


Use of social media and WhatsApp to conduct teaching activities during the COVID-19 lockdown in Pakistan

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The Higher Education Commission (HEC) directed all universities nationwide to start online classes due to the COVID-19 lockdown. In Pakistani higher education settings, distance/virtual learning is not a common practice and for the Pharm-D students their preference is always face-to-face lectures. In addition, most of the public universities lack a proper virtual education system. Therefore, the learning management system used by universities is only used for student registration, attendance and distribution of the study material (PowerPoint files/lecture handouts). Regrettably, the availability of recorded virtual lectures is not very common in most Pakistani universities. Due to a lack of proper virtual education set-up and of trained human resources, it became challenging to ensure all students were getting access to the recorded/live lectures. Limited Internet services, especially for students in remote areas, appear to be the main factor hindering access to virtual lectures.

The Institute of Pharmaceutical Science (IPS), University of Veterinary and Animal Science, implemented the directive to adapt virtual/online classes for the Pharm-D

and Master of Philosophy students. Various free software like Zoom, Google Meet and Facebook Live were short-listed for virtual/online classes (Figure 1). Google Meet and Facebook Live sessions were conducted by creating private groups for the students from the same semester. It is observed that Facebook Live appears to be a very user-friendly and a convenient online learning method for the teachers and students because it does not require any special skills or settings. Discussion sessions conducted at the Facebook Live assisted in clarifying students' concepts and any additional queries regarding the lecture. Recorded lectures were also shared at a WhatsApp group to aid revision. It is observed that by using these methods a student with poor communication skills is effectively interacting with the teacher in comparison with the face-to-face teaching session. In conclusion, use of the social media and social networking applications may serve as a useful communication and teaching tool for developing countries. If the situation persists and lockdown is extending, using advance learning management systems like Moodle or Blackboard will be a better option. Thus, allowing students to get an in-depth exposure of the virtual learning methods and on other end instructors can do comprehensive assessments as well.

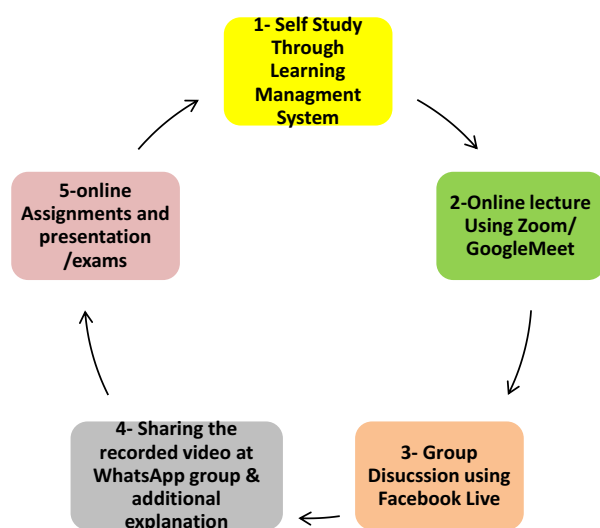


Figure 1 Online learning model for pharmacy students during the COVID 19 lockdown.

Declarations

Conflict of interest

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