Responding to the needs of more Challenged Students: Teacher empowerment during COVID-19 Lockdown and Beyond

[1]Dr Y. MPU ,[2]Prof. E.O. ADU
[1][2]University of Fort Hare, South Africa

Abstract

Dealing with students with severe challenges is a more daunting task for teachers. There are significantly higher rates of students with disabilities in developing countries such as South Africa. The South African government is trying immensely to improve how teachers are empowered to assist them in their work of dealing with these students. These strategies are adapted to fit into the needs of students depending on the type of challenges they have. The risks are thought to be particularly high during COVID-19 lockdown where normal face-to-face classes are replaced with online teaching. When the President announced the national lockdown, students and teachers had to adapt to the new strategy of conducting teaching and learning using online strategies. With students with challenges such as Autism Spectrum and Speech-Language barriers is a big challenge as they need specialized assistive devices to access learning content. Most students come from socially disadvantaged homes where they cannot access Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities. This paper aims to investigate how teachers can be empowered with strategies that can be used during COVID-19 and beyond for students with Autism and those with speech and language barriers. The literature explored here does not only illustrate what numerous authors say about teacher empowerment strategies, but it also illustrates how some of these strategies can be useful for both teachers and students. The discussion is to assist in delivering the best strategies that are accessible by both teachers and students in

teaching and learning during the COVID-19 lockdown period and beyond.

Word Count: 252

Introduction

Most educators actually show utilizing customary strategies, for example, course books and blackboards as the main assets. Nonetheless, during the overall pandemic, reacting to the necessities of more moved understudies to convey instructing and gaining endlessly from homerooms is all the more trying for the two educators and understudies. The advancement of new techniques in ensuring that the scholastic year is spared, instructors are feeling the squeeze to guarantee that gaining proceeds with away from school structures. This is to stick to social removing combined with models to control the spread of the infection. It is suggested that self-teaching is the most ideal choice in making it conceivable that understudies proceed with their work distantly. Instructors need to conform to the understudies' perspectives to convey learning material to understudies during this time.

The ongoing fast advances in data innovation, including the Web and the Internet, have significantly affected various parts of the every day living of humankind and the general public of the industrialized pieces of the world. A portion of the viewpoints that need change are the ways to deal with the headway of instructor strengthening in the utilization of techniques that are easy to use for the two understudies and guardians. Understudies with mental imbalance range and discourse language hindrances are the most testing to manage as they need assistive gadgets and extra help. Discourse challenges can be seen over the mental imbalance range and instructors invest a lot of energy attempting to help these student-types.

A commitment to the new ordinary educators should be enabled with powerful techniques about group showing where

instructors and guardians need to work in a coordinated effort to spare the scholarly year by conveying compelling educating and picking up during Coronavirus lockdown and past. Self-teaching is discovered to be generally testing as understudies with chemical imbalance learn better through osmosis. They learn by seeing what the instructors and friends do and are such it turns into a test when they gain at home away from the school structures and companions. It is surely acceptable to see away from the capacity of innovation to associate individuals in such a day to day existence testing experience.

Study Objectives

This paper aims to investigate how teachers can be empowered with strategies that can be used during Covid-19 and beyond for students with Autism who experience barriers to learning during this challenging time.

Methodology

The paper has used a desktop review methodology to debate, reflect, critique, and explore the panacea and hurdles underpinning teacher empowerment during COVID-19 and beyond. The literature explored here does not only illustrate what numerous authors say about teacher empowerment strategies, but it also illustrates how some of these strategies can be useful for both teachers and students.

Literature Review
An Overview of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is defined as a complex, neurodevelopmental impairment, affecting the brain's ability to process and interpret information (Kawasaki, 2018:6). The symptoms of ASD are typically present before the age of three and stretch over the lifespan (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Children with autism may then start to stand out more as their social skills are not developing at the same rate as their peers do. A simple diagnosis can be reached by asking the right questions and observing specific aspects and social behaviour. According to

Du Plessis (2013); studies show that educators complain about the lack of skills to deal with these students.

