Distance Learning Retention

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[Course/Number]

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The Faculty's Role in Increasing Distance Learning Retention

Introduction

`   Distance education contributes significantly to nursing education as it provides an opportunity for nurses to combine family and work responsibilities in their pursuit of continuous professional development. With more capabilities and features introduced by technology, faculties are experiencing more enrollment rates. However, the potential of this model of education is hindered by poor retention rates and high dropout rates after a few weeks of enrollment. Allen & Seaman (2015) note that an online class as a 10% to 20% higher failed retention rate than traditional courses. Apart from social, technological, and motivational issues of the learner, the faculty's perspective has also been identified in the literature to be a determinant of the retention rates. Hence, the faculty should establish long-term strategies that maximum engagement, interaction, and motivation.

As a faculty, it is imperative to understand that distance education is a combination of distance teaching and distance learning. Gaytan (2015) posits that distance teaching entails the instructor's role in imparting knowledge and distance learning is the student's role in the learning process. The faculty has the mandate of facilitating distance teaching by developing new content, providing mechanisms for interactions and increasing the volume of communication. On the other hand, the faculty has to create an environment that supports student learning. These roles have to be supplemented with additional material that increases motivation and drives learners to take part in their classes even after a long and tiresome day in the ER.

The faculty is in the best position to address the high failed retention rate. This involves a multifaceted approach that aligns the support of the faculty and student support. Faculty support entails both the technical orientation of the students and instructors with the aim of increasing the

volume of communication and engagement (van Rooij & Zirkle, 2016). Isolation is one of the core causes of poor student retention as many students do not or cannot reach instructors for assistance with coursework and also cannot interact with other students. Having an orientation program will ensure that students are aware of the avenues to use to communicate with instructors. This will significantly increase the volume of communication which in turn assures participation, accountability, and better interactions.

Distance education modules are defined at the faculty level and implemented and taught by faculty members. The first step towards reducing the retention rates to push for faculty development and training. Gazza & Hunker, (2014) note that core training areas should include student-faculty interaction, follow up, the use of different media in course content, the provision of timely and constructive feedback on assignments, as well as guidance and counseling. Training and capacity building the instructor will be the first step towards ensuring the student find an audience and feels accountable to an instructor. The instructor should be encouraged to communicate with the student regularly. The instructor can define the volume of communication, and through this, they can support more engagement.

Technology often has a challenging aspect or procedure that may cripple a day's activity especially if the user is not well versed. To minimize the instances where distance learning does not occur due to technical failures, each faculty should have ongoing technical support with the mandate of ensuring systems are functional at all times (Jeffreys, 2015). Downtimes, communication challenges, and fewer engagement rates thereby reducing the retention rates substantially. Ongoing technical support should also gear towards increasing reliability, convenience, and assuring access at all times. Accessibility and availability make the system easy to use which in turn increases participation and engagement of the student.

Student support is a critical and comprehensive approach that impacts the learning environment of the learner. The faculty has to understand the learning needs of students and use appropriate teaching methods, provide services such as library and assessments and ensure adequate and informative supervision. The faculty should ensure instructors use webinars, videos, audio, recordings, email, and textbooks in distance teaching as a variety of teaching tools will ensure that students are well informed, and their needs are met. In addition to the classroom experience, having live webinars and other interactive teaching approaches can help reduce the core challenges that face most students. Among the best practices is the use of weekly videos that focus on the summary of what has been learned that week (Boath et al., 2014). Also, practices such as a having a weekly discussion forum can be useful and lead to better participation in class. Ideally, student support should ensure that students feel that they are taking part in a class. Continuous communication and discussions with other class members as well as the instructor remove the feelings of isolation.

Further, a traditional class prospers because it creates a community of students with common goals and interactions on a daily basis. Geographical differences rob that experience, and the online platform has completely different rules. Nonetheless, there are many ways to build a community online. This includes the inclusion of purpose-built technologies which encourages the students to take part in educational and non-educational interventions. The use of a discussion forum and peer response is one of the best practices commonly used in the distance education platform to ensure engagement build classroom engagement and provide continuous communication prospers on a daily basis. These practices shift the focus of the challenges of distance learning and bank on the key and additional features of online learning.

Even after taking up these practices, it is essential to plan for dropouts. The faculty has to create an early intervention strategy that quickly acts on the students that are showing signs of dropping out. These signs include missed assignments, failure it visits the class for a specific period of three to five days and lack of participation or engagement in online discussions. The faculty can use data to investigate the habits that precede dropping out. After establishing these strategic markers, the faculty can have an intervention that mitigates the risks of a dropout. This could include sending automated emails to instructors who in turn communicates directly with the student. Inkelaar & Simpson, (2015) speculate that the response could consist of support services and more communication and indulgence in active learning. The earlier a student's action is noticed, the higher the chances of addressing it adequately.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

Distance education has revolutionized education in many ways by removing the geographical barrier to access of knowledge. The integration of distance education with online systems has significantly redesigned the education sector. However, poor retention is one of the significant issues that faculties have to face. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach with the goals of increasing the volume of communication, providing mechanisms that support engagement and interactions and developing an early detection strategy along with appropriate measures that will minimize the risk of dropouts. Even though, learning should be a student affair, having a well-equipped and well-designed class environment intrinsically motivates students to be more engaged and participates thereby reducing dropout rates. Besides, it assures that the product of the distance education is a well-prepared learner competent to handle the challenges present in healthcare.

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