

Experience of the Egyptian Physical Therapy Educators on the Online Teaching During COVID-19 Outbreak 2021: A Short Communication

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Short Communication

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ABOUT THE STUDY

Universities all over the world had an outbreak during the academic year 2020-2021 as a safety measure to reduce the dissemination of Covid-19 pandemic [1,2]. Suddenly the Egyptian universities were facing a challenge to transfer into online teaching [3-5]. This Online Teaching (OT) was not totally new experience to many of the Egyptian universities but for practical-based colleges like physical therapy, it was a significant challenge. The study aimed to answer the following six research questions: (1) How was EPTes' OT profile during the COVID-19 outbreak in 2021? (2) What were the characteristics of EPTes and their institutions that influenced this profile? (3) How did EPTes perceive the usefulness of OT for PT colleges, advantages, and disadvantages? (4) To which levels were Egyptian PT colleges and educators ready to implement OT and what were the challenges? (5) Was there any social or financial implication of OT from home on EPTes? (6) How was EPTes' overall satisfaction with OT and what were the implicated factors? An e-survey was used to collect data from Egyptian Physical Therapy Educators (EPTes) to answer the research questions.

Results indicated novelty of OT for 83.0% of 102 EPTes participated in the study and highlighted the positive association ($N=100$, $P=0.033$) between years of academic experience and previous use of OT for the advantage of juniors (1-9 years). Most of EPTes (93.0%) relied on themselves to train on OT and (58.0%) of them practiced OT from work and from home. During OT from home, more than half (54.2%) of the EPTes scheduled instructions outside working hours, and (67.1%) of them used 'the anytime style' for communication with students. This can explain that EPTes considered flexibility as one of the advantages of OT. Meanwhile, two-thirds (68%) of EPTes reported a negative effect of OT on their social life and this might be due to an overuse of this flexibility as applying OT outside the working hours and allow the students to communicate with them at any time with no doubt would beat the family and social time. The novelty of experience from one side and desire of the EPTes to support their students during this stressful condition from other side might be the root cause reasons for this overuse of OT flexibility. Using OT from home might also be responsible for the reported high levels of financial overwhelming by about one third (29.9%) of them of the EPTes. Novelty of EPTes also shown in the tools and methods used during OT as the traditional PowerPoint presentations were the most frequently used while university websites, Microsoft teams, and WhatsApp were the most frequently used OT applications. The study showed significant ($N=57$, $P=0.006$) differences between seniors and juniors EPTes regarding the practiced teaching applications for OT as most (63.8%) of users of university websites were full or associate professors, while 53.3% of users of Microsoft teams were lecturers. The simplicity of university webpage and offering institutional training for its use might explain the preference of seniors to use it. On the other hand, junior lecturers used Microsoft teams as they depend on self-training, or they might have previous experience from using this application for social communication. The experience of OT appeared to be very close in public and private universities as there was no difference between private or public universities in terms of educators' technical skills although the private universities showed significant advantage over public universities regarding the provision of institutional training ($N=101$, $P=0.003$) and availability of institutional educational support centers ($N=99$, $P=0.0001$). The EPTes expressed very modest trust on OT as only 9% of EPTes perceived usefulness of OT for PT colleges and they showed the least level of positive attitude toward usefulness of OT for practical instructions (22.9%). It is to be noted that this poor perception had no association with several factors related to EPTes or their institutions including the educators' university sector ($N=100$, $P=0.789$) or colleges commence year ($N=98$, $P=0.813$), rank ($N=98$, $P=0.847$), years of experience ($N=99$, $P=0.839$), previous use of online teaching ($N=100$, $P=0.803$), or self-efficacy ($N=100$, $P=0.663$).

This study indicates that EPTes believe that physical therapy teaching is better to be offered through face-to-face teaching especially for the practical and clinical instructions to be able to deliver the courses learning outcomes. That is why blended courses were the most frequent (58.8%) courses and about half of ($58.7 \pm 9.4\%$) course hours were dedicated for OT. Add to that less than one-tenth (9%) of EPTes showed positive attitude toward readiness of their colleges to application of OT in terms of availability of supporting infra-structure and resources. Although the EPTes reported limitations of teaching, learning and assessment processes as major disadvantages of OT particularly for clinical and practical courses, they reported efficiency, safety, flexibility, and accessibility as advantages for OT. In conclusion, this study was the first study in Egypt to investigate the OT during the outbreak in PT colleges. It highlighted the primitive experience of EPTes to OT teaching and it indicated that the OT is not the preference teaching approach to EPTes due to the nature of the PT academic programs that are mainly based on clinical and practical courses. The EPTes trained themselves during the outbreak and reported advantages of the OT but still they have a concern regarding its usefulness and readiness of their colleges for its application. And this concern is applied for both private and public universities and it determines that it is not only matter of

infrastructures that might be more available in private universities, but it is more about the suitability of OT to academic program and if OT would be an added value to achieve the program's learning outcomes.

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