



Psychological Stress Resulting from Distance Education Among Parents of Students with Learning Disabilities During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This study aimed at identifying the impact of psychological stress resulting from remote education among parents of students with learning disabilities during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study used the descriptive-analytical approach and a questionnaire as an instrument to achieve the objectives of the study. The instrument was administered to a sample consisting of (61) parents of students with learning disabilities, who were selected randomly. The results of the study showed that the level of stress was high among parents. The findings also showed that there were no statistically significant differences in the evaluation of the respondents about psychological stress resulting from education due to the variable of gender and educational level of the parents. The study recommended providing educational means for parents on how to deal with the psychological pressures they are experiencing in light of the continuation of distance education during the pandemic of the new Coronavirus (Covid-19) and finding alternatives for children to spend their time in useful ways during periods of home quarantine due to the pandemic.

Introduction

The world has recently been witnessing a state of conflict due to the outbreak of the new COVID-19 pandemic since its appearance in December 2019. This pandemic is one of the most dangerous events in the modern human world, as it led to upheavals at all scales and all levels. We were forced to change our lifestyle to a new life that we did not know before, so the air travel was stopped, the borders between countries were closed, and all study activities in schools and universities were stopped, with official demands to stay at home and social distancing. Like other sectors, educational institutions have been completely closed in most countries of the world, and distance learning has been adopted either completely or partially in virtual environments, with quality and capabilities that vary between the institutions of the same region itself.

Distance education is a new type of education imposed by technical changes and global events, whether environmental, economic, political or even health events (Youssef, 2019). Distance learning has advantages such as the possibility of learning at any time and anywhere, throughout the hours of the week, and contributes to the exchange of different views of students, in addition to the ease and flexibility of modifying the content and updating the content of the educational material (Bassiouni, 2007). However, with the development and introduction of anything new to society, it is bound to constitute a kind of general confusion. This is what happened with the employment of distance learning in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia now, as the complete dependence on it has been accompanied by a state of anxiety and

psychological pressure among teachers, parents, and students, and the increasing rates of anxiety and psychological stress among students with learning disabilities and their parents.

Students with learning disabilities are characterized by average mental ability or average difference (Shehata, 2021). They do not have any physical, mental or psychological disabilities. The American Committee for Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) indicated that learning disabilities are clear disorders in some abilities, and examples of which are disorders in the ability to speak, write, mathematical inference, and others. The committee attributed these disorders to a defect that occurs in the central nervous system. Of course, the process of learning for this group of students is physically and psychologically exhausting for all individuals involved in the teaching process, including teachers, parents, and students themselves, as everyone finds it difficult to contain the educational process and prevent it from getting out of their control, and this increases the chance of psychological stress and negative emotions (Al-Anazi, 2020).

Parents of students with learning disabilities are exposed to a lot of psychological stress as a result of the unusual characteristics of their children (Al Fahel & Jadi, 2017). These pressures are present in normal situations and face-to-face education, but with the adoption of distance learning as an emergency alternative to face-to-face learning during the Corona pandemic, these pressures have multiplied (Al-Sai'ari et al., 2020). Psychological stress is caused by stimuli in the family's internal environment, or by external stimuli resulting from the pressure of society and the surrounding world (Al-Ayed, 2012). The level of psychological stress varies from one parent to another, and this difference is due to the difference in their cultural and educational levels, their economic and social conditions, and other demographic variables.

Problem Statement

The Corona pandemic affected the psychological aspect of the general population just as it affected the material aspect, as the pandemic caused a global psychological impact and a collective fear called “Corona phobia.” Among these psychological effects are depression, and psychological pressure. Many studies have dealt with this topic, including Amer (2020), which aimed to reveal the psychological problems resulting from the Corona pandemic in the Egyptian society. The results of this study showed that (74.6%) of the participants admitted their fear of Corona, that (40%) feel depressed, in addition, that (59.4%) face a lot of psychological pressures such as boredom, distress, frustration, and psychological loneliness. The Corona pandemic resulted in repercussions that had the greatest role in creating psychological stress among individuals, including the adoption of distance learning as an alternative to face-to-face education. Many studies have examined the attitudes of parents towards this newly developed educational system, including Al-Enezi (2020), which aimed to investigate the attitudes of parents towards the distance learning system during the Corona crisis. Obstacles they face when using the distance learning system. Based on the foregoing, the problem of the current study is summarized in the following main question: What are the psychological stresses resulting from remote education among parents of students with learning disabilities during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Significance of the Study

