Research Article

Türk Fen ve Sağlık Dergisi
Turkish Journal of Science and Health

Volume 3
Number 2
Year 2022
Pages 85-91

e-ISSN: 2717-7173 https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/tfsd

Received: 20.12.2021 *Accepted:* 25.03.2022 https://doi.org/10.51972/tfsd.1038809

An Evaluation of the Opinions of the First and Emergency Aid Students on Online Education During the Covid-19 Pandemic Period

Şimşek Çelik [1]*, Pelin Çelik [2]

[1]Department of Emergency Faculty of Medicine, Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Sivas, Türkiye
[2]Department of Health Programs, Vocational School of Health Services, Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Sivas, Türkiye

ABSTRACT:
Purpose: This study aims to determine the problems experienced by the students of the first and emergency aid program related to distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic period.
Materials and Methods: This descriptive study was conducted with first- and second-year students of the First and Emergency Aid Department of Vocational School of Health Services of a public university. The data in the study were collected using the online "The First and Emergency Aid Program Students' Opinions on Distance Education Evaluation Form". The data were analyzed through SPSS 22.0 software, and descriptive statistical analyzes were used in the analysis of the data.
Results: It was found that the students participating in the study agreed with the statements "professional knowledge and skills cannot be gained in distance education environments," "distance education does not contribute to professional practice skills," "distance education is not so efficient as face-to-face education," with a considerably high average, respectively.
Conclusions: It is of paramount importance to make regulations considering that distance education, which was suddenly implemented as an alternative to face-to-face education disrupted during the pandemic, may lead to deficiencies in professional skills, especially for applied departments.
Keywords: *Covid-19, Distance Education, Students Opinions*

**Corresponding author: Şimşek Çelik, email: simsekcelik@cumhuriyet.edu.tr*

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic appeared in late 2019 as an infectious disease with an unknown origin. Affecting millions of people across the world, Covid-19 was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Wong, 2020). The first Covid-19 case in Turkey was recorded on March 10, 2020, and the number of cases increased rapidly after the incident (Daily, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic brought difficulties in many fields, one of which is education. The literature examinations suggest that one of the first interventions to manage the current situation in previous pandemics was the closure of schools (Hens et al., 2009). Schools were closed in many countries in the Covid-19 pandemic, as in previous pandemics (Sahu, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). While some schools chose to delay the spring semester of the 2019-2020 academic year to the following year, some schools tried to continue education by using systems that support distance education (Viner et al., 2020; Domenico et al., 2020). In Turkey, the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) announced that education and training in universities were postponed as of 16 March 2020 for the first time to reduce the spread of the virus (YÖK, 2020a). Due to the uncertainty, it was announced that education and training would not be conducted face-to-face in the next phase. Therefore, distance

education started to be on the agenda in Turkey (YÖK, 2020b). In Turkey, distance education was an application that had to be put into effect suddenly to manage the process effectively and prevent the students from experiencing inconveniences such as graduation failures and semester loss. Relevant institutions and organizations made significant efforts to use the available technology in the best way to continue the education process and to minimize the gaps that would arise because of the current conditions (Gewin, 2020; Lau et al., 2020). It is impossible to deny the superiority of the influence of distance education technology on many aspects of our lives today and its increasing popularity and use in the education sector. Though distance education offers advantages such as being easy to handle, the flexibility of time and space, and the opportunity to work at its own pace, it has undeniable limitations minimizing socialization, lack of mutual interaction between teacher-student and student-student, focusing problems, connection problems, and deficiencies in practical subjects (Mukhtar et al., 2020; Dhawan 2020; Snoussi, 2019). Particularly, these limitations may cause adverse impacts on the education process of students whose application areas are clinical. This study was carried out to determine the problems experienced by the first and emergency aid program students related to distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Aims of the Study

This study was carried out to determine the problems experienced by the first and emergency aid program students related to distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Characteristics of Study Setting

This descriptive study was conducted at a public university in Turkey between October and November 2021.

Sampling and participant

The study population consisted of 134 students who agreed to fill out the online study form enrolled in the First and Emergency Aid Program of Vocational School of Health Services.

Data Collection Tools

The study data were collected using the Personal Introduction Form (Annex-1) and the First and Emergency Aid Program Students' Opinions on Distance Education Evaluation Form (Annex-2). The Personal Introduction Form consists of a total of 4 questions to determine the age, gender, grade, and employment of the first and emergency aid program students. The First and Emergency Aid Program Students' Opinions on Distance Education Evaluation Form was developed by the researchers through the literature review (Noori, 2021, Keskin and Özer Kaya, 2020; Kırali and Alcı, 2016; Du et al., 2013) and based on expert opinion and it was prepared online and sent to the students. The form consisted of 24 questions prepared to reveal the opinions of the first and emergency students regarding distance education. There were three options as "agree, disagree, and not sure" that students could choose for each statement in the form. One point for "disagree", two points for "not sure", and 3 points for "agree" were given. Before the form was applied, the purpose of the study was explained, and students were asked to answer the questions fully and carefully.

