

Learning via Reflection: Studying the Covid-19 Pandemic Experiences of First-Year Medical Students

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Abstract

Background: Reflective writing allows for a thorough analysis of something learned or an event had. In medical education, reflective writing is of utmost importance. The Competency-Based Medical Education (CBME) curriculum of the Medical Council of India (MCI)/National Medical Commission (NMC) endorses reflective writing as a learning technique, especially in the emotive domain. Writing reflections is a form of experiential learning, where the experience could be a seminar, conference, natural disaster, or epidemic. Due to the covid-19 outbreak, the Indian government was forced to institute a nationwide lockdown.

Due to pandemics and the uncertainties surrounding the reopening of medical institutions, the return of onsite teaching activities, and the administration of exams, the medical students are experiencing a difficult time. As part of their schooling, the kids were encouraged to express their experiences by writing thoughts on the present pandemic. The first-year medical students reflected on the COVID-19 pandemic using Rolfe G. et al's(2001) three parts reflective approach, which comprises of three simple questions: what happened, so what, and what's next? This article is an attempt to summarize their thoughts.

Aims and Objectives: Learning via reflection: Studying the Covid-19 Pandemic Experiences of First-Year Medical Students

Materials and Methods: To encourage reflective writing among the first-year MBBS and BDS students at the GMC Jammu, they were told to apply Rolfe's reflection model to the COVID-19 pandemic. 200 medical students from the class of 2021-22 were polled for their insights. In order to refresh the students' memories, a quick outline on "how to write reflection" was provided based on Rolfe's reflection. To empower students to freely express themselves, responses were voluntary and anonymous. The responses were collected and submitted in an anonymous way to the authors.

Results: In the present study, students were told to evaluate the situation via the lens of Rolfe's model. Approximately two hundred students took part in the activity. We have merely compiled and provided samples from the reflections of several pupils.

Conclusion: This one-of-a-kind experience of the pandemic and lockdown will linger in the minds of the medical students and us as educators for the remainder of our careers. Some students are hopeful about the future, whilst others fear falling behind on their assignments and contracting the illness.

Keywords: Covid-19, CBME curriculum, Pandemic, Reflective writing

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Introduction

The more modern Competency-Based Medical Education (CBME) curriculum encourages the use of reflective writing for formative evaluation of students.¹ Reflective writing is the discipline of learning from experience and engaging in conversations about the event to improve one's personal judgement. It can be argued that reflecting serves as a stimulant for subsequent growth and paves the way for reflective practise.² The experiences of a person, the reflecting process that enables them to learn from those experiences, and the action ensuing from the new perspective gained via reflection.³ It is feasible to assert that reflective writing is more personal than other forms of academic writing. Due to the exceptional character of the Covid-19 epidemic, the environment of educational institutions has been significantly impacted, resulting in highly unpredictable conditions for professional education, including medical education. The disappearance of in-person classes and their replacement with online lectures has been one of the most substantial changes. Loss of collaborative experiences in demonstration classes and practical sessions is a matter for concern. The accompanying emotional suffering cannot be ignored. In this essay, we have sought to aggregate some of the observations written by first-year MBBS students on this terrifying pandemic.

Aims and Objectives: Learning via reflection: Studying the Covid-19 Pandemic Experiences of First-Year Medical Students.

Materials and Methods

To stimulate reflective writing among GMC Jammu's first-year MBBS and BDS students, they were instructed to apply Rolfe's reflection model to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.⁴ The reflections were gathered from 200 medical students of the class of 2021-22. Although the students are familiar with writing reflections, they were given a brief outline on "how to write reflection" based on Rolfe's reflection in order to refresh their memory. To encourage students to express themselves freely, responses were anonymous and voluntary. The replies were collected and provided to the writers in an anonymous format. After reviewing the responses, it was decided to make them accessible to others.

Therefore, the Institutional Ethics Committee's approval was sought before publishing the data. For the qualitative study, two authors evaluated and thematically analyzed the replies. After extensive talks, the authors achieved a final agreement. The findings were organized according to three themes: what happened, so what, and what next. There are few expressive codes presented in Italics. Students were instructed to reflect using Rolfe's model for reflection (Fig.1). This is a straightforward, beginner-friendly design.

