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Difficulties Faced by Special Education Teachers during COVID-19 Pandemic

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to find out what difficulties special education instructors face when it comes to educating children with special needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants in this research were 30 special education instructors who were chosen through a purposive sampling procedure to serve as respondents. In order to identify the difficulties and challenges faced by special education instructors, both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used. In an attempt to comprehend the data, a descriptive analysis was performed. During the COVID-19 pandemic, special education instructors who worked with students who had learning impairments did not get any technology assistance in order to educate the students. According to the findings of the research, the instructional method for special learners has a suboptimal learning environment as a result of the absence of web-based instructional teaching. The survey's major findings identified 15 difficulties, with the most significant of these being 'insufficient e-learning resources', 'lack of training for online teaching', 'giving feedback to students', and 'making the students to attend online classes', as per survey respondents. According to the results, practitioners and curriculum designers may use the information to build and improve the special education system, teaching techniques, and technologically imbibed instructional learning among special education instructors.

Keywords: Special Education Teachers, Difficulties, Special Children, COVID-19 Pandemic.

Introduction

Education plays a very crucial role in every human being's life. According to Quinn (2011), offering elementary education is an essential thing in most of the countries in the globe. (Quinn, 2011). It is also a fundamental right of freedom for each and every child in India. While normal children are denied proper education in the case of special children it is much more difficult. Special learning disability is completely different. "A specific learning disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic

psychological or cognitive processes involved in learning and that affects a student's ability to read, write or do math" (The role of cognitive remediation in special education - brainware. Cognitive Literacy Solutions. 2020, March 30). Hence both learners are in need of a herculean effort from government and education system as well. The special educators are subjected to create a new curriculum based on the needs which must be similar to normal students' curriculum and hence their work becomes a double – edged sword. It is because they are answerable to the parents as well as the higher

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authorities. Furthermore this differentiated instruction and individualized teaching practice is challenging for the special educators. For this reason, the Indian government has taken multiple steps to fulfil educational goal through educational programmes like Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) and District Primary educational programme (DPEP).

But unfortunately, during the time of COVID-19 pandemic, the entire education system was facing many difficulties when the teaching process happened between the instructor and learner especially while teaching to the students with disabilities. Though online teaching was used as a platform, the clarity that children gain is a big question unanswered. Moreover, parents' burden has increased multifold. They who usually were providing helping hand in homework for special children now has become a mentor, project guides and in most cases even tutors. The absence of a 'classroom atmosphere' has led to a feel of isolation among children hence, pushing the learners more into a shell thus, impeding their learning (SS Rajest, P. Suresh, 2018; 2019). The dyslexia students who are already dependent on home tutors could not get enough attention as every tutor had high demand over this pandemic period. While teaching becomes a rare phenomenon for many, the speed of learning also becomes a great demand. This brings stress not only for the students but also the instructors. In addition to this, most of the instructors mainly focused their attention on normal behaviour students and totally forgot about academic life of special learners. Disability is an incapability of a person who cannot perform a task or activity in a well-designed manner which other sentient entities can perform. (Barbotte, Guillemin, Chau, & Lordhandicap Group, 2001; S S Rajest, P. Suresh, 2018).

Review of Literature

Mohamed, S., Derapa, N.F., & Satari, N.A (2020) focused on teaching basic vocabulary skills for agriculture. Further it examined the special education teacher's readiness in teaching vocabulary for agriculture. For this reason, sixty special educational teachers were involved in teaching process. They have followed questionnaire with five components namely teacher's knowledge, skills, attitudes, demography and constrains which are faced by teachers. Based on the responses, they suggested that to teach vocabulary for agriculture, teachers need enough knowledge regarding agriculture. It can help them in understanding agriculture hence giving practical knowledge for the disabled students while learning.

Ahammed, Hashir (2021) in his article "Challenges Faced by Teachers of Learners with Learning Disability" describes the problems encountered by the instructors while teaching the students with disability. He conducted research based on the responses received from the interview. As a result he stated that to come out of challenges, each teacher has used their own different methods accordingly to teach students with disability.

Alias, Azhar & Mohamad Salleh, Norshidah (2017) conducted a study on "Analysis of Problems Faced by Special Education Teacher in Teaching Multiple Disabilities Students" which has focused on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The study has used interview protocol and it was based on the result; in their findings stated that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs were good indicators for the special teachers to teach multiple disability students and their further development.

Masran, M.N., Sengiah, S.L., Othman, R., & Hassan, N.F (2019) in their paper aim at the attitude of special education teachers and followed survey method with questionnaire. The findings suggested that the attitudes of special education teachers will help the dyslexia students in their future academic performance.