Since 1994, in South Africa, there is a more comprehensive agreement of getting variety. The strategy on Exceptional Requirements Training: Building a Comprehensive Instruction and Training Framework (Branch of Instruction, 2014), from now on alluded to as White Paper 6, expresses that to the extent basically conceivable, uphold must be given at nearby standard schools. Having faith in and supporting the strategy of comprehensive instruction isn't sufficient to guarantee that such a framework will work by and by (Division of Training, 2014), nor does it guarantee that it will essentially convert into what happens inside the study hall (Donohue and Bornman, 2014).

Comprehensive training requires an instruction framework, which does not, at this point segregate, nonetheless, invites all people, offering help and administrations so every kid benefits similarly in standard schools around their areas. This doesn't come simply for instructors as they are dependable to guarantee that all the understudies are upheld a similar method to dodge separation. The social conduct and response of understudies with chemical imbalance are legitimate more often than not, however simultaneously improper (Vermeulen, 2012). Youngsters with chemical imbalance show challenges in their utilization and comprehension of non-verbal correspondence, for example, eye to eye connection, social articulations, and motions.

Educational Intervention
Waddington and Reed, (2017) uncover that in the UK, 60% of understudies with ASD are set in standard schools. During the Corona virus lockdown, all learning establishments went to a sudden conclusion that saw understudies gaining endlessly from schools. Medically introverted understudies and those with extreme difficulties in learning are the most influenced as they advantage generally on assistive gadgets and models that are given by the school. Understudies with ASD profit by presentation to a socially suitable companion bunch realizing when in schools.

In South Africa, there are numerous relevant effects on training that recognize the advancement of instruction in the nation from that of different nations. At the point when understudies with ASD are obliged at any school, the whole staff ought to have sound information and comprehension of ASD, initially as a neuro-formative issue, and besides, as a range issue, which mirrors a continuum of help needs just as accessible resources in the network, (Engelbrecht, 2016). "On the off chance that we acknowledge the demands of instructing, at that point understudies with ASD regularly require a reconsidering of the instructors' own convictions and mentalities", (Conn, 2015: 27).

International responses to COVID-19 on school education
Worldwide endeavours to deal with the effect of the COVID-19 on school training, different nations have received a scope of measures to react to the pandemic relying upon their accessible assets. In Pakistan, the nature of educator instruction actually needs improvement through the presentation of creative techniques and practices, along with financial and social acknowledgment just as new accreditation methods (Dilshad, Rehman, Ahmad and Iqbal, 2010). Innovatively progressed provinces, for example, Italy, France, Germany, Australia, the UK, and the US, have received separation learning as a way to making up for the lost time during the pandemic.

The scratch-off of vis-à-vis contact classes and evaluations negatively affect understudies' learning as a rule. Interior evaluations are significant as they show understudies' adapting needs and afterward uphold learning (Dark and Wiliam 2018). To spare the scholarly year, instructors have an errand to guarantee that educating and learning proceed by conveying learning content basically. In these nations, all partners, establishments, educators, distributors, and guardians have held hands together to make computerized assets (e.g., course readings and learning materials) so they could be conveyed through virtual study halls (Azzi-Huck and Shmis 2020).

This structure foundation is a test in immature nations like South Africa as they are as yet fighting with issues, for example,

neediness, prepared staff, framework, and topographical foundation of understudies. It is all the more a test with understudies who have serious difficulties to instruction like those with a chemical imbalance and discourse language obstructions.

Observation and Discussion
Educational needs for students with disabilities amid COVID-19
Around the world, the lives of any event of 1.5 billion understudies and their families have been essentially influenced by the school terminations brought about by the Coronavirus flare-up, (Azevedo, Iqbal, and Geven, (2020). Governments have reacted by holding classes distantly – to a great extent on the web – to guarantee that understudies keep on considering. Notwithstanding, this measure does not address educational discontinuity and disruption for all students. In any case, this measure doesn't address instructive intermittence and interruption for all understudies. The gauge of 1.5 billion influenced understudies doesn't consider those who are underestimated, impeded, or "undetectable" in instructive frameworks. On the web and innovative based learning stages and assets should be accessible and every one of understudies' needs should be obliged for governments, schools, and educators to guarantee that understudies are not deserted during school terminations just as after schools return, regardless of whether this happens in a half year or a year, Azevedo, et.al., (2020).

