

Lessons Learned from Distance Learning Among Occupational Therapy Students under the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Background: In the Palestinian territories, there are only two universities offering a bachelor's degree in occupational therapy that is recognized by the World Federation of Occupational Therapists. These two universities have adopted the American curriculum for occupational therapy education, including the general style and pattern.

Objective: This paper describes the experiences of the author as an instructor of occupational therapy at the Arab American University in Palestine during the 2020 pandemic. Students at the University have not been accustomed to distance learning through online courses.

Methods: The course was developed for 36 students who were divided into groups, each consisting of six to eight students. These groups are the future occupational therapists who will provide occupational therapy service to the community in the near future after receiving their bachelor's degree in Occupational Therapy soon. For telephone communications, all 36 students plus the instructor formed one special group on WhatsApp, a free online phone service.

Results: The global pandemic was the first experience of this kind for occupational therapy students and for everyone else in the world. Group members had to think outside the box because the experience was full of different challenges. This lack of resources appropriate to the reality of the pandemic was overcome by referring to the fundamental basics of occupational therapy, and through collective thinking about problems and scenarios. This learning method became a catalyst for students in finding creative solutions.

Conclusions: Occupational therapy programs have not been spared and must change to provide their public health services. The traditional delivery of services through direct physical contact must change. Moreover, the online education should be an option for teaching an occupational therapy specialist.

Keywords: Online education, COVID-19 pandemic, Occupational therapy students, Palestine, AAUP

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