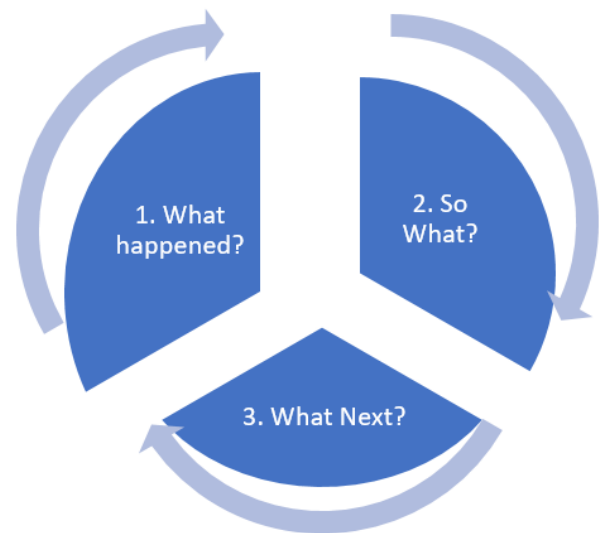


Fig. 1: Rolfe's Model of Reflection, Rolfe 2001

The components of the three steps are given in Table 1.

Table 1: The Rolfe Model's Steps for Reflective Writing

S. No.	Sub-heading of reflection	Event	To do
1.	What happened?	The narrative	Description of events. Set the scene and summarize.
2.	So what?	The learning	Analyzing the event. Ask yourself what it means.
3.	What next?	The change	Following the event, suggested action.

Results and Discussion:

There are a variety of formats for reflective writing. Among others, there are the Gibbs Model of Reflection, the Schon Model of Reflection, the Kolb reflective cycle, and the Borton Model.⁵⁻⁸

The model of Rolfe was derived from the model of Borton. The Borton model was proposed in 1970, but it was improved by Rolfe in 1988 and has since been utilized by both professionals and students. It is thought to be the most effective model for writing reflections.

In the current study, students were instructed to consider the circumstance in light of Rolfe's model. Approximately 200 pupils participated in the activity. We have simply summarized and are giving excerpts from several of the students' reflections.

What Happened?

The reflections of students in this article demonstrated that Covid-19 has the same yet unique appearance for each student. The students, reflecting on the current situation, discussed the commencement of the COVID-19 pandemic, the statewide lockdown, the closure of the medical college, the cessation of onsite teaching activities, and the inception of an online teaching-learning program.

"The word of the Covid-19 epidemic in our nation spread like a forest fire. Everyone was anxious and terrified."

"As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, all colleges, theatres, and shopping malls are closed, and the government of India imposes a lockdown, requiring us to remain at home."

"We were on the college campus when the news of the Covid-19 new strain broke, and the first case was reported in Jammu. In a matter of days, the government decided to impose lockdown, all students were sent home from their hostels, and the college staff and faculty made certain that each and every student reached home safely; they kept in touch with us periodically."

"Normal college lessons were cancelled and students were sent home due to the rapid emergence of the Covid-19 epidemic. A further extension of the lockdown halted all activity across the country."

"Because of the Covid-19 pandemic in India, we were unable to attend our regular college classes, causing us to fall behind in our curriculum."

"We were unable to bring all of our books with us due to the covid-19 pandemic, and it is uncertain when the college will reopen."

"The situation appeared grave, the entire college was evacuated, and we all returned home." Eventually, everything was placed on lockdown. The rising number of Covid patients was truly frightening to observe. There was widespread panic. Doctors have given their all to protect the public."

"We were about to take our terminal 1 exam when a virus known as covid-19 began to spread in India, prompting our return home. I did not have sufficient time to assess the situation and was unaware of when we would be sent home."

"Due to an unexpected emergency, we left the college hostel in a hurry and were unable to bring all of our books and study materials with us because we did not know we would be gone for so many days. As this is the first time that we have stayed in the same enclosed setting day and night for so long, productivity and efficiency have also decreased."

So What?

