OPEN PEER REVIEW

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Peer Review Report for "Designing a Conceptual Pattern of E-Learning for Iran's Universities of Medical Sciences"

Author(s): Roghayeh Sajedi, Abbas Khorshidi, Fatemeh Hamidifar, Hamid Moghaddasi, Amir Hossain Mahmoodi

Review Timeline:

Submit Date: 14 Jul 2020
Revised Date: 9 Nov 2020
Accepted Date: 5 Dec 2020

Revision (0)

Here, you can see the **Reviewers**, **Associate Editors** and **EICs'** comments from the beginning to the end of the revision process.

REFEREE: Reviewer | Revision (0) — 12 Aug 2020

Dear AE,
Comments for the authors:
1. Please add a comment about ethics review approval. Also in limitation section you could add the standard comments for a phenomenologic study such as trustworthiness, truth-value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality.
2. The authors must describe qualitative approach (eg. Ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology), sampling strategies, and inclusion criteria.
3. The authors do not use abbreviations.
4. Describe the advantages of using qualitative methodology.
5. Describe type of interview; semi-structured or non-structured and why.
Thanks.

Ali Mohammadi: Reviewer | Revision (0) — 14 Aug 2020

Dear AE,
The manuscript is a main and important aspect of health.
So, some comments are suggested for the authors:

1- How many face to face interviews were made?
2- How many interviews?
3- Create an Ethics considerations section. the authors must include approval by appropriate consent, and other confidentiality and data security issues.
4- Shorten the suggestions.
4- Number and relevant characteristics of participants included in the study. the authors should consider include table.
Thanks.

Nasrollah Sohrabi: Associate Editor | **Revision (0)** 20 Sep 2020

Dear EIC
The reviewer(s) have recommended publication, but also suggest some minor revisions to the manuscript. Therefore, I invite the author to respond to the reviewer(s)' comments and revise his manuscript.
Kind regards,

Nasrollah Sohrabi: EIC | **Revision (0)** 20 Sep 2020

Dear Author,
Your article is reviewed by the reviewers carefully. According to their comments, this document needs minor revision. Please follow their comments as requested.
Thanks.

OPEN PEER REVIEW

Revision (1)

Reply to Reviewers

Ideally, the reviewing process can significantly improve the submitted manuscripts by allowing the authors to take into account the advice of reviewers. Author(s) must reply to all reviewers' comments in a separate Word file, point by point. A "**Reply to Reviewers**" document is submitted along with revised manuscript during submission of revised files, summarizing the changes that the authors made in response to the reviewers' comments. The responses to reviewers' comments specifies how the authors addressed each comment the reviewers made.

You can read the authors' responses to the reviewers' comments in the next page.

Reply to Reviewers' Comments

Reviewer 1:
Q1: How many face to face interviews were made?
R1: It mentioned in page:4, lines:17-18

Data gathering process consisted of deep, semi-structured, private, and face-to-face interviews at the faculties and research and educational centers at different occasions. After 30 face to face interviews, saturation was achieved.

Q2: How many interviews?
R2: It mentioned in page:1, line:16

Methods: This study was applied in terms of objective and qualitative in terms of data collection. The population of the study was the e-learning experts and faculty members of universities who sampled purposefully, after 30 interviews, saturation was achieved. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to interview. The qualitative data was analyzed using three- stage codings.

Q3: Create an Ethics considerations section. The authors must include approval by an appropriate consent, and other confidentiality and data security issues.
R3: It mentioned in page:4,lines:4-8
Ethical concerns observed in the study were making the require arrangements before entering the research environment, briefing the participants about the objectives and method of interviews, ensuring the participants about confidentiality of their personal information like their identity, securing their informed consent for participation and voice recording the interviews, and reminding their right to leave the study at whatever stage.

Q4: Shorten the suggestions.
R4: It mentioned in page:11, lines:4-19

Suggestions
Based on the results of this study, the following solutions and suggestions are proposed for policy-making and measures aiming to strengthen and develop e-learning in higher medical education:
The pattern proposed in this study can be used as a basis for the identification of e-learning needs of universities, and serve as a foundation for the development of virtualization programs and activities.
It is suggested that a committee be established for expanding e-learning, comprising higher education management, educational management, educational technology, and medical education experts, as well as administrative institutions (representatives of state-run/private electronic higher education institutes, representatives of universities holding e-learning courses, and representatives of the e-learning association)
It is suggested that facilities be provided for low-income families to continue their education in e-learning universities.
It is suggested that interactions occur among Ministry of Health and Medical Education, Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology, Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, Ministry

of Education, and private sector activists for designing a strategic plan for developing e-learning economy in Iran.
It is suggested that the pattern and its appendixes be presented to Ministry of Health and Medical Education for assessment and pilot implementation.

Q5: Number and relevant characteristics of participants included in the study. The authors should consider include table.
R5: It mentioned in page:4, line:16, Table 2
30 participants were selected on the basis of theoretical saturation. In other words, selection of participants continued until no new information was added to the previous information (Table 2).