Samudra, Senarath (2019) study on the primary teachers' awareness of the students with special educational needs and their confidence on teaching. The study followed the Sequential Explanatory Mixed Method and a non-random sampling method and 102 primary teachers were taken as sample for this study. The findings suggested that the primary teachers need more training programmes to effectively teach for the students. In addition they need different methods for the academic progress in the future.

Schuck, R.K., & Lambert, R (2020) conducted a study on "Am I Doing Enough?" Special Educators' Experiences with Emergency Remote Teaching in Spring 2020" examines the experiences of two elementary special education teachers during the time of COVID-19 pandemic. The teachers said that there is a not adequate materials to teach as well as inequity among the children. Further they stated that online learning is not in favour of the students when students interact physically.

Fatima Ghulam, Hussain Abid and Malik Misbah (2016) study on "Instructional Practices used by Special Education Teachers in Classrooms of Young Children with Deafness". The main purpose of the study here is to identify and use instructional practices employed by the special education teachers in the classroom. The study involved 338 teachers and 34 Punjab government Deaf & Defective Hearing Schools. The sample size was 68 teachers from each school two members and analyzed both t-test and ANOVA. As a result, the major findings were

lacking of teaching aids as well as the teachers in the zones of Punjab.

O'Leary, W. (2019) study on challenges faced by teachers due to traumatic events which is even natural disasters that occur. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) defines traumatic event as a "frightening, dangerous or violent event that poses as a threat to a child's life or bodily integrity".

Research Objectives

The present study aims to focus on the difficulties of special education teachers' instructional methods in COVID-19 pandemic. Hence the main objective of this study is:

- To find out the various difficulties faced by the special education teachers in teaching children with special needs during COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

Based on the objective of the study, the research sought to answer the following research question:

- Did Special Education Teachers face any difficulties and challenges in teaching special children during COVID-19 pandemic?

Research Method

Both quantitative and qualitative research method is implemented in this study. Survey tool is incorporated in this research in which the questionnaire has been used to get the results. Totally there are 15 items in the questionnaire to collect the data quantitatively. All the 15 items are closed-ended questions with nominal scale being used and they require only Yes or No response from the participants. Apart from the quantitative questions, qualitative data has been collected through the question with blank lines which have been given in the questionnaire asking them to write if they have any other difficulties that have not been included in the Yes/No questionnaire items.

Data Collection

The data has been collected from the special education teachers who work in a special education school which is located in Tamil Nadu, India. The total number of participants in this survey is thirty teachers who teach children with special needs in a special education school. All the participants involved themselves in this data collection willingly as they felt the importance of the study and the topic is connected to what they have gone through during COVID-19 pandemic.

Results and Discussions

According to the results, the most significant difficulties experienced by special education instructors in educating children with special needs during the COVID-19 pandemic were linked to elements of the issues faced by both teachers and students throughout the pandemic period. Researchers attempted to present their results in accordance with the objective after thoroughly examining the survey data collected.

Table 1.

Difficulties during COVID-19 Pandemic

Difficulties during COVID-19 Pandemic			
S. No.	ITEMS	YES	NO
1	Difficulties due to insufficient e-learning resources	27	3
2	Due to lack of training for online teaching	24	6
3	Due to limited knowledge on the technology aids	27	3
4	Due to lack of classroom environment	29	1
5	Due to time management.	25	5
6	Due to lack of teacher – learners face to face interaction.	30	0
7	Due to poor participation of the students in learning	24	6
8	Due to students having no access to laptops or mobile due financial issues	19	11
9	Difficulties in giving instruction to students	23	7
10	In evaluating the students	25	5
11	In giving feedback to the students	14	16
12	In meeting the learning needs of the students	28	2
13	In making the students to attend the online class	25	5
14	In motivating students	30	0
15	In communicating with students	24	6

The present article discusses the difficulties that are related to the special education teaching, activities, curriculum, training during COVID-19 pandemic at the high level priority. The results of descriptive analysis are presented in detail.

Table 2.

Difficulties due to insufficient e-learning resources

Difficulties during COVID-19 Pandemic	Yes		No	
Difficulties due to insufficient e-learning resources	27	90%	3	10%

The above result of the statement 1 in this survey shows that there is higher response for the option 'Yes' and lower response for the option 'No'. Out of 30 special education teachers 27 of them have responded with 'Yes' which is 90% of the total participants. It indicates that they found it difficult to teach due to insufficient e-learning resources during COVID-19 pandemic. Only 3 participants have responded 'No' which is the 10% of total participants. It indicates that they have sufficient e-learning resources and their teaching was not affected during COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3.

