Chapter 1

Amplifying Voices, Empowering Perspectives:
Exploring the Experiences of Children With Disabilities in Inclusive Education During the Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on exploring the experiences of children with disabilities in inclusive education during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Through a thorough literature review and thematic analysis of narratives provided by children in the UAE, the study aims to understand the complexities of inclusive education, identify the challenges faced by these children, and highlight factors that contribute to their inclusion. The research questions guiding this study are centered around the experiences, issues, and pivotal factors ensuring inclusion of children with disabilities in the UAE during the pandemic. The themes that emerged shed light on their concerns, interactions, strategies, and recommendations, providing valuable insights into the specific challenges and opportunities within the UAE context. The importance of cultural sensitivity, collaboration among stakeholders, and targeted support systems are highlighted as key elements in ensuring inclusive education for children with disabilities in the UAE.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education strives to create equitable learning environments where every child, regardless of their abilities, can thrive and reach their full potential. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges to inclusive education practices, raising important questions about the experiences of children with disabilities during this transformative time. As we navigate the complexities of remote and hybrid learning models, it is crucial to examine the unique perspectives of these children and shed light on the issues they have faced. This chapter embarks on a stimulating exploration of the experiences of children with disabilities in inclusive education during the pandemic. By centering their voices and empowering their perspectives, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges they have encountered, the concerns that have emerged, and the factors that have contributed to their success in not being left behind. The research questions guiding this inquiry are, *1. What have been the experiences of children with disabilities in inclusive education during the pandemic? 2. What are the main issues and concerns faced by these children in accessing and participating in inclusive education remotely or through hybrid models? 3. What factors have played a pivotal role in ensuring that children with disabilities are not left behind amid the pandemic?* By delving into these questions, this study will uncover the multifaceted dimensions of the lived experiences of children with disabilities, recognizing both the unique challenges they have encountered and the promising practices that have emerged in response. Through qualitative interviews with a diverse group of children with disabilities, we provide them with a platform to share their stories, perspectives, and insights. Their voices will serve as a powerful catalyst for change, informing teachers, policymakers, and stakeholders about the critical aspects that require attention and action. This chapter serves as an urgent call to action, urging us to reevaluate and redefine the way we approach inclusive education in the context of a global crisis. By amplifying the voices of children with disabilities and embracing their experiences as valuable sources of knowledge, we aim to promote a more inclusive, equitable, and resilient education system.

Background

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a diverse and dynamic country that places great emphasis on inclusive education and the well-being of its citizens, including children with disabilities. As a nation committed to providing equal opportunities for all, the UAE has made significant strides in promoting inclusive practices in its educational system. However, the COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges to this inclusive agenda, necessitating a deeper understanding of the experiences of

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