

research snapshot

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Distance Education Provides a Positive Learning Experience

What is this research about?

Prior to getting a license in Canada, many internationally educated health professionals (IEHPs) have to complete health-related college or university bridging courses. The goal of these courses is to ensure that health practice in Canada is up-to-date, competent, and safe. IEHPs often complete their courses through distance education. This type of education replaces face-to-face contact between the student and the professor with online correspondence. It offers flexible scheduling for adult learners and also improves access to a mix of learning resources. However, it is unclear if current health-related university courses accommodate the needs of IEHPs.

What did the researcher do?

Lillie Lum, an Associate Professor at York University, looked at the learning experiences of IEHPs in distance education courses. Professor Lum gathered information from students at Ryerson University, using surveys, questionnaires, and focus groups.

She also interviewed professors to gain insight into the barriers that IEHPs face and how they

What you need to know:

Distance education is an effective way to provide professional bridging education for IEHPs. Some barriers to learning, however, do exist.

can be eliminated. Her goal was to speak for those who have little political say.

What did the researcher find?

Professor Lum found that IEHP students view distance education as a positive learning experience. The key elements that make this experience so positive are:

- Easy access to computer equipment
- Computer literacy training and financial resources
- Effective course design

In order for courses to work, they must have clear expectations. They must also identify the ways to achieve these expectations. Professor Lum found that ideal learning depends on the

teacher having some expertise in course design. Interaction between the teacher and the student is also important. However, a student's language proficiency, qualifications, and country of origin did not have an impact on their preference for distance learning.

Some barriers do exist for IEHP students. These include inconsistent school policies and methods for identifying students who are having trouble in the educational system. There is also unequal access to resources, feedback, and support services.

How can you use this research?

This research will help both policy-makers and educators to tap into the skills of IEHPs. IEHPs can potentially fill the healthcare worker shortage in Canada. However, although IEHPs have had positive experiences with distance learning, the overall success rate continues to be a setback for skilled immigrants. Institutions need to make changes to allow for equal access to Canadian healthcare licenses for IEHPs. And educators must be attentive to ensure that technology enhances learning and does not further isolate students. In terms of future research, studies of larger samples over a longer period of time would be beneficial. This would ensure more unbiased and specific results.

About the Researcher

Lillie Lum is Associate Professor in the School of Nursing at York University, and cross-appointed to the School of Health Policy and Management.

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Knowledge Mobilization at York

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