Original article

Deliberations of Nursing Academics towards Distance Education

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Abstract:

Introduction: There are different ways of upgrading knowledge and competency among the learners, distance education is believed to be a valid method for enhancing competencies.

Methods: In order to assess the practicability in terms of availability of information communication technology as well as commitments of the learners in conducting distance education, a feasibility study was conducted in three nursing institutes of Institute of Medicine, which were selected purposively. For data collection structured instrument was used for administrators and self-administer semi-structured questionnaire for nursing academicians.

Results: It was revealed that all the campus administrators were ready to take part in this new initiative and willing to collaborate during implementation of the project. Cent percent of nursing academicians were enthusiastic to take part in this project, among them 95% were interested in learning proposal writing for qualitative study. Eighty percent of them had computer along with Internet facilities at their work place, and 80% had their own computer along with internet facilities at work place, while only 50% had their own computer. However, 66% of them did not have advance knowledge in handling multi-medias and computer skills.

Conclusion: Administrators as well nursing academicians are willing to collaborate in this distance education project, and nursing academicians are enthusiastic in developing competencies in conducting qualitative research via distance education on their own leisure time without hampering in their scheduled activities.

Key words: Distance education, Feasibility study, and Qualitative Research Approach.

Introduction

A feasibility study is often conducted to assess and evaluate a proposed project in determining whether it is technically feasible, realistic within the existing resources and evaluate cost effectiveness. In most of the circumstances, before conducting any big project, it is sensible to initiate a small scale study before launching any new project, for exploring the existing situation as well as gathering prerequisite requirements[1]. Moreover, a feasibility study can be conducted as an appraisal of the potential impact of a proposed program which may helps the decision-makers in determining whether or not to implement a particular program in a new situation by accepting the current practices for evaluating overall impact on the environment[2].

In addition, a feasibility study also provides extensive data related to financial as well as operational impact of the proposed plan on the current situation; one can investigate a variety of ways for organizing and optimizing the outcome for the decision makers for providing fund from donor institutions. A team of multidisciplinary groups comprising experts in the different fields related to the concerned issues should be included as an independent consultant for effective implementation of a feasibility study[3].

Although, there are many reasons for conducting feasibility study, but in this article a feasibility study was conducted for assessing applicability for initiating a distance education project in the academic nursing institutes. This proposed distance education project has three major objectives: develop modules in qualitative research approach (QLRA) based on need of the learners (pretesting the existing knowledge on QLRA, to deliver the developed modules by adopting distance education technology among learners, and to test the effectiveness (by post test) of the developed modules among the nursing academicians.

These objectives were proposed to achieve in two phases by setting following activities: by conducting meetings with concerned campus administrators regarding pre-testing the modules on developing competencies in qualitative research methodology via distance education, where exploration was done to assess of the existing ICT facilities, followed by development of modules on qualitative research approach as articulated by the respondents. Then in the second phase, before implementation of these modules, awareness level as well as competencies will be pre-tested. Based on the findings due modifications and refinement will be done in the modules; and finally the developed modules will be implemented by adopting distance education technology.

Methods

This is the report of a feasibility study entitled "Developing Competencies among Nursing Academicians on Qualitative Research Approach via Distance Education", which was conducted in three Nursing Campuses of Institute of Medicine: Nursing Campus Maharajgunj, Pokhara Nursing Campus and College of Nursing, Chitwan (Chitwan School of Medical Sciences) on 30th. Nov; 2nd. Dec; and 5th. Dec. (2011) respectively. By adopting census sampling method, 20 nursing academicians (i.e. 12, 4 and 4 respectively) were selected based on the set inclusion criteria: (a) earned master level education; (b) currently involve in master level nursing programme; and (c) engaged in the research / thesis related activities of graduate and post graduate level programmes. Among twenty samples, three of them were involved in administration (2 campus chiefs and 1 acting campus chief) while others were full time academicians involved in Master in Nursing Programme.

Two different sets of instruments were used for data collection: structured questionnaire was used for gathering pertinent information from the administrators; while self-administrated semi-structured instrument was used for the nursing academicians. For the administrators (campus chiefs), questions were focused on availability of multimedia and facilities related to information communication technology (ICT) for their academicians along with their

cooperation during implementation of the project. While for the academicians, the major components were related to qualitative research methodology, competency in handling of multimedia including ICT materials particularly computer skills, and their commitment in learning this QLRA via distance education. The data were collected in their own respective nursing institutes which were set based on the mutual agreement between the respondents and the study team members. The collected data were rechecked for its completeness and then coded before analysis.

Results

The findings of this study revealed that all the campus administrators were positive to take part in this project and they were contented to initiate this project in their institutes. They were ready to collaborate with the project and willing to share their existing multimedia, ICT materials including Internet facilities during study period (pretesting and data collection).

