

A Study of Effectiveness of Distance Education Programme in Nursing

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Advancement in health care information and knowledge as well as technology in education has a profound impact on nursing education. Nurses are expected to demonstrate an expanded practice base requiring a higher level of competency. They have a responsibility to patients, a professional responsibility to the organization and an individual responsibility to maintain a high level of current and relevant knowledge and skills Rath (1996). In order to keep pace with current and potential health care reforms, nurses have to maintain their competency levels through continuing education.

Resources for educating this huge work force are inadequate for preparing them at university level due to shortage of colleges of nursing and the low intake in the conventional system. So distance education offers a challenge for professional transformation.

Nurses are particularly appropriate clientele/target group for distance learning because of their geographical location and constraints of time ,money ,family and shift duty

In response to the growing emphasis on professional development, continuing professional education, need to enhance practice and skills, Indira Gandhi National Open University developed and launched a three-year degree programme (Post basic BSc. Nursing) in July 1994, through distance mode in 17 programme study centers all over the country initially. In order to assess the credibility of this system for higher education of nursing professionals, a study of distance education program in nursing was undertaken with following objectives.

- i) To study the profile of learners, to identify whether target group is adequately covered.
- ii) To assess the effectiveness of self-instructional course material by learners, counsellors and programme incharges.
- iii) To examine the effectiveness of instructional process in relation to,
Audio and Video support
Counselling sessions and practical contact sessions
Counsellors and clinical supervisors
Teleconferencing sessions
Assignments and Evaluation
- iv) To assess performance of learners in terms of knowledge and skills as expressed by learners and programme in charges.
- v) To Identify the problems faced by learners while undergoing the programme.

Structured questionnaires were canvassed to 534 distance learners, 136 counsellors / clinical supervisors and 17 programme incharges of IGNOU's B.Sc. Nursing Programme across the various parts of the country, out of which 201 distance learners, 85 Academic Counsellors/Clinical Supervisors and 13 Programme Incharges responded. Random sampling technique was adopted to select the learners, purposive sampling to select the counsellors/ clinical supervisors and total enumeration of the sample was used to select the programme incharges.

Major findings of the study indicated that the course material was found to be highly effective by learners, counsellors and programme incharges.. The findings indicated the scope for further improvement of the course material by updating it periodically and providing supplement material from time to time.

Audio–video sessions were found to be effective in terms of quality of content presentation and helped the learners to revise the lesson. However, audio–video facilities were not accessible to majority of the respondents.

Counselling sessions and practical contact sessions were found to be relevant, useful and effective and helped the learners to acquire skills relevant to work situation. The counselling sessions gave the learners an opportunity to interact with counsellors and peer groups and clear their doubts .The numbers of counselling session and practical contact sessions were found to be inadequate in all specialty areas.

Learners benefited from contact with the Counsellors were found to be supportive, encouraging, helpful, available and competent.

Teleconferencing sessions were informative, satisfactory, useful and helped the learners to clarify the unit and clear their doubts. Technical quality and presentation need to be improved and the sessions more interactive and accessible.

Assignments were found to be challenging, thought provoking and effective. They helped the learners to understand the text and prepare for the examination. Tutor comments written only on a few assignments were positive and constructive.

There was great delay in receipt of evaluated assignments. Some of the students stated that they received back the evaluated assignments and/or grades after the Term End examination. Learners desired more individualized feedback on their assessment and more interesting study guides and readings for reference. The Term End examination question papers were found to be of good quality. The situation about the incomplete grade cards and delayed result was a cause of serious concern for the learners, counsellors and programme incharges.

There was a significant increase in knowledge, skills and attitudes of learners after undergoing the BSc. Nursing programme as expressed by learners and programme incharges.

The main problems expressed by the respondents included lack of information regarding various operations of the programme, delayed receipt of assignments and Term End Examination grades, result, incomplete grade cards, work pressure from work place, long duty hours, family and personal problems, far away study centres, traveling, boarding and lodging problems.

A few programme incharges faced the problem in arranging clinical experience, problem of payment from the regional centres and cooperation from counsellors.

The major suggestions given by learners, programme incharges and counsellors included that there should be increase of theory and practical counselling sessions, updating of course material, improving and changing pattern of practical activities, preparing creative assignments, close monitoring, review and evaluation of the programme by the faculty, feedback regarding programme from learners, programme incharges, counsellors, coordinators, supervisors and employers.

Findings highlighted the need for alternative procedures for selection of learners, close monitoring by faculty, increasing programme study centres to make the programme accessible to outreach learners to, broaden the educational opportunities, eliminate the long travel and enhance the skills. Although a few learners had raised the question of cost of the programme, participants gained intangible benefits.