

The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Educating Students With Disabilities

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Abstract

The current study aimed to understand the nature of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the education of children with disabilities in Jordan. The study included interviews with 10 people, including parents, teachers, students with disabilities, and owners of service centers for people with disabilities. To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher used the qualitative phenomenological approach. Semi-structured and open-end questions were used in collecting qualitative data. The qualitative results indicated that educating children with disabilities in the COVID-19 pandemic faces challenges, most notably the difficulty of communicating with families, the weak skills of families in educating their children, and the difficulties of teaching practical skills, especially if it was targeted throughout distance education.

Key words: The impact of COVID-19 pandemic; Educating students with disabilities; Jordan

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AN INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a respiratory disease caused by the newly discovered coronavirus, and the virus is mainly spread through several means such as saliva

or nasal secretions (World Health Organization (WHO), 2020; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2020). The results of a study conducted by El-Zraigat and Alshammari (2020) indicated that persons with disabilities need a set of psychological, social, health, personal, recreational and educational services, and these needs reflect that the epidemic has led to restrictions among persons with disabilities, especially in receiving basic services. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused school closures and led to multiple challenges to teaching, educating, and communicating special educators the needs of their students (Smith, 2020). Also noticed many challenges faced people with cases and their families and services. What we have learned during this period regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the service system for people with disabilities should provide a roadmap for building a more robust and resilient system going forward. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many school districts have transitioned from traditional to distance education with little planning time and limited resources (Tremmel, Myers, Brunow, and Hott, 2020). Actually, persons with disabilities go through many transitional periods throughout their lives, and each series of transitional decisions has a direct impact on an individual's quality of life. However, Couper-Kenney and Riddell (2021) assessed the extent to which children's rights were prioritized during the COVID-19 crisis in Scotland and concluded that, particularly in the early days of the lockdown, little consideration was given to the rights of children with ASND as education and suddenly withdraw care services. Problems such as unequal access to information technology, different levels of support and differences in family resources arose. While families also reported some positive experiences, such as enjoying more time together and de-stressing from school. On the other hand, the quality of life for people with disabilities varies according to each individual, according to the nature and severity of his disability. It is also different for families

with disabilities, especially when there are various factors beyond their control (Sparks and Nam, 2021).

Beckmann, and Reyneke (2021) were concerned with problems involving learners with severe disabilities after children returned to special needs schools following the easing of COVID-19 closures. They noted that schools faced new challenges for principals, teachers and parents to protect the right of these and other learners to education and to prevent large-scale disruptions in school activities. Duran (2021) notes that preschoolers all had feelings of anxiety, fear, and longing during this process and wanted to go back to school as soon as possible. Likewise, most teachers were very anxious and teachers attended online classes related to their professional development during the stay-at-home process. The process of distance education was very difficult in pre-school education. The CDC has recommended that direct support specialists (DSPs) take additional steps to protect people with disabilities during COVID-19 and receive training in the use of personal protective equipment and infection prevention. School assessments have become increasingly complex with school psychologists having to dramatically adapt face-to-face assessment procedures and conduct assessments via remote assessment approaches. This poses profound challenges for some families, many of whom are vulnerable (Brunson, Roanhorse, Harris, Heyborne, Zemantic, and Azad, 2021). While the Madaus, Gelbar, Faggella-Luby, and Dukes, and Dukes (2021) study reported that students reported feeling supported by their institutions, faculty, and disability services offices, also noting shifts in accommodation needs, as well as personal, health, and financial interests.

THE PROBLEMS AND IMPORTANCE OF STUDY

With the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic for the second year, the education of students with disabilities in Jordan has been affected, and the educational outcomes of this group of students have also been affected. Despite that, this effect differs between students, their families, and the institutions that provide them with education and rehabilitation services. Hence, the current study seeks to understand the nature of this impact on the education of students with disabilities in Jordan.

The study attempted to answer the following questions:

How has COVID-19 pandemic affected the education of students with disabilities?

How has COVID-19 pandemic affected the service centers?

How has COVID-19 pandemic affected the involvement of families of students with disabilities?