This study can constitute a scientific addition to the educational library in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Arab region. It is hoped that the study will contribute to opening new areas for researchers to conduct future research and studies in the field of learning disabilities and build special features for Saudi schools. It is also hoped that the results of the study will contribute to providing a realistic picture to decision-makers in the Higher Committee for

Education Policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia of the challenges and psychological pressures faced by students with learning difficulties and their parents during distance learning, and thus achieving an added value for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the global competitiveness index. The current study may help teachers to adopt new methods and strategies that would contribute to providing the educational material to students with learning difficulties in a more effective manner that increases their knowledge output. The current study may contribute to identifying the amount of psychological stress that parents suffer from while following up on their children. Thus, helping them to solve this problem and alleviating the psychological pressures experienced by parents, and may contribute to their awareness of the characteristics of their children and how to follow up on them.

Delimitations of the Study

The results of the current study are limited by the following limitations; (1) Thematic limit: psychological stress among parents of people with learning difficulties during the Corona pandemic; (2) Time limit: The current study was applied during the second semester of the academic year 2021-2022; (3) Spatial Limit: The current study was applied in Asir region, in its three governorates (Abha, Khamis Mushait, and Ahad Rafida); (4) Human Limit: Parents of students with learning difficulties in public schools in Asir region.

Literature Review

We live today in exceptional circumstances in light of the developments of events that occurred at the end of the year 2019, where the Coronavirus was detected. It is still spreading and expanding in all countries of the world, which has created more psychological pressure on all individuals, organizations, educational institutions, and other aspects. Because of the spread of this pandemic, countries have taken precautionary policies to limit its spread. Among these precautionary measures were closing schools and universities and following the policy of distance learners to ensure social distancing, which has a major role in limiting the spread of this pandemic. The closure and social distance generated the so-called psychological pressure among teachers and parents, as the parents of the student who learns remotely live under multiple psychological pressures. All of these pressures are linked to the student's needs for the requirements of distance education, and concern about their future and their coming life, which intensifies these pressures on the student's parents, who depend on them in the distance learning process (Al-Sayyad & Issa, 2019).

The Corona pandemic forced the various educational systems to adopt innovative methods and strategies that would support the employment and investment of modern technology and the transition towards digital learning through the distance education system. This system proved its worth and importance despite the presence of some challenges and became imperative for educational systems (Al-Laithi, (2020). The different educational systems make a qualitative leap in the teaching and learning processes under the current circumstances through the adoption of the distance education system, which has become a need at the global level (Al-Muqbaliyah & Al-Fawair, 2020). This pandemic imposes on the various educational systems to refine and enhance the skills and capabilities of the academic and administrative staff in the field and support their capabilities towards employing technology and the transition towards digital learning in the current and future period until this virus recedes and goes away. Distance learning provides the means to enhance the knowledge, skills, and technical level of students at various educational levels and provides them with values that bear the responsibility of their learning with the direct support and promotion of their teachers, teachers, and all parents (Boughazy & Oreibi, 2016; Ferreiman, 2014).

In addition to the above, it has become imperative for the various educational systems to adopt everything that would enhance communication between parents and those in charge of the educational process in schools and universities in general (Hetsevich, 2017). It became also important to enhance their technological skills directly, to ensure that they follow up on their children correctly during the distance learning process. Students with learning disabilities required more attention, as their groups have been affected more than others in light of the repercussions of the Coronavirus by teachers and their parents (Mohamed, 2020). However, they are unable to learn basic skills and school subjects such as reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, attention, and concentration skills. This group needs special attention and education because their poor academic achievement may lead them to problems that may cause dropping out of school.

Previous Studies

Khoja (2019) identified the most common behavioral problems among third-year students with academic learning difficulties (reading, writing, arithmetic) and revealed the differences in behavioral problems between this group. The list of behavioral problems was applied to (34) students with academic learning disabilities. The results showed that the most prevalent behavioral problems among those with academic learning difficulties were attention-distraction and hyperactivity, while aggressive behavior ranked last.

