Chapter 5

The Experience of Emergency Remote Distance Teaching and Learning Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Preschool and Special Education Students:
An Overview of the Recent Literature on the Challenges for Teachers, Parents, and Suggestions for Improvement

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ABSTRACT

The chapter explores the impact of the emergency remote distance teaching and learning (DL) due to the COVID-19 pandemic in preschool (PE) and special education (SE). As research suggests, these two education sections can be characterized as two of the most challenging, especially during emergency situations, such as the prolonged lockdowns caused by the recent pandemic. The chapter is an overview of the most recent literature regarding some of the most prevalent challenges encountered by parents and educators of PE and SE learners in various socio-cultural backgrounds, at an international level. Recommendations for more effective PE and SE DL experiences during emergency periods from parents and teachers are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The Sudden School Closures and the Forced Shift to Online/Distance Learning Due to COVID-19 Pandemic

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 coronavirus (which erupted in Wuhan, China in 2010), as a pandemic (Millard, 2020). The sudden, unexpected and rapid spread of the pandemic severely affected almost every aspect of human life (i.e. economic, social, family and educational everyday-life domains), in the entire universe (Miho & Thivenon, 2020).

As regards the education sector, in particular, the sudden, obligatory closures of all educational facilities and the forced shift of teachers, students and parents to online/digital learning, was characterized as *"the largest simultaneous "shock" to all education systems in our lifetimes"* (Jaime Saavedra, Global Director of Education, World Bank, 2020). Over 1.6 billion students across the world (i.e. almost 90% of the entire world's student population, in at least 190 countries), were faced with a sudden disruption of their daily normal learning experiences (United Nations, 2020; Heba & Sultan, 2020). In most countries, forced engagement with online learning procedures was made mandatory for all school types and levels (Wang, Pan, Wan et al., 2020).Specific educational sectors were even more severely affected and were more vulnerable to this sudden change, due to the learners' age and or/special educational needs (SEN). More specifically, the two most severely affected educational sectors were the Early Childhood/Preschool Education (PE) and the Special Education (SE) sectors (Ghosh, Dubey, Chatterjee & Dubey, 2020; Kim, 2020).

Aim and Scope of the Chapter

The aim of the current chapter was to provide an overview of the most recent literature regarding some of the most prevalent challenges encountered by parents and educators of PE and SE learners in various socio-cultural backgrounds, at an international level. After pinpointing and analyzing the most serious issues (selected themes) mentioned in the relevant literature by those involved in the DL process, various suggestions and recommendations for more effective preschool and special distance learning experiences and procedures during emergency periods, from both parents and teachers, are also discussed.

Methodology

As regards the Method used, a traditional (narrative) literature review was conducted, in which 56 articles, published between 2020-2021 (i.e. during the Covid-19

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