Due to lack of training for online teaching

Difficulties during COVID-19 Pandemic	Yes		No	
Due to lack of training for online teaching	24	80%	6	20%

The above result of the statement 2 in this survey shows that there is higher response for the option 'Yes' and lower response for the option 'No'. Out of 30 special education teachers 24 of them have responded with 'Yes' which is 80% of the total participants. It indicates that they found it difficult to teach due to lack of training for online teaching. But the remaining 6 participants which is 20% of the total participants have not found it difficult to teach due to lack of training for online teaching during COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4.

Due to limited knowledge on the technology aids

Difficulties during COVID-19 Pandemic	Yes		No	
Due to limited knowledge on the technology aids	27	90%	3	10%

The result of the statement 3 in this survey shows that most of the participants have responded with the answer 'Yes' and only few have responded with the answer 'No' which indicates that the special education teachers found difficulties due to limited knowledge on the technology aids. It is really challenging to teach during COVID-19 pandemic if there is not enough knowledge on the technology that can be implemented. Out of 30 participants in the survey, 27 teachers have responded with the option 'Yes' and 3 teachers have responded with the option 'No' which is 90% and 10% respectively.

Table 5.

Due to lack of classroom environment

Difficulties during COVID-19 Pandemic	Yes		No	
Due to lack of classroom environment	29	96.6%	1	3.3%

The above table with the result of the statement 4 in this survey shows the details of the responses of participants. Totally 30 teachers have responded to the statement in which 29 of them have responded with 'Yes' and only 1 teacher responded for the statement with 'No' which indicates that 96.6% of the teachers have found it difficult to teach due to lack of classroom environment during COVID-19 pandemic. Out of 30 respondents, only one responded that teaching during COVID-19 pandemic was not affected due to lack of classroom environment.

Table 6.

Difficulties due to time management

Difficulties during COVID-19 Pandemic	Yes		No	
Difficulties due to time management	25	83.3%	5	16.7%

The result of the statement 5 in this survey shows that there is higher response for the option 'Yes' and lower response for the option 'No'. There are 30 teachers have participated in this survey. Responding to the statement 25 participants have chosen 'Yes' which is 83.3% of the total participants and 5 teachers have chosen 'No' which is 16.7% of the teachers participated in this survey. This result indicates that Most of the special education teachers have found difficulties due to time management during COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 7.

Difficulties due to lack of teacher – learners face to face interaction

Difficulties during COVID-19 Pandemic	Yes		No	
Difficulties due to lack of teacher – learners face to face interaction	30	100%	0	0%

Teaching children with special needs through online mode is really a challenging one. Teachers find it hard to teach due to lack of teacher-learner face to face interaction. When special education teachers were asked to respond if they have any difficulty in teaching children with special needs due to lack of

teacher-learner face to face interaction, all the teachers responded with 'Yes' and agreed that they had difficulties due to lack of teacher-learner face to face interaction. Totally 30 teachers have participated in this survey. All the 30 teachers have responded with 'Yes' and none of them answered 'No' to the statement which clearly indicates the difficulties they had during COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 8.

Difficulties due to poor participation of the students in learning

Difficulties during COVID-19 Pandemic	Yes		No	
Difficulties due to poor participation of the students in learning	24	80%	6	20%

During lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic, special children were asked to participate through online mode of learning where there was a poor participation of the students in class and in learning as well. When teachers were asked whether they had any difficulty due to poor participation of the students in learning, 24 teacher respondents answered with 'Yes' expressing their view that they have difficulty in teaching students because of poor participation of the students in learning and attending class through online mode. The remaining 6 respondents which is 20% of the total participants have answered 'No' stating that they did not have any difficulty in teaching during lockdown.

Table 9.

Difficulties due to students having no access to laptops or mobile due financial issues

Difficulties during COVID-19 Pandemic	Yes		No	
Difficulties due to students having no access to laptops or mobile due financial issues	19	63.3%	11	36.7%

Many special children did have access to laptop or mobile due to financial issues due to lockdown during COVID-19 pandemic which created difficulties for the special education teachers to teach to the students with special needs. The above result of the statement 8 shows that 19 teachers who have participated in the survey answered 'Yes' to the statement while 11 participants have answered 'No' to the statement which is 63.3% and 36.7% respectively. Totally 63.3% of the participants agreed that they found

it difficult to make students to participate in learning because they do not have access to laptop or mobile due to financial issues.

Table 10.

Difficulties in giving instruction to students

Difficulties during COVID-19 Pandemic	Yes		No	
Difficulties in giving instruction to students	23	76.6%	7	23.4%

The above result of the statement 9 in this survey shows that there is higher response for the option 'Yes' and lower response for the option 'No'. Out of 30 special education teachers 23 of them have responded with 'Yes' which is 76.6% of the total participants. It indicates that they found it difficulties in giving instruction to the students while teaching through online mode whereas 7 respondents which is 23.4% of the participants, did not find any difficulties in giving instructions to the students while teaching through online mode during COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 11.