The students have mostly mentioned the good features of lockdown, such as improving personal cleanliness, following interests and hobbies, training themselves to be future doctors, appreciating the efforts of instructors to give online lessons, etc. Negative analysis included impacted research, the economic downturn, and more.

"The shutdown has afforded folks the opportunity to improve their personal talents and clear accumulated backlogs. The online classes have proven to be a boon for the students, despite the fact that finishing the curriculum has been an inconvenience."

"It has taught us the value of cleanliness and encouraged us to become devoted and helpful physicians."

"It will eventually be a part of the doctor community, therefore I promoted awareness through social media, took precautions, and encouraged those

around me (my family) to do the same. Nonetheless, there are many who do not comprehend the gravity of the situation and who freely walk the outdoors."

"Our online classes have begun, which originally caused some issues, but I believe that everything is currently running smoothly. In this period, numerous individuals revealed their talents. I have been able to devote some time to drawing and painting, something I never would have been able to do otherwise. My life has undergone several similar transformations."

"It is a commendable effort by our college instructors to instruct us online. It was a great experience to learn through online classes as we were able to focus more on the app."

"Despite the pandemic, online classes came as a relief, and we're attempting to learn as much as we can."

"Our research have been adversely affected by this pandemic."

"Our institute offers online lessons, but they are not as effective as college lectures, and I'm having trouble with network issues and a shortage of books."

"Concerns have turned from supply-side manufacturing challenges to diminished business in the services sector as the Covid-19 has spread around the world. More than a third of the world's population at the time was placed on lockdown because to the epidemic, which produced the greatest global recession in history."

What Next?

The pupils think that the pandemic has taught them to overcome obstacles, to live a simple life, to assist those in need, to remain optimistic, and to have faith in the best possible outcome. This is an anxious period for all of us, yet it affects everyone of us in a unique way.

"I've learned that no matter how difficult situations become, we can overcome them together. If necessary, online classes can be performed efficiently. I've learned that we race after the materialistic world and forget that life can be lived simply."

"This lockdown has not been the same for everyone; daily bettors have endured plenty. My

family has assisted local needy individuals by providing them with food and rations. When my nation needs me in times of struggle, I will continue to follow the rules and do what is required."

"After the pandemic has ended, we must remember the importance of hygiene and social manners. Respect the medical practitioners and healthcare professionals. Be proactive in compensating the education losses caused by the lockdown."

"I am really positive about the future, and there is a remedy for worry. The hope that will carry us through these challenging times. By having faith that this virus will pass, listening to medical professionals and authorities, staying indoors, maintaining good hygiene, social distancing, and being mindful and supportive of those profoundly affected physically or emotionally, I am confident that we will emerge stronger than ever."

"In the following days, I hope that everything will be resolved so that we can resume our studies as before." Because online courses cannot substitute for classroom instruction."

"I hope that everything returns to normal so that we may resume our studies as before. Negative experience. As the period of lockdown increases, interest in everything, including schoolwork, decreases."

"After the end of this epidemic, we will continue hygienic procedures and social isolation to prevent a recurrence of this crisis in the future."

"As soon as the current issue is resolved, professors should restart classroom instruction and provide extra time for practical work, where we are falling behind."

"I am currently reviewing previously taught material and reading what is being taught in class. The number of Covid-19 cases will hopefully reduce, India's health care system will be able to deal with the impending crisis, and our college will reopen so that we can return to our usual lives."

Conclusion

This unique experience of the pandemic and lockdown will remain etched in the brains of the

medical students and us as educators for the rest of our lives and professions. Some students are optimistic about the future, while others are fearful of falling behind on their coursework and acquiring the sickness itself. The Covid-19 outbreak is functioning as a spur for the India's medical educators to make significant adjustments to incorporate the new age of learning, as uncertain times require tougher measures. It is quite likely that the epidemic will alter the preferences of educators and students away from traditional classroom learning and toward digital learning. In addition to the curriculum covered in the online lectures, we should encourage our students, who are the future healers, to be resilient and to contribute to society by keeping their family members, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances in a positive frame of mind; by reducing their stress and anxiety through counselling.

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