

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the students with special needs in Sabaragamuwa.

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Introduction

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, school closures have brought about an unexpected and extraordinary challenge for education providers.
- Parallely, many countries including developing countries like Sri Lanka have started to incorporate online teaching and learning technology to mitigate learning losses.
- However, not all students have the same access to online learning which also varies especially for learners with disabilities who have the additional barrier of inaccessible learning content.
- Inequities in educational outcomes experienced by students with special needs prior to the pandemic have been greatly worsened and the pandemic has widened education inequalities.
- In this study, the aim is to examine the parents' perceptions of distance learning provided for students in Special Education Units in Sabaragamuwa Provincial schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Problem & questions.

- The problem sentence of the research is “How do students with special needs continue their education during the COVID-19 pandemic?”
- The sub-questions related to this problem statement are,
 - 1) What kinds of practices are carried out based on emergency distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic process for students with special needs who continue their education through online classrooms?
 - 2) What are the problems that the students with special needs who continue their education through online education faced during COVID-19?
 - 3) What are the expectations of parents about their children with special needs who continue their education through online classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Methodology

- In order to make an in-depth analysis and description, this study has employed **phenomenology** as the research method.
- This study focuses on the parents of students with special needs. Accordingly, a **purposeful sampling** method was utilized to determine the participants.
- The sample size had **15 voluntary parents** of students with special needs as a minimum number. These parents had children between 9-to-14 years of age with different disability identities, both physical and mental disabilities.
- Research data have been collected through **semi-structured interviews** and analyzed by the inductive method.

Data Analysis and findings

- Data analysis has shown that students with special needs have continued their education via distance education (Zoom teaching, telegrams, and WhatsApp groups) provided by the Zonal Education offices of Sabaragamuwa province.
- However, several negative consequences of school closure on academic performance have also been noted as follows:
 1. Many children with special needs could not follow the Zoom classes and most of them did not attend remote learning:
 2. They did not receive constructive feedback about their activities:
 3. Apart from these, most importantly, these children did not receive support educational, and there was no communication and cooperation among teachers, families, and students.
 4. Moreover, the findings have highlighted that school closures precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic have caused significant learning loss for children with Special needs.
- Keywords: students with special needs, distance education, COVID-19, pandemic,

Suggestions

1. Promoting peer learning and collaboration.
2. Developing increased awareness and expertise of different techno-pedagogical Skills to help teachers understand the practical and appropriate uses of technologies.
3. Utilizing current teacher potential.
4. Pedagogical support and preparedness
5. Psychosocial support and nurturing well-being
6. Inclusive Education
7. Teacher support and guidance
8. Support for Parents and Families of Learners with Disabilities
9. Maintaining Remote Learning Continuity: Using a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Approach.
10. Accommodations for Language and Communication Style.

Thank You.