Abdullah and Hamad (2020) explored teachers' views on the problems faced by students of the learning difficulties from the secondary stage during e-learning in light of the Corona pandemic and the mechanisms for activating education in light of this pandemic. The sample of the study consisted of (6) female teachers, which was chosen in the simple method. The results showed different problems such as dealing with electronic devices by parents and students effectively and the lack of electronic devices for a large proportion of students in this category. Teachers made suggestions to activate education in light of this pandemic, the most prominent of which was the adoption of blended education for this category and their qualification as teachers for how to deal in light of crises.

Al-Aqili (2020) investigated the role of e-learning in raising the efficiency of educational attainment for people with learning difficulties from the point of view of the teachers of the city of Benghazi. The study used the analytical descriptive approach and was applied to a sample of (51) female teachers. The result of the study concluded that (88.3) of the study sample confirm the absence of e-learning in teaching women with difficulties.

Al-Saiari et al (2020) explored the relationship between parents' communication, learning difficulties teachers, and the child's level in the individual program. The study sample consisted of (45) children enrolled in the learning difficulties program, where they were chosen in a systematic random manner. The researcher used the descriptive approach. The results of the study indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between parental communication methods, teachers of learning difficulties, and the level of the child in the individual educational program. The findings showed that there were statistically significant differences in the methods of communication between parents and teachers of learning difficulties according to the variable years of experience among the teachers.

Al-Muqbiliya and Al-Fawa'ir (2020) investigated the effect of a group counseling program on developing psychological resilience among female teachers with learning difficulties in the Governorate of South Al Batinah in the Sultanate of Oman. The study used the experimental approach and divided a sample of (16) teachers into two groups. The results revealed that there were statistically significant differences in the level of psychological resilience. The results

showed that there were no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group members on the post and follow-up scales of the resilience scale.

Al-Sharif (2020) identified the level of psychological burnout among female teachers of learning difficulties compared to female teachers of regular students in Makkah Al-Mukarramah. The sample included (275) female teachers, of whom (25) were teachers with learning difficulties, who represent the total number of the community of female teachers with learning difficulties in Makkah. The results found that female teachers with difficulties Learning and general class teachers suffer from an “average” level of general burnout. The results showed that there were differences in the scale dimensions combined and sporadic in favor of learning difficulties teachers. The results also showed differences in the dimensions of the scale due to demographic variables.

Methods

This section provides information on the methodology of the present study, which includes population and sample, research instrument, and validity and reliability of the instrument.

Population and Sample

The study population consists of all parents of students with learning disabilities in public education schools in Asir region, which are in the governorates (Abha, Khamis Mushait, Ahmed Rafida), and their number was (70) parents during the academic year 2021. The study sample consisted of (61) of parents of students with learning disabilities, who were randomly selected from the original study population. The following table shows the characteristics of the study sample.

Table 1. Distribution of the sample according to demographic variables

Variable	Category	NO.	Percentage
Gender	Male	30	49.2%
	Female	31	50.8%
	Total	61	100%
Academic level	Elementary	7	11.5%
	Intermediary	3	4.9%
	Secondary	8	13.1%
	Graduate	43	70.5%
	Total	76	100%

Research Instrument

The study instrument (the questionnaire) was used to collect the data, which is represented in the responses of the study sample to the items of the questionnaire. The study instrument was divided into two main parts. Part one: relates to the personal data of the respondents under the study (gender - educational level of the guardian). Part Two: It represents the main focus of the study that discusses the psychological pressures resulting from remote emergency education among parents of students with learning difficulties, and it consists of (14) paragraphs.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To verify the apparent validity of the study instrument, and the logical validity of the content of the questionnaire list, it was presented to judges with expertise in the field to provide their opinions and observations and their appreciation of the validity of the questionnaire. The instrument was modified accordingly to reach its final form.

The reliability of the questionnaire means that this questionnaire gives the same result if the questionnaire was redistributed more than once under the same conditions. In other words, the stability of the questionnaire means stability in the results of the questionnaire and not changing them significantly if it was redistributed to the sample members for several times. The researcher used the Cronbach Alpha method to measure the stability of the instrument, and the results were as shown in the following table.

