Chapter 7
Building Community and Engagement in Online Nursing Education:
Strategies and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

In the digital era, online nursing education offers unprecedented opportunities for flexible learning, yet fostering a sense of community and engagement remains a challenge. This chapter explores the strategies to build robust communities in online nursing programs, focusing on creating emotional connections, active participation, and collaborative learning. Emotional Intelligence (EI) is emphasised as a crucial skill for both educators and students in fostering a supportive online environment. The integration of essential nursing topics such as chronic and acute conditions, into the online curriculum presents unique pedagogical opportunities and challenges. The chapter also examines the role of online education in advancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to health and well-being. Finally, it highlights best practices in online teaching that support the development of emotional resilience, holistic care approaches, and interdisciplinary collaboration, all while preparing nursing professionals for the complexities of modern healthcare.

INTRODUCTION

The transition from traditional in-person nursing education to online platforms has been a complex and multifaceted process, particularly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This shift has presented both significant challenges and opportunities for educators and learners alike (Reis da Silva and Mitchell, 2024a). As nursing programs adapt to digital environments, the importance of fostering a sense of community and engagement among students cannot be overstated (Reis da Silva and Mitchell, 2024a). This chapter explores the theoretical and practical aspects of building community in online nursing education, drawing from current research, teaching methodologies, and best practices to address the specific needs of nursing students and educators in this evolving educational landscape.

One of the primary challenges faced by nursing educators during the transition to online learning has been maintaining student motivation and engagement (Reis da Silva and Mitchell, 2024a). The concept of "emergency remote education" emerged as a response to the abrupt shift from traditional methods to online plat-forms, highlighting the necessity for educators to adapt quickly to new teaching modalities while still delivering quality education (İnangil et al., 2022). Research indicates that the effectiveness of online education can be significantly enhanced through innovative teaching strategies such as gamification and animation, which have been shown to improve student engagement and learning outcomes (İnangil et al., 2022). Furthermore, the integration of collaborative tools and communication platforms is essential for creating an interactive learning environment that fosters a sense of community among nursing students (Kosteniuk et al., 2019).

The unique nature of nursing education, which traditionally relies heavily on hands-on practice and clinical experience, poses additional challenges in an online format. The shift to online learning has necessitated the development of alternative methods to deliver practical skills training effectively (Reis da Silva and Mitchell, 2024a). Studies have shown that online simulations and virtual clinical experiences can provide valuable opportunities for nursing students to practice their skills in a safe and controlled environment (Kim, 2024). For instance, the use of standardised patient simulations in online modules has been found to enhance learning outcomes for nursing students, particularly in complex clinical scenarios such as heart failure management (Silva et al., 2021). These innovative approaches not only help bridge the gap created by the lack of in-person clinical experiences but also promote collaboration and peer learning among students (Xing et al., 2018).

Moreover, the psychological impact of the transition to online learning cannot be overlooked. Research has indicated that nursing students experience heightened levels of stress and anxiety during this period, which can adversely affect their academic performance and overall well-being (Çelik et al., 2022). It is crucial for educators

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