

Evaluating Emergency Remote Learning in Physiotherapy Education in Sri Lanka: Preparing for a Technologically Advanced Future

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The evolution of technology has significantly transformed education, with online learning becoming increasingly prevalent. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift, prompting educators to adopt emergency remote learning (ERL) methods integrating technology. This study evaluated the ERL strategies employed by the State Universities offering Physiotherapy degrees in Sri Lanka, aiming to discern better practices and explore student perceptions of this paradigm shift. A descriptive cross-sectional survey, utilizing a pre-tested online questionnaire, was conducted. The study included participants from all three State Universities, utilizing total population sampling of the 3rd and fourth-year undergraduates. The three institutions were designated as 'A', 'B', and 'C'. The data was collected during 2022, post-pandemic period. A total of 112 responses were received, with 40 responses each from institutions A and C, and the remaining 32 responses from institution B, resulting in a response rate of 67%. Results showed significant inter-institutional disparities ($P < 0.05$) in online content delivery and assessment practices. The online content delivery included the provision of lecture notes ($P < 0.001$), recordings ($P < 0.001$), and video materials ($P = 0.002$). Notably, Institution A prioritized content dissemination, while Institution B emphasized student-centered activities. Conversely, Institution C experimented frequent online assessments comparatively. Across all three institutions, lecture note provision was the commonest practice, whereas online assessments were scarcely implemented. However, despite all these variations, students exhibited preference for traditional face-to-face instruction over online delivery for both theoretical (67%) and practical (98.2%) aspects of physiotherapy. Further, the students' overall experience suggested a greater satisfaction with traditional in-person delivery compared to online methods. The study revealed significant differences in the ERL strategies among the three State Universities, indicating substantial opportunities for each institution to enhance its approaches. Nonetheless, addressing negative perceptions of online education warrants further qualitative exploration to optimize the integration of evolving technologies in future educational endeavors in physiotherapy, in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Online Education, Emergency Remote Learning (ERL), Physiotherapy Education, Student Perception