Difficulties in evaluating the students

Difficulties during COVID-19 Pandemic	Yes		No	
Difficulties in evaluating the students	25	83.3%	5	16.7%

It is not only difficult for the special education teachers to teach the special children during lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic, it is also difficult for them to evaluate the students with special needs through online mode. The above table clearly indicates the result of the statement 10 which shows that 25 teachers have found difficulty in evaluating the students while 5 teachers have not found it difficult which is 83.3% and 16.7% respectively.

Table 12.

Difficulties in giving feedback to the students

Difficulties during COVID-19 Pandemic	Yes		No	
Difficulties in giving feedback to the students	14	46.6%	16	53.4%

When teachers were asked to state if they have any difficulties in giving feedback to the students, 14 teachers have responded 'Yes' and 16 teachers have responded 'No' which clearly

shows that there is a balanced view on teachers' view toward difficulties in giving feedback to the students. Majority of the teachers (53%) have no difficulty in giving feedback to the students while 46.6% of the teachers found it difficult when giving feedback to the students.

Table 13.

Difficulties in meeting the learning needs of the students

Difficulties during COVID-19 Pandemic	Yes		No	
Difficulties in meeting the learning needs of the students	28	93.9%	2	6.1%

There is a huge difference between teaching through online mode and teaching students offline with classroom environment especially teaching the children with special needs. It is really hard to meet the learning needs of the students through online teaching. The above result for the statement 12 indicates whether teachers found any difficulties in meeting the learning needs of the students while teaching during lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic. Out of 30 participants 28 teachers which is 93.9% have answered Yes and only 2 teachers which is 6.1% have answered 'No' which indicates that most of the teachers had difficulties in meeting the learning needs of the students while teaching during lockdown period.

Table 14.

Difficulties in making the students to attend the online class

Difficulties during COVID-19 Pandemic	Yes		No	
Difficulties in making the students to attend the online class	25	83.3%	5	6.7%

It is true that being a teacher, everyone would have faced this difficulty during lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic. When it comes to teachers who facilitates learning to the children with special needs, it is really a challenging to make the students to attend the class online. When teachers were asked to share their feedback whether they have faced any difficulties in making students to attend the class, 25 teachers which is 83.3% have responded that they had difficulty in making the students to attend the online class but 5 teachers (6.7%) have not faced any difficulty in making the students to attend the class.

Table 15.

Difficulties in motivating students

Difficulties during COVID-19 Pandemic	Yes		No	
Difficulties in motivating students	30	100%	0	0%

The above result for the statement 14 in this survey shows that all the special education teachers who participated in this survey answered 'Yes' when they were asked to answer if they have any difficulty in motivating the special children during online teaching. No teacher has chosen 'No' for the statement which clearly indicates that all the 30 teachers (100%) had the difficulty in motivating the students during online class.

Table 16.

Difficulties in communicating with students

Difficulties during COVID-19 Pandemic	Yes		No	
Difficulties in communicating with students	24	80%	6	20%

Communicating with the students is one of the important aspects of the teaching. But the teachers in special education find it difficult to communicate with the students during lockdown. The teachers were asked to give their feedback whether they had any difficulty in communicating to the students during lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic for which 80% of the teachers have answered 'Yes' agreeing to the statement and 20% of the teachers have answered 'No' stating that they haven't faced any difficulty in communicating to the students. Out of 30 participants 24 have answered 'Yes' which means that most of the teachers had the difficulty while teaching to the students with special needs.

Conclusion

Several conclusions were reached as an outcome of the results of the research investigation. To begin with, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of instructors who worked with children with special needs did not get any instructional training on how to educate children with learning disabilities. Furthermore, special education instructors who participated in this research indicated that e-learning resources for children with special needs are lacking in their classrooms for kids with special needs. The majority of learners with disabilities did not get all of the technology modalities that were required to educate the special learners. Workshops

should provide instructors with practical information on technologically infused learning, alternative forms of teaching and assessment, classroom management strategies, and how to adjust pedagogical implications in the teaching-learning process, according to the results of the research. As a result of recognizing the difficulties faced by special education instructors during the COVID-19 pandemic, solutions will be developed to guarantee that children with exceptional needs get appropriate education from special education teachers who provide high-quality technology instruction. Finally, all instructional methods must work together and cooperate to provide inclusive education so that special learners may benefit from a broad variety of technology-infused educational levels.

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