

Learning and Assessment in COVID- ERA in Al-Azhar

Faculty of Medicine

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Since the outbreak of novel Corona virus (COVID-19) has been emerged in December 2019, the question in each institution was how to give a lecture or to call student for an exam (test) safely. When WHO announced COVID-19 as a pandemic, all educational institutes had been closed. So, under these circumstances the challenge was how to continue lectures, practical sessions. or assessments without transmission of infection. This article is intended to discuss how an instruction and assessment were moderated in Al-Azhar Faculty of Medicine in the COVID era.

Until the middle of March 2020, medical schools and other teaching institutes were practicing their normal daily life. After that, no face to face learning or assessments as it would carry the possibility of infection. Lectures and tutorials were replaced by online lectures through zoom meeting or telegram. According to the integrated medical program which has been launched in Egypt in September 2018, no oral exam is to be carried out. So, assessment was decided to be written, practical, clinical, project and questionnaires or other forms tests.

In May 2020, Al-Azhar University, had decided to replace the traditional (mass gathering) exams (tests) in the first three years by online tests. Nevertheless, other Egyptian medical schools asked their students to prepare an essay or what is called a project to cover each course or module.

Different types of written assessments were suggested, e.g. multiple choice questions (MCQs) with or without case scenario, extended matching questions (EMQs), short essay questions (SEQs), etc. Practical tests were carried out in the form of figures, diagrams for specimens, organs, etc.,. Google drive was used because it has a lot of facilities. The examiner could formulate the test sheet with multiple sections. The first section of this form “examiner form “ was left blank for basic student information. Questions could be uploaded in the following sections and circle(s) or a space were left for his/her answer, and this was called the “student form”. The examiner could upload question by question with the correct answer in such a way which could not be recognized by the student. The student could add his basic information including, name, seat number, identity number, e-mail etc., in the first section of his/her test. A link was to be sent to the students to download at the time of the assessment. The coordinator of each module had an access or special link to his test. He/she could add, delete or modify before publishing the exam. He may also invite an assistant or other colleague to share by sending

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him/her a special link. This form has been supported by a software to recognize the correct answers and to evaluate the test results.

As regards to the final years exams (tests), they were postponed till Covid-19 pandemic started to decline. So, in July, 2020, final 4th, 5th and 6th years exams were carried out according to the instruction of the Ministry of Health and Population and guided by the instructions of the Al-Azhar University Principal. Temperature was measured for each student, who was asked to wear a medical or cloth mask. Examination halls was cleaned and disinfected and physical distance was applied. A decision has been taken to moderate clinical exam (test), either face to face, online or both according the availability of patients or models.

In September 2020, postgraduate written exams (tests) were carried out, and in October 2020, oral and practical (laboratory-based) tests were carried out with the above mentioned precautions.

Because of the present situation, no program (or course or module) evaluation was carried out for the academic year 2019/2020 until now. When this happen, this will help teachers to monitor and evaluate learning progress over time. Surveys, questionnaires or peer assessments would also be filled in as a part of evaluation of the whole program.

In September 2020, several meetings were headed by the Vice Dean for Education and the medical integrated program committee to discuss the action plan for the new academic year 2020/2021, and to evaluate learning and assessment in Covid-era as there is a possibility of a second wave.

Different training courses were carried out to train our staff on how to prepare and upload a teaching course or exam. Different programs, as Microsoft team, courser, formative, etc, were used. Currently, more staff need to be trained on these tools of learning or assessments. Since the lockdown in April 2020, most of our staff helped by the Technology Center in Our University and their experienced colleagues have started to learn the skills of online learning and assessment. Modules coordinators were asked to prepare a question's (items) bank through a grant from the Ministry of Communications. Three or more workshops to recruit representatives from the four faculties of medicine in Al-Azhar University. Websites, emails, links etc., should be secured as we will continue with hybrid learning and with the great possibility of online tests.

We are now near the beginning of the new academic year 2020/2021. As threat of transmission of Covid-19 is still in process, learning and assessment will be a hybrid one (face to face and online). These mean that some lectures and tutorials will be online through Microsoft or zoom meeting with voice and power point presentation, either live or recorded. Problem based-problem (PBL) and practical or clinical sessions is expected to be face to face, if no threat happen.

Students should be trained for this type of learning. Actually, in Al-Azhar Faculty of Medicine, an online formative tests were carried out from the early beginning in 2018/2019 with different

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modules, and the students were happy and cooperative. So, when we started to use it in summative one, most students did not resist the idea. Faculty development is in the core of the educational process.

The application of online learning and assessment carry a great challenge for both learners and teachers. Since face to face sessions will not be held in many times, immediate feedback will be missed. Some students will loose their interest or attention. There is a possibility of not attending online courses. Sheeting may happen in some tests if they are doing outside the medical school without supervision. These and some other problems need to activate the role of academic advisor to follow up students and their improvement. Also, tests should be directed more to higher cognitive skills, and it is better to be held in examination halls with infection control precautions. Other types of assessments as e-portfolio can be prepared by each student and uploaded through the official website of the institution. Portfolio can allow learners to display their individual learning activities through the whole academic year.

In conclusion, recent technology using an official website is the hope to partially replace face to face learning and mass group assessments. Question's (items) bank is now in progress to solve many problems in the validity and reliability of test items. How portfolios are actually used or not in medical schools, and whether they can produce the desired educational results, this will likely determine how they are perceived. Online learning and assessment are now a wise solution to overcome possible transmission of infections with communicable diseases such as Corona virus infection.

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