

Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Learning Counseling Practice

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ABSTRACT

The School of Medicine offers study counseling. In particular, the School of Medicine has many required courses, and it is important to respond to students with learning difficulties. It is necessary to discuss a new approach to learning counseling for such students, considering the prevention of COVID-19 infection, but online learning counseling has not been discussed so far. In the future, flexible selection and response based on an understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of online learning counseling will be required. To overcome this challenge, this paper examines the practice of online learning counseling at the University's School of Medicine in the Corona Disaster. The practice could be characterized by seven advantages [behavioral understanding, physical condition consideration, continuity, confidentiality, sharing, immediacy, and convenience] and two challenges [grasping reactions and interruptions]. Subsequently, it was presented new possibilities for online learning counseling by examining the content related to learning.

Key words advantage and disadvantage; online learning counseling; school of medicine; students with learning difficulties

Among medical schools, the retention rate of medical students tends to be higher than that of other faculties because of the large number of required courses.¹ Therefore, it is important to deal with students with learning problems.² Since all students meet the admission policy and academic passing scores at the time of admission, the impact of students who have not mastered learning methods or are unable to concentrate on their studies after admission³ is likely to be significant. Along with the importance of the learning link from high school to university,⁴ it is important to build on learning support from the early grades, and it is expected that individual learning styles will be formed by examining learning methods⁵ and university-wide efforts that can support these learning styles.⁶ However,

until now, most counseling for student support has focused on psychological aspects and developmental disorders, and little attention has been paid to the learning methods of medical students, many of whom remain in school.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, learning counseling at our medical school has switched to real-time online interviews to prevent infection and has been ongoing. Although relevant previous studies have examined fictitious cases of medical students from the three perspectives of discrepancy between cognitive characteristics and learning strategies, depression, and localized learning disabilities to support academically students with learning difficulties,⁶ Furthermore, there are no studies on online learning counseling in the Corona disaster. In the future, it is necessary to examine the possibility of online learning counseling in order to provide learning support to students independent of the corona epidemic. Therefore, this paper aims to present the characteristics of online learning counseling as a practical report and to suggest support for students with learning difficulties. Specifically, the advantages and disadvantages of online learning counseling are presented and discussed to provide clues for discussing the future of online learning counseling.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The School of Medicine offers study counseling for students with learning difficulties. The subjects were students with learning difficulties, such as those who have not passed their grade or did not know the best study strategy or exam preparation for themselves, and those who were referred by their class instructors, tutor instructors, Academic Affairs Division, Student Support Center, or Health Service Center. Online learning counseling was conducted as the method to prevent infectious diseases.

Regarding the examination of learners' learning methods, learning strategies based on cognitive psychology have proven to be useful for effective learning.⁷ In this learning counseling, based on cognitive psychology, the following steps also were implemented: 1. questioning values and beliefs about learning and forming a new view of learning, 2. setting learning goals to be achieved, 3. developing a personalized learning plan to achieve the goals, 4. examining new learning plans

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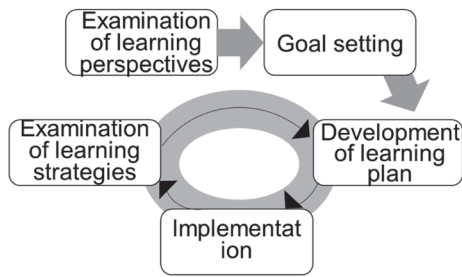


Fig. 1. Flow of Learning Counseling.

and learning methods. Then, 5. the implementation was evaluated, and 6. future learning plans and methods were discussed with the individual (Fig. 1).⁸

The author reviewed the online learning counseling sessions that have been conducted for students with learning difficulties one by one, and extracted the contents that were characteristic of the online sessions. If several different contents were obtained for a single case, they were classified as separate items. Then, referring to the procedure of the KJ method (Kawakita, 1967),⁹ the author named and organized each of the similar contents obtained as one group. As a result, seven advantages and two disadvantages were found. Learning counseling was provided by the licensed psychologist/clinical psychologist with the degree in education (the author).

RESULTS

The following are characteristics of online learning counseling that can be stated because it was conducted at this medical school (Table 1). Seven advantages are listed: behavioral understanding, physical condition consideration, continuity, confidentiality, sharing, immediacy, and convenience. Behavioral understanding: With a little time, one can see the student’s behavior differently than in the interview room, such as making tea. Consideration for physical condition: Although there was no fever, counseling was possible even when the student was absent, taking into consideration coronas such as a cough. Continuity: Counseling was possible even when students were on long vacations, returning home, or in other situations that made it difficult for them to come to the university. Confidentiality: No one could see the students when they entered the counseling room. Sharing: Reference books and materials were displayed on the screen, and the results of mock exams could be shared and checked in detail on the screen. Immediacy: I could look up materials and reference books at home on the spot, and send URLs of books and websites for reference on the spot. Convenience: It is easy to take notes with each other and save the contents of explanations on the whiteboard as data.

On the other hand, several disadvantages were observed (Table 1). Grasping reactions: difficult to read facial expressions through the screen, difficult to convey the mood, difficult to grasp stuttering, pauses, etc., and difficult to notice that they are concerned about time. Interruptions: Since the student is at home, interruptions

Table 1. Features of online learning counseling

Benefits	Main items	Item	Contents
Advantages	Behavior	Behavioral understanding	Can see how students behave at home
	Physical condition	Consideration of physical condition	Even if students do not have a fever but has a runny nose, the student can still be interviewed if he/she wishes to do so
	confidentiality	confidentiality	No other students can see them enter the counseling room
	Learning	Continuity	Continuing to meet with students even during long vacations or when it is difficult for them to come to the university
	Learning	Shareability	Resumes and reference books can be projected on the screen, and the results of mock examinations can be shared on the screen for review
	Learning	Immediacy	Students can look up reference books and other materials at home, and send reference URLs and other materials on the spot
	Learning	Convenience	Images and files that have been reviewed and written can be saved as they are as date
Disadvantages	Reaction	Responsiveness	Difficult to see facial expressions and notice when students are distracted
	Interruption	Everyday events	Interruptions due to line, notification, or courier service from home, or visits by other people

occur on a daily basis, such as notifications from the smartphone, phone calls at home, and sometimes friends or parents coming to the room. However, no problems were found in the cognitive psychology step which is the core of learning counseling.

DISCUSSION

Online learning counseling for students with learning difficulties, as described in this paper, is an important option for the future in terms of infection prevention. Better usage will need to be discussed after sorting out the practical benefits and challenges. In the following, of the seven aforementioned advantages of behavioral understanding, physical condition consideration, continuity, confidentiality, sharing, immediacy, and convenience, continuity, sharing, immediacy, and convenience as they relate to learning are discussed.

Since learning support is important to build up from the early grades,⁶ continuity is important to implement learning methods suited to each student in learning counseling. In this study counseling, The author and the students were able to review the results of mock examinations together on a shared screen (sharing) and discuss specific study methods. It was also possible to look up materials, reference books, websites, etc. at home on the spot, send information to each other (immediacy), and save data that had been checked and written (convenience).

Although many students with learning difficulties may aim to spend more time when reviewing their studies, setting clear goals with motivation, specific study plans, execution, and subsequent review of study methods can provide an opportunity to review a series of learning processes with metacognition¹⁰ which is higher thinking about thinking.

This is possible through the use of an online system. In this case, functions such as continuity, sharing, immediacy, and convenience made possible by the use of online systems are considered useful for learners.

Despite some challenges, counseling online should be recognized as one of the most important tools for supporting students with learning difficulties and should be used effectively.

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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