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Interactive online international exchange program for occupational therapy students during COVID-19 pandemic

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<Introduction> International exchange has been facing challenges since COVID-19 pandemic started. However, to promote international exchange in occupational therapy (OT) field, we need to continue international academic and cultural program even though under the pandemic.

<Purpose> The aim of this report is to examine the effectiveness of interactive online international exchange program and to discuss the usefulness and challenges under travel restriction due to COVID-19

<Method> Tokyo Metropolitan University (TMU, Japan) and Mahidol University (MU, Thailand) arranged 4 months' online exchange program. It consisted of lectures (90min×12times; 10 times interactive live lecture, 2 times on-demand video lecture), report assignments, collaboration research project. Contents of lectures were medical system and OT in each country, OT education etc. Online program was advertised to target participants, and participants had English group interview to check language proficiency by lecturers. The program was arranged by coordinator lecturers from each university. Video application system was used for interactive live lecture, and free cloud service was used for sharing information and materials, establishing original website. As supplemental tools, social network service, cloud platform service was introduced. Participants were encouraged to join all online lectures, and communicate with each other off-class. This is practice report with no needs of ethical consideration, and there is no COI status to be disclosed.

<Results>17 OT students joined (7 from TMU and 10 from MU) the program from 15 June to 15 September 2021. During program schedule, TMU students were in the first semester of 3rd year, and MU students were in the second semester of 2nd year to in the first semester of 3rd year. They were almost the same academic learning progress level excepting clinical placement. All participants joined online lectures, and in the final week, TMU and MU joint students' groups presented 4 research projects. In addition, they had cultural exchange program for mutual understanding off-class. When arranging the program, there were challenges of considering semester schedule in each university, and of that all were non-native English speakers and had online communication, so coordinators needed to concern regular academic calendar and effective communication way.

<Discussion> COVID-19 influences interactive international exchange program, however, we had experienced international collaboration works by online. Even though online program is different from onsite experience and has difficulty to communicate smoothly, students had active communication in academic and personal site, and shared the precious experience. Furthermore, this is economy tool than onsite program, and students can join it during semesters. In OT education, online program can be one of effective and practical measure for international exchange.