



Covid-19 Pandemic: Difficulties Faced By Special Education Teachers During Emergency Remote Teaching Through Online Learning And Their Opinions

Abid Masood Khan*, Hafiz Tahir Jameel **, Tanzila Nabeel***

*PhD Scholar, Department of Special Education, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad

**Assistant Professor, Department of Special Education, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad

***Associate Professor, Department of Special Education, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Submitted 14.08.2021

Accepted 24.11.2021

Published 30.12.2021

Volume No.8

Issue No.II

ISSN (Online) 2414-8512

ISSN (Print) 2311-293X

DOI:

Keywords: Covid-19, pandemic, special needs students, special education teacher, emergency remote teaching, online learning

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to explore the difficulties faced by special education teachers during emergency remote teaching through online learning to special needs students during covid-19 pandemic and discuss their opinions. Population of study was special education teachers who were teaching to special needs students of secondary level at government special education institutions Faisalabad division of Punjab province Pakistan. The sample of the study was 15 special education teachers were selected through random sampling technique. Phenomenology pattern was used in this research as a method of research. Semi structure interview was used as a tool of research. Results of the study clearly showed that almost all the special education teachers were motivated towards providing emergency remote teaching to their special students through online learning system. They have practiced a variety of strategies to provide online education to their students but they face a lot of difficulties in this regard. As majority of special students were from low socio economic background, so they have a lack of online learning facilities i.e. android cell phones, laptops and internet connection etc. It was interesting to know that all the students who have sufficient facilities of online learning were not utilizing this for constructive purpose and to overcome their academic problems. They were merely wasting it over social media and gadgets are not utilizing for constructive purpose which was creating anxiety for their parents.



Introduction

Covid-19 has become a big source of continuous stress and anxiety for the educational policy makers, administration, teachers, parents and students to maintain the standard of education in 21st century. All educational institutions were closed and students have to continue their educational process from home this new change in the educational system brought a lot of problems for student's teacher's parents and the stakeholders.

Covid-19 is a pandemic caused by coronavirus, has become a big source of continuous stress and anxiety. To maintain the standard of education in 21st century educational policy makers, administration, teachers, parents and students have to search new trends to continue education activities during the pandemic of Covid-19. Students have to continue their educational process from home because all educational institutions were closed. This new change in the educational system brought a lot of problems for students, teachers, parents and the stakeholders. Covid-19 is a pandemic caused by coronavirus has the rapid morbidity and mortality rate globally is communicable pandemic has bitterly affected all the systems of

life. Specially it has brought a big change in the educational system and gave a new shape to the education. Almost all the government around the globe has closed their educational institutions to rescue their children from the communicable disease. This academic year of institutions has been affected almost 90% of the population of students in the world. Many countries including Pakistan have adopted new strategies and new technologies of 21st century to combat with Covid-19 and to minimize the sudden up break of educational loss (Reimers and Schleicher, 2020). All Countries have searched for an alternative method of education to minimize the educational loss. Viner et al., (2020) demonstrated that this strategy have saved two to four percent of death.

Due to sudden outbreak of COVID-19 and closure of schools all the educational policy makers of the world decided to transform the traditional educational system into distance learning system. Pakistani educational ministry has also continued the education by using two methods of distance learning. To provide education to the children through TV channel and setting is to provide education to the students through self-managed online system of the relevant educational institution (Kirik and Ozkocak, 2020).

Transformation of educational system from traditional to online classes was sudden for inexperienced teachers and they have no training to use online educational system. At the same time students were also illiterate in using online class. So the beginning of these online classes was the matter of stress and anxiety for parents, teachers and students. It is a fact that public and private educational institutions were not trained and well prepared to use online educational system and to set the online system in practice brought the whole society (parents, teachers and students) in frustration (Ustun and Ozciftci, 2020).

Teachers play a vital role to make the online educational system successful. Sound psychological wellbeing and mental health of all pillars of education are more important for online system of education as compared with traditional educational system. In synchronous and asynchronous distance education the role of teacher is the most important factor to make it successful.