Regarding the multimedia and ICT facilities, all the administrators had separate computes with Internet facilities at their office and they had access to printers along with other accessories. However, one institute (1/3) did not have provision of backup power supply, but they were also in the process to have their own ADSL Internet facilities. Likewise, the administrators were ready to let the study team to use their existing ICT resources for 4-5 hours per day for pre-testing the modules, and they were willing to share their ICT facilities for the training purpose. Moreover, the administrators were quite positive, and were ready to allow the study team to bring ICT resources (temporarily, if needed) during testing the modules (data not presented, in this article), and they quite affirmative to provide additional facilities for their academic staffs (refer table 1).

Table 1   Responses of the Campus Administrators related to existing ICT Facilities and their Commitment

Items	Percent
Provision of separate computer room for academics	100.0
Free internet facilities	100.0
Collaborate during pre testing modules	100.0
Releasing academics to take part in the study	100.0
Collaborate during data collection period	100.0
Free printing facilities to the academics	66.6

Above table 1 indicated that regarding sharing ICT resources during pre-testing the module, cent percent of administrators were ready to provide separate room during study period, and would share their ICT resources free of cost . Similarly, all of them were ready to release their academicians to take part in the study. However, two campus chiefs (66.6%) added they cannot provide free printing facilities to all the academicians even in the actual data collection period.

Table 2   Commitment and Motivation of Nursing Academicians related to Distance Education Project

Responses	Yes
• An opportunity	100.0
• Important for professional development	100.0
• Committed and motivated:	
Can devote 10 – 15 hours per week	90.0

In relation to knowledge regarding QLRA (refer table 2), cent percent academics replied that they need to learn it, as it is an opportunity for them for their professional growth. Among all respondents, 90% of them were committed and motivated to devote 10 – 15 hours per week in learning it via distance education on their own time

Table 3   Access to Computer and Internet Facilities among the Nursing Academics

Computer and Internet Facilities	Percent
Computer with Internet facilities at office	80.0
Computer with internet Facilities around their locality	80.0
Computer facility at my residence	50.0
Computer/laptop along with internet facility	50.0

Above table 3 indicated that 80% academicians had computer access with internet facilities at their office, and almost same percentage had also such facilities around their locality as well. However, only 50% had their own computer/laptop with internet facilities of their own.

Table 4 Competencies of Nursing Academics in Handling Computer

Knowledge and skill in computer handling	Yes
Log in a computer system	100.0
Follow web links: Create, send, forward, reply, save attachments & print email	75.0
Managing word processing	75.0
Open a web browser	70.0
Open a web address between website(s) (URL)	50.0
Operate Excel	50.0

In response to the question regarding computer operation, cent percent could log in a computer system by using username and password and could open a web browser. While, only 75% of them can follow web links, open the web browser; and only half of the respondents (50%) could open web address between website(s) (URL) and operate other advance computer programme i.e. Excel (refer table 4).

Table 5 Nursing Academicians Responses in Learning QLRA via Distance Education

Categories*	Percent
• Own interest	100.0
• Prevailage	85.0
• Without hampering duty/work	80.0
• Not negatively affect in my duty	55.0
Voluntary participation	45.0

*Multiple responses

In response to overall responses towards learning QLRA, (refer table 5) cent percent of them were enthusiastic to take part in this project on their own interest. Similarly, 85% cent percent also added that they would like to grasp this opportunity as a prevailage, and 80% of them mention that they will participate in this project on their own leisure time without hampering on their scheduled duty. Furthermore, they also stated that their participation in this project will not negatively affect in their duty. Fifty five percent of them were aware regarding the rights of the respondents, so they mentioned that they can withdraw at anytime if they

want; while only 45% respondents mentioned that their participation in this study would be voluntary.

Table 6 Suggestion of Nursing Academicians Related to Enhancement QLRA via Distance Education via Distance Education

Suggestions*	Percent
Essential for professional growth advance computer training	90.0
Easy access to computers and continuous Internet	55.0

*Multiple responses

In response to a open ended question regarding their suggestions to build up this project in future, 90% respondents suggested that they need additional training in advance computer programming, and 55% added that the existing ICT materials including computers should be in working condition and there should be continuous Internet facilities so that they can work in this project on their own during their free time.

Table 7 Suggestions of Nursing Academicians Related to the Contents of Qualitative Research

Categories*	Percent
Advance training in QLRA methodology, v proposal writing, including report writing	90.0
Cultural care practices, Cultural congruence	35 .0

*Multiple responses

Similarly, in response to open ended questions related to QLRP, 90% academicians expressed the need for additional information that they need in advance training in QLRA particularly in research methodology, proposal writing, as well as report writing. Moreover, 35% also added that this type of project should be provided for enhancing evidence based culturally congruence care to the clients. Cent percent academicians had taken this project as an opportunity for developing their own competencies in QLRA, which is essential for their academic as well as professional development, and revealed their keen interest to develop competency in QLRA.

