


# Chapter 8

## General and Special Educators' Perceptions of Teaching SEN Students in Inclusive Phygital Learning in the UAE

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this chapter is to explore the literature in relation to perceptions of special and general education teachers about teaching students with special needs in phygital inclusive environments. Different cross-cultural experiences that dealt with this topic were discussed. Also, some focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with general and special education teachers to generate themes that can consolidate our understanding of how teachers address teaching students with special needs in phygital inclusive environments. The FGDs explored teachers' perceptions about teaching during and after the pandemic, how they adapted the students' individualized educational plans, assessment methods, and teaching strategies. Also, the FGDs explored teachers' perceptions in relation to how they addressed*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-8504-0.ch008

*the learning loss their students experienced and which innovative strategies they used to address various learning issues. The chapter will include recommendations for teachers and practitioners on how to promote the education of students with special needs in phygital learning.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In 2020, COVID-19 disrupted many fields of society around the world including healthcare, employment, social interactions, and education. In many regions of the world, the sudden closure of schools forced teachers to shift their approaches from face-to-face to online instruction with little-to-no preparation (Francis et al., 2022). The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have created a challenging situation, particularly for the education system (Bellacicco, 2022). In addition to this, COVID-19 presents additional challenges for not only teachers but also the students with special educational needs (SEN) whose life and learning styles depend heavily on social interaction (Adigun et al., 2022). The unforeseen disruption of the social interface, Adigun et al., (2022) elucidate, resulted in SEN students' feeling of being excluded and ignored, especially for the learners with hearing, visual, and physical impairments; down syndrome; autism; and other neuro-developmental disorders.

One of the challenges reported by teachers and caregivers is that children with disabilities were not receiving the same quality of services during the Covid-19 pandemic (Steed et al., 2022). Also, inclusive and adapted digital materials were not always available, and individualized learning objectives were not mastered in the mainstream environment (Bellacicco, 2022). Other challenges that teachers encountered in teaching SEN students during the COVID-19 pandemic were revealed by the study conducted by Filiz and Gunes (2022), such as the lack of technological tools and infrastructure in the teaching process. Also, the digital literacy levels of teachers and parents were insufficient. Moreover, Depuydt's study (2021) found that teachers encountered challenging problems with distance teaching for students with disabilities during the pandemic. Those problems manifested through the incapacity to consistently communicate with students, and a lack of participation amongst students, lack of training, and no prior experience in the online teaching process, lack of available technology and lack of ordinary routine and direct instruction, and academic and emotional regressions in students. Those reported problems manifested through the lack of student participation, training, prior experience in the online teaching process, technology availability, ordinary routine, and direct instruction. Some other issues as reported included incapacity to consistently communicate with students as well as the academic and emotional regressions in students.

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