Barriers to education through remote-learning practices
Understudies with incapacities experience an assortment of obstructions to training. For instance:
- In wellbeing emergencies, for example, Coronavirus, people with incapacities are frequently furnished with less assistance and deficiently prepared instructors. Dahab, van Zandvoort, Flasche, and Checchi, (2020).
- More time and assets are required for understudies with incapacities to effectively partake in learning. This incorporates gear, web access, and exceptionally planned materials and

backing. This makes learning exorbitant for understudies and their families.

- Students with extreme learning difficulties are adversely affected by the schools' closure because of Coronavirus in extra manners. They lose admittance to class dinners, assistive gadgets, and play with their friends, which are similarly significant for their psychological turn of events and learning.
- Another obstruction is that numerous instructors need ICT aptitudes and information. All things considered, absence of expert ICT aptitudes. They are not enabled to show on the web and can't guarantee understudy commitment, explicitly for understudies with chemical imbalance who experience the ill effects of a discourse language incapacity. Presently, there is no accessible information on a custom curriculum instructors' computerized abilities in creating in immature nations, (Owusu-Fordjour, Koomson, and Hanson, 2020).

Support for teachers for home schooled students

Homeschooling is best characterized as an elective type of instruction outside the school setting. Instructors need to address the multi-education aptitudes of their understudies, for example, essential proficiency abilities, the seriousness of inabilities, wellbeing, passionate and social foundation, (Costelloe and Langelid, 2011:63). As schools change to web based getting the hang of during the Coronavirus pandemic, it is imperative to give instructors direction and applicable, proof put together assets with respect to how to convey exercises in far off and online settings in a custom curriculum. Virtual learning for the two educators and understudies is overpowering, so they stun meeting focuses during the lockdown time frame because of broadband availability challenges. We can't overlook that numerous understudies need specific, express guidance and admittance to materials in various organizations. As per the Public Place for Instruction Insights, 7 million, or 14%, of all state funded school understudies ages 3–21 got custom curriculum administrations during the 2017–18 school year under the People with Handicaps Act (Thought).

The following are a couple of ways educators can stay consistent to their understudies with mental imbalance and those encountering discourse language obstructions during the Coronavirus lockdown period and past. Thought is supporting instructors and understudies in keeping up admittance to specific guidance by:

(a)   Checking for accessibility features and compliance

Regardless of which online stage your region uses to convey online educational program, ensure everybody knows about the openness includes that stage upholds. Numerous understudies who utilize assistive technology (AT) need to be able to use their own AT gadgets or their own AT programming. In the event that the stage isn't open for AT gadgets, at that point the understudy could be barred from guidance and support with their companions.

Luckily, numerous stages have highlights, for example, Zoom or amplification, shut subtitling, and console route. The accompanying connections give data on normal online study hall stages and what availability highlights are accessible: Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Skype.

(b)   Teach the layout of new platforms

Instructors should set aside a lot of effort to audit the highlights and disclose how to explore the site, for example, how to screen share, share reports, utilize the talk include, lift a hand, and locate the quiet catch. We can't expect that all children will discover these highlights or use them instinctively. Accordingly, strolling them through will set everybody up for progress and instructors are compelled by a sense of honor to carry on the errand.

On the off chance that the class has never met on the web, there will be understudies who won't realize how to utilize all the magnificent highlights the greater part of these stages. Instructing the stage's design will be the most significant advance for any understudy who is an AT client and has never utilized the site.

(c) Lay down ground rules

Investing energy to lay the standard procedures for online classes is very bulky and understudies with specific needs are an exceptionally large tested. Nothing is a similar right now for anybody, everything has changed, and understudies with incapacities should be seen.