Discussion

Pragmatically, qualitative research means many things to many people, as it encompasses multiple perspectives of the human disciplines. In general, qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting[4]. In this article distance learning is coined with distance electronic learning, where instructional contents are delivered by electronic learning (DeL) which consists of the Internet, intranets or extranets, audio and videotapes, satellite broadcast, interactive TV, CD-ROM etc.

In this regards, the nursing academicians were asked regarding acquaintances related to ICT technology, majority of them had basic knowledge; however, they were in favor of acquiring advance skills in handling ICT equipments, As initiation of distance education programme is a complex process, it involves new technology and resistance by users, and it revolves around ICT, with the internet as the backbone technology. It is reported that the institutions of higher learning in developing countries have lagged behind those in the developed world in DeL, mainly due to cost and poor Internet infrastructure[5]. Moreover, initiation of qualitative research via distance education is multifaceted process, it is better to learn how to implement qualitative research in a rigorous manner. It has been argued that although a wide range of methodological literature exists, there is a paucity of works that demonstrate how qualitative research methodology can be practically applied by researchers[6].

As initiation of distance education programme is a difficult process, it involves new technology and resistance by users. It is reported that the institutions of higher learning in developing countries have lagged behind those in the developed world in DeL, mainly due to cost and poor Internet infrastructure[7]. Hence, this feasibility study was conducted to assess the existing ICT infrastructure in the three selected nursing institutes of Institute of Medicine to assess the ICT resources so that competencies can be developed in QLRP via distance education.

While planning a DeL programme, it is essential to build a support team before initiating any new programme. In this connection, a pilot study was conducted in Canada to identify a good, specific and sustainable practice for implementing DeL programme. It was recommended that for the effective implementation of DeL programme, there should be a specified procedure to be included before technology, scheduled plan for online activities that integrate with the face-to-face teaching, and ensure the requirements related to ICT infrastructure and LMS[8].

Similarly, in a study related to establishment of DeL research by using the World Wide Web technology in higher education "how naturalistic inquiry can be implemented in e-learning research had provided guideline for researchers

to initiate this form of qualitative research[9]. The findings of this study indicated that majority of the students believed that their results would be improve due to use of distance education technology in their regular classes.

In addition, DeL programme was also initiated for overcoming the shortage of qualified academics in the higher learning institutions; so, the Kenyan governments had implemented ICT in education system and implemented e-learning in a national setting to produce more qualified teachers. It was indicated that although it was a complex process involving introduction of new technology, resistance by users and arrangement of ICT equipments, it has helped them to produce sufficient human resources to overcome the deficit human resources. The findings were beneficial to institutions of higher learning for upgrading the competencies among the learners even in developing countries[10].

Similarly, in a study conducted in Canada[11] to improve the quality, consistency, and portability of academicians through the introduction of Pan-Canadian standards for helping employed academics to increase the professionalism of their workforce revealed that compared to a conventional course, the learners were enthusiastic in a flexible modular program, indicating DeL would be an important option in enhancing additional competencies among the human resources.

In order to train the existing academicians in qualitative research approach a DeL programme would be the best option, as DeL is effective in promoting human resources training[12]. Almost congruent report was highlighted by a study conducted in Ghana, the findings revealed that the respondents were enthusiastic to learn this naturalistic inquiry via distance education particularly by using flexible modular, and they also recommended providing special considerations for focusing on specific ranges of competencies[13].

It has been reported that the institutions of higher learning in developing countries have lagged behind those in the developed world in distance education, due to high coat and poor Internet infrastructure. Initiation of distance education in such institutions is often complex involving introduction of new technology, resistance by users and alignment issues. Most distance education research in developed countries is on continuity, which is not the case in developing countries[5]. In a this study, when the nursing academicians were asked regarding acquaintances related to ICT technology, majority of them had basic knowledge; however, they were in favor of acquiring advance skills in handling ICT equipments, as it was reported that without well established ICT, DeL cannot be initiated effectively.

Moreover, it is also revealed that both the campus administrators as well as nursing academicians were interested in initiating this DeL project in their respective nursing campuses. They were positive to provide their existing ICT facilities and releasing their academicians during pretesting as well as for data collection; it would be the fact that there is great need of human resources who are equipped with competencies in QLRA. In reality, there is paucity of experienced faculties in QLRA among the employed staff, but on the other hand there is increasing use of QLRA in post graduate levels. In such context, developing competencies in conducting QLR among the existing academicians would be the best option via distance education; hence both the employers as we as employee are interested to take part in this study.

Conclusion

Based on the above findings of this study, it can be concluded that the campus administrators are eager to collaborate in this distance education programme and they are ready to cooperate during the implementation of this programme. All the administrators as well as academicians are ready to take part in this programme to develop competencies in conducting qualitative research approach via distance e-learning. Hence, it would be a cost effective programme to produce competent human resources in conducting qualitative research approach via distance education. However, there should be some continuous support from the administrators on to keep update the computers and Internet facilities for the academicians and they should be helped to develop advance skills in computer programming for the effective implementation of this programme.

Conflict of interest: None declared.

Acknowledgment

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