Objectives of the study

The objective of this study was to explore the difficulties faced by special education teachers during emergency remote teaching through online learning to special needs students and their opinions during Covid-19 pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study was descriptive in nature and survey method was used to collect the data. A qualitative study method was used to interpret collected data regarding the difficulties faced by special education teachers during emergency remote teaching through online learning to special needs students during covid-19 pandemic and their opinions.

Population and Sampling

Population of study was special education teachers who were teaching to special needs students of secondary level at government special education institutions Faisalabad division of Punjab province Pakistan. The sample of the study was N=15 special education teachers were selected through random sampling technique. The demographic variables including gender, residential area, qualification and working experience of teachers was asked before starting the interview. All the teacher were teaching in the same institute since last 03 years were preferred as respondent, so they have observed all the scenario of Covid-19 in their respective institute.

Tool of the study

The following questions were asked from the respondents of the study through semi structured interviews to investigate the opinions and the difficulties faced by special education teachers during emergency remote teaching through online learning to special needs students during Covid-19 pandemic:

1. When Covid-19 pandemic started and schools were interrupted, what did you do as individuals and schools as part of the continuity of students' education process?
2. How do you evaluate the quality of teaching of lesson/assessment test and presentations sent to the students via whatsapp and email?
3. What is your opinion regarding the formative assessment of students taken through whatsapp and email?
4. What are the problems you have encountered during the teaching process in the context of Covid-19 pandemic?
5. How do you evaluate the psychology of students during Covid-19 pandemic? Has any research been carried out by your school to find solution of teaching learning process during Covid-19 pandemic?

Data Collection

The semi structured interview was conducted according to the availability and convenience of the participants of study. The purpose and nature of the interview was told to the respondents and after getting permission the interview was started. The demographic variables were collected from participants at the beginning of each interview. The length of interviews was between 30 to 40 minutes. All responses of the respondents were recorded in audio file after taking permission of the respondents. At the end of the interview surety of confidentiality of responses was given to the participant and note of thanks was given to all participants.

RESULTS

Table 1

Demographic Analysis of the Respondents

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Male	9	66%
Female	6	40%
M.Phil& Above	3	20%
Master	12	80%
1 to 5 year experience	12	80%
6 to 10 year experience	3	20%
Rural	3	20%
Urban	12	80%

Above table indicated that 60% of the respondents were male and 40% were female, 80% of teachers were having master degree and 20% of respondents having M.Phil degree, 80% of the respondents having 1 to 5 years teaching experience and 20% of teachers having 6 to 10 years working experience, 20% of the respondents living in Rural Areas and 80% of respondents were living in urban area.

Table 2

When Covid-19 pandemic started and schools were interrupted, what did you do as individuals and schools as part of the continuity of students' education process?

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Started online classes	15	100%
Calls to parents	12	80%
Giving Awareness to parents and children about Covid-19 through videos, audios and images.	9	60%
Motivating parents to play their part in education of their children	15	100%

Above mentioned table indicated that when COVID-19 pandemic started and schools were interrupted, 100% of the selected teachers started online classes, 80% of respondents calls to parents, 60% of teachers giving awareness to parents and children about COVID-19 through videos, audios and images and 100% of the selected were motivating parents to play their part in education of their children. Overall teachers play their role for continuity of student's education process during the COVID-19 pandemic situation through different activities.

Table 3

How do you evaluate the quality of teaching of lesson/assessment test and presentations sent to the students via whatsapp and email?

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of communication due to limitations of video calling.	12	80%
Electricity issue.	12	80%

Late response or no response of parents was demotivating for me.	15	100%
I have to work more for online class as compare to traditional class.	15	100%

Above mentioned table indicated that selected respondents evaluate the quality of teaching of lesson / assessment test and presentations sent to the students via whatsapp and email, 80% of the teachers responses that lack of communication due to limitations of video calling, 80% of the selected teachers facing electricity issues, 100% of respondents calls to parents, 60% of teachers facing late response / no response of parents was demotivating him and 100% of the selected respondents were work more for online class as compare to traditional class. Overall teachers explained that they were facing many different issues to evaluate the quality of teaching of lesson/assessment test and presentations sent to the students via whatsapp and email.