Educators should start by remembering their understudies for setting rules and working off of their certainty. Exhibiting to understudies on what they have to do isn't simple when they can't see the educator before them. Guardians and parental figures need to fill the role in such manner. This straightforward solicitation can give the instructor a plenty of knowledge and it is an extraordinary method to begin building network desires, and standard procedures into new online practices. At that point make guidelines together, for example, when to turn on recordings, muting when you're not talking, and when to use the raise-your-hand feature or chat.

(d) Get curious and ease anxiety

Many students, teachers, and parents are using online tools for the first time. It is helpful to foster curiosity and ask questions about what is and is not working at home for students. As we know, every student is different, every home life is different, and these differences can be a wide range.

To help with anxiety, think ahead and give students and parents schedules ahead of time to prepare not only physically, but also emotionally. There are students with speech-language disabilities who may need more detailed schedules requiring specific task analysis, so be mindful this may be the case. Sometimes the transition from home life to school life is jarring, so prepping students can ease anxiety about the unknown. Transitions can be especially difficult for students withthe speech-language barrier, so take time to implement mindfulness and consider social and emotional needs before diving into a lecture or instruction. It is worth your time to ground students and take into consideration their feelings and anxieties.

(e) Consider universal design for learning (UDL)

Numerous understudies, educators, and guardians are utilizing on the web instruments unexpectedly. It is useful to encourage interest and pose inquiries about what is and isn't working at home for understudies. As we probably am aware, each understudy is extraordinary, each home life is unique, and these distinctions can be a wide range.

To help with uneasiness, think ahead and give understudies and guardians plans early to get ready truly, yet in addition inwardly. There are understudies with discourse language inabilities who may require more nitty gritty timetables requiring explicit assignment investigation, so be careful this might be the situation. Here and there the progress from home life to class life is jolting, so preparing understudies can ease nervousness about the obscure. Changes can be particularly hard for understudies with the discourse language boundary, so set aside effort to execute care and think about social and enthusiastic needs before plunging into a talk or guidance. It merits your chance to ground understudies and contemplate their sentiments and nerves.

(f) Give grace and time

Some students will need to spend time with a specialist, whether that's for speech-language, special education, occupational or physical therapy. Offer extra time that you will be available for questions, for help with a project, and maybe as a listener. More importantly be the conduit for the specialists, students, and parents so everyone can work together.

Train teachers for emergency responses to respond to COVID-19 remote learning

Innovation and alternative teaching methods. Review, along with teacher representative organizations and teacher educators, current teacher policies, and development frameworks to update provisions for distance education and education in emergencies to strengthen the resilience of education systems. Co-operate with teacher training institutes to enhance training and tools that

reinforce teachers' capacity for pedagogical innovation, including digital literacy, ICT, and child-centered teaching skills.

This suggests that technology can enhance learning in some way, but it is unusual to find explicit statements about what this "enhancement" actually involves and how students benefit (Kirkwood & Price, 2014). Students with autism spectrum and with speech-language learn by simulation and by observing what teachers and peers say or do. Teachers need to be confident in carrying out a range of key tasks – for example: analyzing information, planning, putting plans into practice, adapting as needed, evaluating and critically reflecting – with all students in mind during COVID-19 lockdown when students are at home. They need to shift their thinking from 'ideas of "most" and "some" students to everyone,(Florian and Linklater, 2010: 370).

Hollenweger, (2015) suggests that to achieve inclusive practice, teachers have to engage in four specific practices linked to four components – teacher, learner, curriculum, and context. Professional learning is relevant and interesting for educators when ideas and resources are freely exchanged, for example in online environments (Teaching and School Leadership, 2014).

Conclusion
The findings of this study confirmed that teachers are the center of caring for learners with severe challenges in education. This calls for intensive professional development in enabling them to adjust to online teaching and strategies to deal with the needs of students who are studying at home during COVID-19 lockdown and beyond. Teachers need to save the academic year by adapting their curriculum to fit the individual learner needs of learners that are in their classrooms. Inadequate skills and knowledge in ICT, lack of adequate infrastructure, poverty, geographical background, and internet facilities to enhance performance are a challenge in South Africa.