Statistical Method

The data obtained from the study were analyzed through the SPSS 22.0 software. Descriptive statistics (number, percentage, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation) were used in data analysis. The results were evaluated at the 95% confidence interval and the significance level of $p<0.05$.

Ethical Considerations

The approval for this study was obtained from the Cumhuriyet University Clinical Research Ethics Committee with the decision number 2021-09/01 on September 14, 2021, which stated there was no ethical or scientific objection to the study.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the descriptive characteristics of the sociodemographic status of the first and emergency program students who accepted to participate in the study.

Table 1- The Sociodemographic Characteristics of the First and Emergency Aid Program Students

Age (Av.±SD)	19.7±1.4	
Gender	n	%
Male	76	56.7
Female	58	43.3
Grade		
First-year	64	47.8
Second-year	70	52.2
Employment		
Employed	9	6.7
Unemployed	125	93.3

Table 2- The First and Emergency Aid Program Students' Opinions on Distance Education

The Statements of the First and Emergency Aid Students' Opinions Regarding Distance Education	**Disagree**		**Not Sure**		**Agree**		**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
	n	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**		
Distance education contributes to the level of theoretical knowledge.	40	29.9	19	14.1	75	56.0	2.26	0.89
Distance education contributes to the general knowledge level.	41	30.6	19	14.2	74	55.2	2.24	0.89
Distance education does not contribute to professional practice skills.	12	9.0	7	5.2	115	85.8	2.76	0.59
Distance education is not so efficient as face-to-face education.	8	6.0	17	12.7	109	81.3	2.75	0.55
Distance education applications should be widespread.	99	73.9	13	9.7	22	16.4	1.43	0.76
Widespread use of distance education is beneficial to continuous professional development.	112	83.6	10	7.5	12	9.0	1.26	0.62
Distance education increases self-confidence.	92	68.7	20	14.9	20	14.9	1.46	0.73
I can easily communicate with academics in distance education.	32	23.9	23	17.1	79	59.0	2.36	0.84
I can freely express my opinions through distance education.	50	37.3	21	15.7	63	47.0	2.11	0.91
I can get enough feedback in distance education.	70	52.2	28	20.9	36	26.9	1.75	0.85
Distance education encourages me to research.	73	54.5	29	21.6	32	23.9	1.71	0.84
Distance education reduces teamwork by directing more individual work.	26	19.4	12	9.0	96	71.6	2.51	0.80
I forget a topic fast that I have learned through distance education.	20	14.9	19	14.2	95	70.9	2.55	0.74
I have technical difficulties during distance education.	20	14.9	15	11.2	99	73.9	2.57	0.74
Professional knowledge and skills cannot be gained in distance education environments.	8	6.0	12	9.0	114	85.1	2.79	0.53
Distance education offers the opportunity to access educational materials/contents when needed.	23	17.2	10	7.5	101	75.4	2.58	0.77
Distance education offers a higher chance to meet with expert and experienced educators.	34	25.4	27	20.1	73	54.5	2.34	0.79
Distance education has higher costs.	45	33.6	21	15.7	68	50.7	2.15	0.90
Distance education does not contribute to efficient learning.	24	17.9	14	10.4	96	71.7	2.52	0.78
The knowledge gained through distance education cannot be easily transferred into practice.	15	11.2	16	11.9	103	76.9	2.65	0.67
Distance education can be limiting/hampering for participants to be active.	10	7.5	20	14.9	104	77.6	2.70	0.59
Distance education offers the opportunity to gain professional knowledge and skills through visual activities.	101	75.4	16	11.9	17	12.7	1.36	0.69
Distance education offers the opportunity to gain professional knowledge and skills through listening-based activities.	75	56.0	22	16.4	37	27.6	1.88	0.84
Distance education offers the opportunity to don't gain professional knowledge and skills through visual and listening-based activities.	26	19.4	19	14.2	89	66.4	2.47	0.80

It was found that 56.7% of the students participating in the study were male, and their average age was 19.7±1.4, and 93.3% were unemployed (Table 1). Table 2 shows the findings of the first and emergency program students' opinions on distance education. These findings were obtained by taking the average of each item in the form. In this way, it was revealed to what extent the students agreed with the statements. As a result of the findings, the statements with the highest average agreement of the students are respectively "professional knowledge and skills cannot be gained in distance education environments", "distance education does not contribute to professional practice skills", "distance education is not so efficient as face-to-face education". These statements were followed by the statements of "distance education can be limiting/hampering for participants to be active", "the knowledge gained through distance education cannot be easily transferred into practice", "I have technical difficulties during distance education", respectively. While the averages of the other statements show similar values, they are in the direction of students' agreement. The statement with the lowest average is "widespread use of distance education is beneficial to continuous professional development" (Table 2).

