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Virtual Learning Intervention on Therapeutic Diets: Comparing Mexican and American Systems

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Abstract

This study describes an educational intervention using virtual learning environments and digital collaborative tools to teach therapeutic diets in the Mexican and American systems to 35 Mexican dental surgery students in higher education. The intervention had two aims: to evaluate digital literacy and develop second language communication skills, while integrating diet competencies into the "Food, nutrition and society" course. Students were given synchronous online sessions on therapeutic diets used in Mexico and USA, delivered in English in videoconference. They were also provided with a manual on US hospital diets. Working collaboratively online from home, students created videos demonstrating different mealtimes for assigned therapeutic diets, identifying appropriate foods, describing portions, and tasting the meals - all in English. The videos were shared among peers, allowing students to visualize their collective effort for acquiring professional competence in new therapeutic diets used in both countries, while integrating English as a second language into the curriculum content. A digital literacy diagnostic test was used to assess students' technological skills and English comprehension. Results showed improvements in digital competencies and English communication abilities among the dental students compared to a nursing student control group. The intervention successfully integrated language learning with subject content, while developing students' collaborative and digital skills in a virtual environment necessitated by the rapid transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Teaching through English in Higher Education (Tehe); Therapeutic Hospital Diets; Rapid Transition to Online Learning (Rtol); Collaborative Work Online; Digital Literacy