Table 2. Demographics of the participants

Variable	Level	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	23(76)
	Female	7(24)
Academic rank	Professor	8(26)
	Associate prof.	13(43)
	Assistant prof.	9(30)
Specialized field	Educational Technology	8(26)
	Distance Learning	6(20)
	Educational Administration	5(16)
	Medical Education	4 (13)
	E-learning planning in medical sciences	7(23)
Work experience	1 to 10 years	6(20)
	11 to 20 years	13(43)
	More than 20 years	11 (36)

Reviewer 2:
Q1. Please add a comment about ethics review approval. Also in limitation section you could add the standard comments for a phenomenologic study such as trustworthiness, truth-value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality.
R1: It mentioned in page:10, lines:35-39

Limitation Section
However, the study was not free of limitations as some of the participants had concerns about voice recording the interviews. To solve their concerns, they were informed about the objectives and necessity of the study and that the recorded content will be used only for research purposes and remain confidential. In addition, the authors ensured the participants that their identity will not be divulged to any institute or organization.

Also it mentioned in page:11, lines:24-26

Ethical Approval

This study was drawn from a research project (No.IR.IAU.TMU.REC.1399.129) approved by Tehran Islamic Azad University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.

Q2. The authors must describe qualitative approach (eg. Ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology), sampling strategies, and inclusion criteria.
R2: It mentioned in page:3, lines:8-16 & page:4, lines:4-11

The study was carried out as a qualitative grounded theory study. In grounded theory, a set of ideas (the "theory") is generated from the concepts and constructs retrieved from the coding stages. However, the theory remains grounded in the data, and is obtained from analysis of the codes and "memos" noted during the coding process, which come together to create an overall theory explaining the phenomenon under investigation (12).
The study population included university experts and faculty members in the field of educational technology, distance learning and medical education.
30 participants were selected on the basis of theoretical saturation. In other words, selection of participants continued until no new information was added to the previous information (Table 2).
Ethical concerns observed in the study were making the require arrangements before entering the research environment, briefing the participants about the objectives and method of interviews, ensuring the participants about confidentiality of their personal information like their identity, securing their informed consent for participation and voice recording the interviews, and reminding their right to leave the study at whatever stage.
Totally, 30 participants took part in the study. The interviews took between 35 and 60 minutes and the time and place of interviews were selected to the convenience of the participants mostly in the universities.

Q3. The authors do not use abbreviations.
R3: It mentioned in page:2, lines:25-26

Meanwhile, the Educational Transformation and Innovation Project proposed 12 education transformation packages based on the large-scale policies and orientations of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MoHME).

Q4. Describe the advantages of using qualitative methodology.
R4: It mentioned in page:3, lines:8-12
The study was carried out as a qualitative grounded theory study. In grounded theory, a set of ideas (the "theory") is generated from the concepts and constructs retrieved from the coding stages. However, the theory remains grounded in the data, and is obtained from analysis of the codes and "memos" noted during the coding process, which come together to create an overall theory explaining the phenomenon under investigation (12).

Q5: Describe type of interview; semi-structured or non-structured and why.
R5: It mentioned in page:4, lines:12-27 & page:5, lines: 1-17

Data gathering process consisted of deep, semi-structured, private, and face-to-face interviews at the faculties and research and educational centers at different occasions. After 30 face to face interviews, saturation was achieved.

The systematic approach of Strauss and Corbin (1998) was conducted in three stages of open, axial and selective coding (13).

So that after completion of the first interview, it was transcribed verbatim as soon as possible and the analyzing process was continued along with the interviews. The findings of data analyses would constitute the basis for the following interviews and this process was continued until the last interview. Three coding stages including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were performed. The open coding stage was in fact a microscopic data analysis process where all possible meanings were extracted. The interview's texts were reviewed several times at this stage and the research team concentrated on developing concepts based on the data. The axial coding stage used the codes and categories obtained throughout the open coding and similar categories were combined based on common axes. The codes were continuously compared at this stage and then each category was compared with other categories to make sure that the categories are distinguishable. Afterwards and based on selective coding the dimensions, categories and indicators of e - learning for universities of medical sciences were identified.

The validity and reliability of the data were achieved through Lincoln and Guba criteria (14). As to credibility of the data, the author had a prolonged engagement with the participants to win their trust and have a better perception of their experiences. In addition, the coding and analyses results were forwarded to some of the participants to check if the results reflect their opinions and viewpoints (member check). Moreover, a widest diversity in the participants added to the authenticity of the data. Confirmability was ensured through observing neutrality; asking experts in e-learning and qualitative research to check the codes and themes; and reviewing the interviews texts, codes, and categories through peer check. To ensure stability of the findings, the interviews were transcribed as soon as possible and experts were asked to check the data (external check). Transferability was ensured by selecting diverse participants and using direct quotes (14).

OPEN PEER REVIEW

Revision (1)

Here, you can see the **Reviewers**, **Associate Editors** and **EICs'** comments from the beginning to the end of the revision process.

REFEREE: Reviewer | **Revision** (1) — 1 Dec 2020

Dear AE,
The study is reviewed carefully. According to comments and revisions by the author, this manuscript is accepted.
Thanks

REFEREE: Reviewer | **Revision** (1) — 1 Dec 2020

Dear AE,
The study is reviewed carefully. According to comments and revisions by the author, this manuscript is accepted.
Thanks

Mohammad Hossein Pourasad: Associate Editor | **Revision** (1) — 5 Dec 2020

Dear EIC
Based on the authors' answers to the reviewers' comments, the reviewer(s) have recommended publication.
Kind regards.

REFEREE: EIC | **Revision** (1) — 5 Dec 2020

Dear Author,
The document is reviewed carefully by the reviewers. According to their comments and your revisions as requested, this manuscript is accepted.
Thanks.