Though it was viewed that developed countries are doing well with online teaching and learning, South Africa is still sluggish in technology. The study realized that teachers in this case cannot work in isolation, parental involvement is found to be equally

important in this collaboration. Teaching and learning material needs to be sent to parents and rules be understood by them and then passed to students. This is found not an easy task as some parents do not have the technological facilities and background to access the learning material sent to their children. The government and institutions need to go the extra mile in the education of children with severe learning challenges to ensure that, No Child is Left Behind.

Recommendations

It is glaring that during COVID-19 teachers have a dauntingtask in making sure that teaching and learning continue. Teachers are battling with saving the academic year and need to be empowered with professional knowledge and skills for online learning of students with severe learning challenges. ICT skills could play an important role in providing and enhancing efficient teacher performance during this lockdown period and beyond.

References

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). American Psychiatric Association: Diagnostic Statistical Manual

Azevedo, J. P., Hasan, A., Goldemberg, D., Iqbal, S. A., & Geven, K. (2020). Simulating the potential impacts of COVID-19 school closures on schooling and learning outcomes: A set of global estimates.

Azzi-Huck, K., & Shmis, T. (2020). Managing the impact of COVID-19 on education systems around the world: How countries are preparing, coping, and planning for recovery.

Black, P., &Wiliam, D. (2018). Classroom assessment and pedagogy. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, *25*(6), 551-575.

Conn, C. (2015). 'Sensory highs', 'vivid rememberings' and 'interactive stimming': children's play cultures and experiences of friendship in autistic autobiographies. *Disability & Society*, *30*(8), 1192-1206.

Costelloe, A., & Langelid, T. (2011). Prison Education and Training in Europe–A Review and Commentary of Existing Literature, Analysis and Evaluation. *Directorate General for Education and Culture, European Commission, EAC*, *19*, 06-130.

Dahab, M., van Zandvoort, K., Flasche, S., Warsame, A., Ratnayake, R., Favas, C., ... & Checchi, F. (2020). COVID-19 control in low-income settings and displaced populations: what can realistically be done? *Conflict and Health*, *14*(1), 1-6.

Department of Education, (2014). The challenges of realising inclusive education in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, *34*(2).

Dilshad, S. R., Rehman, N. U., Ahmad, N., & Iqbal, A. (2010). Documentation of ethnoveterinary practices for mastitis in dairy animals in Pakistan. *Pakistan Veterinary Journal*, *30*(3), 167-171.

Donohue, D. K. & Bornman, J. (2014). Examining the rights of children with intellectual disability in South Africa: Children's perspectives. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability*, *39*(1), 55-64.

Du Plessis, A. J. (2013). Long-term developmental outcome of children with a fetal diagnosis of isolated inferior vermian hypoplasia. *Archives of Disease in Childhood-Fetal and Neonatal Edition*, *99*(1), F54-F58.

Engelbrecht, E. (2016). *The implementation of inclusive education in South Africa after ten years of democracy. European Journal of Psychology in Education, 21(3), 253-264.*

Hollenweger, J. (2015). *HandbuchInklusion und Sonderpädagogik* (Vol. 8643). UTB.

Kawasaki, C. (2018). Association between single nucleotide polymorphisms in estrogen receptor 1/2 genes and symptomatic severity of autism spectrum disorder. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, *82*, 20-26.

Kirkwood, A., & Price, L. (2014). Technology-enhanced learning and teaching in higher education: what is 'enhanced'and how do we know? A critical literature review. *Learning, media and technology*, *39*(1), 6-36.

Florian, L., & Linklater, H. (2010). Preparing teachers for inclusive education: using inclusive pedagogy to enhance teaching and learning for all. *Cambridge journal of education*, *40*(4), 369-386.

Owusu-Fordjour, C., Koomson, C. K., & Hanson, D. (2020). The impact of Covid-19 on learning-the perspective of the Ghanaian student. *European Journal of Education Studies*.

Vermeulen, J. A. (2012). Mainstream teachers about including deaf or hard of hearing students. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *28*(2), 174-181.

Waddington, E. M., & Reed, P. (2017). Comparison of the effects of mainstream and special school on National Curriculum outcomes in children with autism spectrum disorder: an archive based analysis. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, *17*(2), 132-142.