics covered (S33).

However, some students pointed to failures related to the effective participation of students in board activities.
It was an eye-opener experience, though I believe it could have been even more interesting if there was more interaction between the participants of the board, where they made comments about the class; however, it was apparent that many did not read the comments of classmates (S8).

Authors have investigated the perception of nutrition students about distance learning and obtained similar results with respect to the lack of participation on the part of the colleagues during discussions, besides the impediment of some in attending synchronous sessions due to scheduling conflicts. However, interaction tools were considered valuable components for DE [12].

Although 23 students reported never having taken a course in this modality, all the students, either with or without previous experience with DE, evaluated the experience as positive.

My experience with distance learning is new, but in that particular environment and format, it is new. The virtual environment used leads to different possibilities of interaction between students and tutors, the possibility of solving doubts and learning to become more effective (S10).

Thus my first experience with a DE course, so at first I thought it would be monotonous and boring. But when the classes started and when I got in contact with the virtual environment, I changed my mind. The experience was good and I was able to undo some paradoxes regarding this modality of course (S11).

The course makes it possible you to use your free hours, and the candidate can choose the best time to carry out the activities (S34).

Research evaluated the satisfaction of 45 students who underwent an open access online course on various topics, and 87% indicated that they had been able to follow the course and received sufficient assistance while taking the course. On the factors that most motivated their participation, 64% indicated the content, 44% discussion sessions, 40% regular communication with the instructor [13].

Positive aspects of the training reported were related to the methodology adopted, the availability of content, chat tools and boards; choice of DE for professional qualification.

The interaction tutor-student was very positive.

The availability of subjects.

The responsibilities of some students to participate in the board and chat (S18).

The cited benefits of the use of DE for training, as pointed out in another study with teachers, were: promotion of easy access, flexibility of time and physical space, encouragement for the students' self-discipline and self-learning [14].

Negative points were not mentioned by most of the students, but some technical problems of access to the virtual environment were pointed out.

Some problems in the system that prevented access to the board and classes, causing problem to the progress of the course (S15).

### 3.2 Evaluation of the Content

This category allowed the reflection of teachers and tutors on students' goals, their expectations and what contents could have been approached in order to make the course even more complete. The students expressed their opinion in a simplified manner about the training on communication with blind people. This moment was crucial for the final evaluation. The analysis of these aspects is relevant for the improvement of subsequent offers of the course.

In order for DE to be used an alternative for learning and training, it is necessary to create adequate teaching material. The content must be clear, complete and easy to understand [15]. Furthermore, the content must be presented in a dialogically manner, acting as a mediating and interactive element in distance learning, otherwise it will cause discouragement in students, hampering learning, inhibiting the possibility of a critical and reflective insertion of learners in their training process [16]. On this issue, students emphasized the interactivity of content, as evidenced in the following reports:

It was a very pleasant course, easily accessible, very dynamic and attractive, which helped to attract attention and did not leave us tired or uninterested, as the course presented not only texts, but also images, videos, among other elements. The platform had its problems, but it is overall excellent (S4).
Training with excellent content, and essential information, mainly for us nursing students who are learning how to treat and care for patients (S13).

The emancipatory power of nurses can be achieved by acquiring knowledge still in the undergraduate field, enabling them to perform health care for different audiences. This process results in personal empowerment and professional autonomy, through acquisition of competencies, motivation, satisfaction and decision making [17].

Offering health care requires knowledge of the communicative singularities of different audiences, so as to promote humanized and quality care. Acquiring skills for this purpose has proved to be a useful basis for training in health promotion, academic preparation and continuous professional development [18].

The offer of the distance course for the training of students on communication with the blind was considered effective by the students. Empowerment on the theme and improvement on humanized care were acknowledged as a result, since the theme is not addressed in undergraduate courses. This is noted in the accounts.

It helps us to become professionals with a more humanized look, and consequently better able to properly assist our future patients (S5).

It was very good for me and I believe that for others too; my eyes have now become more humanized, I have always had a humanistic but not holistic view of reality (S9).

Nine students suggested deepening the content with themes related to blind patients and family approach, health services, and public policies and technologies used for education and communication. Other students stated that the content was clear, complete and easy to understand. This can be seen in the reports below:

The issue of the patient's family, or the companion, we know that this is important in the process, but that he should not take autonomy from the blind, his freedom to develop and society, ex; Eating at a restaurant and being able to pass a credit card without problems, this is communication that must be double-handed, society must align itself with its way of being, and not them to us, all this is communication (E8).

What technologies could we use to improve care for the blind, I did not see this being mentioned during classes (S24).

Relevant aspects needed for consultations of blind clients were addressed in order to promote a better care, as there was a humane look beyond the holistic, to know how to respect and meet the needs of this public (S16).

A training with excellent content and essential information, mainly for us nursing students who are learning how to treat and care for patients (S30).

4 CONCLUSIONS

It was observed that the course in the distance modality on communication of nurses with blind patients offered opportunities for gradual approach of the theme and was evaluated by the nursing students as suitable to promote the learning, for presenting content, and the VLE was regarded as easily accessible, and the didactic material adequate and interactive. In addition, interactive tools, such as chat and boards, are essential for motivation and learning.

In this sense, the most valuable skill envisioned in the teaching and learning process was related to the manifestation of the students’ personal impressions about the proposal developed and the resources made available. It is worth emphasizing that the considerations reported should be studied more fully to be incorporated into the course, since the students’ opinions are of great relevance for the construction of knowledge.

REFERENCES