Table 4

What are the opinions of teachers regarding the formative assessment of students taken through whatsapp and email?

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
All students were not responding.	15	100%
All students were not giving importance to online classes.	12	80%
Some students were giving excellent performance.	9	60%
Some parents were not responsive while some were giving full involvement in the progress of their children	15	100%

Above mentioned table indicated that selected respondents give opinions regarding the formative assessment of students taken through whatsapp and email, 100% of the teachers responses that all students were not responding, 80% of the selected teachers stated that all students were not giving importance to online classes, 60% of respondents stated that some students were giving excellent performance, 100% of teachers explored that some parents were not responsive while some were giving full involvement in the progress of their children. Overall selected teachers have positive opinions / perceptions regarding the formative assessment of students taken through whatsapp and email.

Table 5

What are the problems you have encountered during the teaching process in the context of COVID-19 pandemic?

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Some Parents were complaining that they do not have cell phone or laptop to manage online classes.	15	100%
Have to work hard as compare to traditional class.	9	60%
Routine and time schedule was disturbing due to online classes.	9	60%
Some parents reported that their children use mobile for social media and does not use it for study purpose.	6	40%

Above mentioned table indicated that selected respondents encountered problems during the teaching process in the context of COVID-19 pandemic, 100% of the teachers responses that some parents were complaining that they do not have cell phone or laptop to manage online classes, 60% of the selected

teachers stated that they do work hard as compare to traditional class, 60% of respondents stated that routine and time schedule was disturbing due to online classes, 40% of teachers explored that some parents reported that their children use mobile for social media and does not use it for study purpose. Overall selected teachers were facing different issues during the teaching process in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 6

How do you evaluate the psychology of students during COVID-19 pandemic? Has any research been carried out by your school to find solution of teaching learning process during Covid-19 pandemic?

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Some students were very energetic and motivated toward utilizing their time in studies via online classes.	9	60%
Some students take mobile from parents for online classes and use it for social media only.	6	40%
Students were easy and making their own time schedule according to their own pace of learning.	9	60%
No any research in the institute before this.	15	100%

Above mentioned table indicated that selected respondents evaluate the psychology of students during COVID-19 pandemic, 60% of the teachers responses that some students were very energetic and motivated toward utilizing their time in studies via online classes, 40% of the selected teachers stated that some students take mobile from parents for online classes and use it for social media only, 60% of respondents stated that students were easy and making their own time schedule according to their own pace of learning and 100% of teachers explored that no any research in the institute before this.

Conclusions and Discussion

The results of the study showed that most of the teaching staff working in government special education institutions using online learning program on preference basis as alternative strategy during Covid-19 pandemic. For this purpose teachers started practicing distance learning programs by means of online sources and other programs like zoom, whatsapp and email. It has also been noticed that there is a great change towards the development of educational skills and knowledge and the teacher gained it to use distance educational methods. This also helps in gaining best results from online resources (Telli and Altun, 2020).

All the respondents were reported that they were not prepared for this process of online learning prior to this situation. No any kind of in service or pre service training about these pandemics conditions given and were not being told how to tackle with it. It was a really hard task for them to be accomplished. It was the first priority of school management authorities to provide study material and to manage the routine lectures through online classes for the students and all these adjustments and preparations of infrastructure were made on the spot during the pandemic (Aytac, 2021).

With and during this outbreak of pandemic, it was observed that distance education has to be taken as the first priority and Emergency Action Plan (Telli and Altun, 2020). As Pakistan is a developing country there are limited resources and many of the schools are working in remote areas, most of the teachers do not have sufficient guidance how to manage the situation during the pandemic. Along with other too many problems, the one major basic problem is to reach the pupils, along with some other significant problems like absence of tools, competencies and unfavorable conditions etc.