The purpose of the study

The current study aims to understand the nature of the

impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the education of students with disabilities in Jordan.

Study Methodology

To achieve the goal of the study, the researcher used the qualitative phenomenological research method.

Participants

The number of study participants was 10 people who were interviewed.

Data collection

The researcher used open-end questions and semi-structured interviews with the study sample.

Data Verification

To verify the nature of the data collected, the researcher interviewed students, parents, teachers and owners of educational services provision centers for people with disabilities.

THE RESULTS

The researcher collected data through semi-interviews that were limited to specific open-end questions with students, teachers, parents and owners of centers to:

Teacher: COVID-19 pandemic has caused an increase in the educational burden and duties in educating my students with disabilities. So I had to prepare educational materials and tools and use the internet through a special link to communicate with students in their homes. In many cases, communication did not succeed due to Internet problems, which led to difficulties in communication and delivery of educational lessons.

Father: I felt that distance education for my disabled son was not effective. There are duties that I could not help my son with due to my lack of experience and knowledge. I was sad because my son does not benefit well from distance education.

Teacher: I was thinking that there are goals that need practical training and practice directed by me with the student. But when I switched to distance education, I used to restore these goals and skills until face-to-face education returned. Because I knew that the child would not benefit because the targeted skills needed practical training, observation of his performance and providing corrective feedback to him.

Student: I was not able to communicate with my teachers because of internet problems and my parents were not able to teach me as I was learning in school.

Center owner: COVID-19 has negatively affected the education of our children with disabilities, and we were forced to retrain the skills that children previously acquired because parents are not qualified to teach their children. The pandemic has exhausted us, affected our children's educational gains, and burdened us with additional duties, such as the need to carry out education

remotely, the Internet, and other financial costs resulting from the closure of the center due to the community quarantine.

Teacher: The performance of my students has declined, especially as I train children with severe disabilities, and I suffer from the fact that the children have developed many of the skills that they had acquired before the pandemic. And now I am obliged to retrain and rehabilitate them again. It's an extra burden and I have to deal with it.

Mother: My son's level has fallen and he has forgotten the skills he used to do before. The problem is that I can't help but learn these skills. I feel sad because my son is not benefiting from distance education. Also, we cannot provide an internet that enables us to communicate with teachers.

HYPOTHESIS

By presenting the results of the interviews, the researcher formulates the following hypotheses about the impact of COVID-19 on the education of children with disabilities:

- The COVID-19 pandemic affects the educational procedures of children with disabilities, which leads to a lower level of their performance.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has forced retraining of previously acquired skills before the pandemic.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed restrictions and barriers on the education of children with disabilities.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic affected people with disabilities in the psychological, emotional and social aspects as a result of the quarantine. This effect was increased by the lack of interaction and visits, and the avoidance of face-to-face education and the shift to distance education. However, poor family communication has led to negative results on the follow-up of their children. The weakness of the families' preparation and training was evident through their expressions, which indicated their inability to train and follow up their children's education at home. This was caused by the unavailability of the Internet and the lack of computers, which exacerbated these challenges and increased the negative effects of distance education for children with disabilities.

Inevitably, distance education cannot be a successful and effective alternative in educating children with disabilities. This category of children needs interaction, acquisition of skills and information, and they require a follow-up teacher who trains and teaches according to a specific systematic plan with daily goals and directed activities. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the role of parents in education through educational platforms and social media; this of course has negative effects, especially since they are not prepared for distance education.

Thus, it may lead to psychological pressures and other physical problems due to the necessity of providing the Internet and computers that contain applications to be used with their children with disabilities. In addition to the lack of knowledge of these applications. El-Zraigat and Alshammari (2020b) indicated that persons with disabilities needed psychological services, community and family support, learning adjustment skills and practicing leisure time activities, and special educational services that meet their unique needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the results, the researcher recommends the following:

- Training families and involving them in educating their children with disabilities.
- Develop future plans to deal with the aftermath of the pandemic.
- Preparing a practical guide for parents and teachers that demonstrate procedurally how to use distance education with students with disabilities.

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