DISCUSSION

Due to the suspension of face-to-face education due to the Covid-19 pandemic, an immediate transition to web-based distance education was made to avoid interrupting the education process. The sudden transition of a method planned for formal education to web-based distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic caused students to experience inefficient learning and encounter numerous difficulties in teaching-learning activities due to the lack of materials (UNESCO 2020 report; Onyema et al., 2020; Khlaif et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2020; Khaliq et al., 2020; Mohammadi et al.,2021). It is crucial to identify the difficulties and deficiencies and receive direct feedback from the students to develop and improve this education method.

According to the opinions of the students participating in this study, the majority stated that distance education was not so efficient as face-to-face education and that professional knowledge and particularly skills could not be gained through distance education. Since the Covid-19 became a pandemic and the worldwide quarantine was initiated, in Turkey and others started to use distance education as an alternative to ensure the safety of personnel and students. Similar to in this study, other studies found that most students preferred face-to-face education by stating that they were not satisfied with distance education, especially in applied courses because distance education has certain deficiencies in practice, and face-to-face education was more beneficial compared to distance education (Thai et al., 2020 ; Widodo et al., 2020; Berga et al., 2021; Abbasi et al., 2020; Mukhtar et al., 2020; Snoussi, 2019; Almaiah et al., 2020; Almanthari et al., 2020). First and Emergency Aid Program; in pre-hospital emergency health services, who have reached the competence to determine and solve health problems in the best way, can provide basic and advanced life support to the sick and injured, can recognize all kinds of system trauma and make the appropriate emergency approach; It aims to train qualified health technicians who can work in cooperation with the team, who ensure that the patients or injured who have received first aid are safely transported to the hospitals by ambulance. To achieve this goal, students take a large number of applied courses and practice. Achieving these goals is possible with face-to-face training and first and emergency aid practices in the field are required. The statements of the students agree with the characteristics and purpose of the program they are studying.

Similarity in their study with nursing students, Süt and Küçükkaya (2016) pointed out that most students (83.5%) stated that distance education would cause deficiencies in laboratory and clinical practices, which have a vital place in practical professions. Abbasi et al. (2020) stated in their studies that distance education was not sufficient for the subjects that require applications in the laboratory/clinical environment.

It was determined that the students who participated in this study thought that distance education could not contribute to their practice skills and that the level of agreement in the statement

"professional knowledge and skills cannot be gained through visual and listening-based activities" was significantly high. Duijn et al. (2014) reported in their study that additional training is needed to develop clinical skills and fill the theoretical and practical gaps that might occur during online learning. From this point of view, it is obvious that the students, especially in the applied departments, require more face-to-face education.

After learning the theoretical content of the course, students must improve their professional practice skills through applications. Web-based distance education can be successful in acquiring and comprehending information; however, it is not sufficient in terms of applying, analyzing, and evaluating information (Forehand, 2010).

It was seen that although web-based distance education has advantages such as offering flexible time to study for students at their own pace, there are several disadvantages such as insufficient feedback, failure to express opinions freely, and impermanent learning. It was thought that reason why students cannot learn the subject permanently is because they only learned theoretical knowledge without practice. In a meta-analysis study, it was reported that when planning for web-based learning, it should not only cover the content but also how it will affect different interactions in the learning process (Bernard, 2009). In this study, it was seen that the students highly agreed with the statement "I forget a topic fast that I have learned through distance education".

In addition, in parallel with the studies suggesting that the distance learning method limits the student-teacher interaction, it was seen that there is a high level of agreement in this study with the statement "distance education can be limiting/hampering for participants to be active". Similarly, Cheng and Chau (2016) emphasized the importance of social interaction in web-based education and reported that web-based education might reduce students' social interactions and lead to a decrease in their performance.

In their study, Sindiani et al., (2020) stated that students experienced difficulties with the Internet and the applications used during distance education; Noori (2021) reported that the majority of the students had problems with the Internet and lacked technological devices. In this study similarly indicated that most students had technical difficulties during distance education.

CONCLUSION

It is necessary to identify the deficiencies to develop the web-based distance education method and make the necessary arrangements. In this context, evaluating the feedback received from students and determining their expectations from web-based education will facilitate their adaptation to the process. In this study indicates that most students think that the professional knowledge and skills that should be taught with clinical and laboratory support cannot be given efficiently and effectively through distance education. According to the findings, conducting further studies with an extended sample group to determine the effects of distance education on theoretical education-oriented departments will provide data on behalf of higher education to fill the gap in theory and practice, to develop clinical skills, and to develop more effective interaction between educators and students during the distance education process.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

Financial Disclosure

The authors declare no financial support for his study.

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