All the portals for educational purposes that were provided by the government were highly rated by the teachers. Along with positive points there are some hazards also that were felt or faced by the teachers and students equally. These include the problems regarded quality of the content and also some technical issues relating internet connection and online connections for the class to be conducted. A large number of teachers reported this problem of getting lower rate of attendance and motivation level of students is gradually decreased during this situation of learning. But students who do receive support from their

parents and who are fond of internet study were not affected by this.

Teachers that teaching online classes pointed out internet connection errors were the biggest issues that were faced by the students during online learning. This also affects the motivation level of the students and sometimes parents cannot provide them suitable place or cannot manage to provide them with suitable platform for their learning process. Teachers pointed out many reasons for the low motivation and less participation in the class going online (Brooks et al., 2020).

Conditions during pandemic depict that different families and children belonging to those families have different digital resources. During the outburst of this disease in China and especially in Wuhan responsibility of teaching students were given to the parents of those students. Parents were asked to find relevant material that could be helpful for teaching their children and for that purpose they were supported by the government. After selection of content parents has to follow the instructions given by the government, for parents to convey the learning content to the children in a proper way (UNESCO,2020). In Pakistan during pandemic conditions disabled students were very difficult to reach and it was a very challenging task to approach the students in their homes as they do not have many facilities at their homes. The portals that were available or not customized according to their needs even if online learning is adopted it is not up to the mark and it was not possible to reach every child.

A very important aspect that is discussed in this study was that participant shows that their co-workers are not essentially and adequately equipped and competent in using distance learning programs and new technologies. Teachers were reporting positively and also been realized that face to face education and normal setup of the classroom is very important for teaching and learning. There is a very important aspect that it is negative impact of excessive use of technology in educational process. The importance of face to face interaction during traditional class room and the socialization of the students were affected by the COVID-19 conditions that lead towards student's loneliness. As when a teacher is teaching in the traditional class he is not only delivering the content that is planned but is also enhancing social emotional developmental also imparted to his pupil in a normal set up classroom.

Although there are different approaches and conventional names are changed with their digital or online learning process. Distance learning will take place of the basic educational assistance rather than of being passive support for the conventional education system (YamamotoandAltun, 2020). Keeping in mind, educational system situation, it is very much necessary to learn new ways to teach students for this blended method could be used this is the mixed method that is used for teaching students with both media and conventional methods. It could be known as reverse learning process as in past years it is practice to use media as support and teacher will explain what is told through the media. Teacher is to learn and to teach in both ways conventional and with the use of media as with the sudden outburst of Covid-19. It was very difficult for some teachers who were not familiar with the immediate or learning for distance education learning to cope with the situation, so we have to be ready for every kind of situation that may occur in the future(TEDMEM,2020).

Implications

On the basis of conclusion and data analysis following implications was presented:

1. Digital infrastructure and contents of TV/education portal that can support the accessof millions of students should be enriched. The infrastructure should be improved and strengthened. Deficiencies of online system should be identified and developed byconsideringCovid-19 pandemic as anopportunityand test.
2. After Covid-19 pandemic, special education teachers shall have important duties during the process ofadapting students to school and of normalization. Teachers need to be supported on how to supportspecial needs students when they return to school during and after Covid-19 pandemic, and to identify learninggaps in the context of missing achievements and topics. Otherwise, this process shall be referred as asignificant period of loss.
3. A communication platform can be created to enable teachers to share knowledge andexperiencewiththeircolleagues.
4. During Covid-19 pandemic, parents should be informed about monitoring and supportingtheir children's learning process at home. Parents should be informed about how they are a part oflearning process andsupportedon how tocreate andmanagealearning-teaching environment atthome.
5. It is recommended on the basis of this study conclusion that government should make arrangements

for the provision of virtual classes and luggage all students with android cellphones so that they can attend online classes without any issue.

6. Internet free services for students should be provided during this process by making agreements with mobile network operators and telecommunications service providers.

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