Table 2. Cronbach's alpha coefficient to measure the stability of the instrument

Dimension	Number of paragraphs	Stability coefficient
Psychological stress resulting from distance education among parents of students with learning disabilities	14	0.940

It is clear from the results shown in the previous table that the value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all paragraphs of the questionnaire was (0.940), which is a high stability coefficient. Thus, the researcher has confirmed the validity and reliability of the study questionnaire, which is suitable for analyzing the results and answering the study questions.

Results and Discussion

This section provides the findings obtained from the present study. These findings are presented based on the research questions that guide the present research. To answer the question of the study, the researcher analyzed the paragraphs of the questionnaire and calculated the mean scores and percentages of the responses of the study sample members and the following table shows these results.

Table 3. The mean scores, relative weight, and standard deviation of the answers of the study sample arranged in descending order according to the mean scores

NO	Paragraph	Mean score	Relative weight	St. deviation	Result	rank
1.	I feel psychological pressure in light of the continuation of distance education during the pandemic of coronavirus	3.44	68.8%	1.259	Agree	11
2.	I worry about children staying at home for a long time	3.64	72.8%	1.170	Agree	7
3.	I'm nervous about negative and bad news	3.82	76.4%	1.025	Agree	3
4.	The cost of distance education at home is causing psychological stress during the Covid-19 pandemic.	3.46	69.2%	1.273	Agree	10
5.	I worry about children losing contact with peers during the COVID-19 pandemic.	3.95	79.0%	1.175	Agree	1
6.	I do not trust the means of distance education because I do not have enough idea about it	3.12	62.4%	1.226	Neutral	13

7.	I am nervous about the child's lack of response to our efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic.	3.84	76.8%	1.157	Agree	2
8.	I am nervous because of the children's inability to know the sources of services available online during the Covid-19 pandemic.	3.56	71.2%	1.057	Agree	9
9.	I am pessimistic about the future of our children during the Covid-19 pandemic.	3.26	65.2%	1.425	Neutral	12
10.	I cannot control the behavior of my child with learning disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.	3.57	71.4%	1.117	Agree	8
11.	I am concerned about family instability during the COVID-19 pandemic.	2.93	58.6%	1.250	Neutral	14
12.	I am concerned that children may not adapt to distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic.	3.71	74.2%	1.070	Agree	5
13.	I feel psychologically tired from the continuous care of children and its consequences during the Covid-19 pandemic.	3.75	75.0%	1.178	Agree	4
14.	I fear that distance education will affect the psychological state of children during the Covid-19 pandemic	3.71	74.2%	1.358	Agree	5 repeated
Total		3.55	71.0%	0.901	Agree	

The previous table shows the highest response to paragraph No. (5), which states, “I worry about children losing communication with peers during the Covid-19 pandemic,” with a mean score of (3.95) and a relative weight of (79.0%). A large percentage of the study sample members believe that the emerging coronavirus pandemic has negatively affected their children’s relationship with their peers and colleagues in terms of communication with them, which may reflect negatively on the children’s psychological status. The sample was less responsive to paragraph No. (11) which states that “I worry about family instability during the emerging coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic” with a mean score of (2.93) and a relative weight of (58.6%). It is clear from the previous statement that a neutral percentage of the study sample members are concerned as a result of family instability, due to the restrictions imposed by the Corona pandemic on the region.

To determine the level of psychological stress resulting from distance education among parents of students with learning disabilities during the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher divided stress into three levels (high level - medium level - low level). The scale's measuring points were calculated by ranges from (5-1=4), then dividing by (3) to get the length of the period (1.33), and adding it later to the lowest value in the scale, as shown in the following table.

Table 4. Mean scores of the levels of stress from the point of view of the study sample

NO.	Value	level of psychological stress
1	If the mean value ranges between 1- 2.33	Low level
2	If the mean value ranged between 2.33 - 3.66	Medium level
3	If the mean value is more than 3.66	High level

To apply the previous levels to the results of the analysis of the dimensions of the questionnaire, we find that the mean score of all paragraphs of the questionnaire was (3.55), which is a value ranging between 2.33 and 3.66 and indicates that the level of psychological stress had a medium level. The level of psychological stress was measured also according to the dimensions of gender and the academic qualification of the parent. To find the existence of differences, the researcher applied the Mann-Whitney U test to find the differences between two independent samples. The following table shows these results.

Table 5. The mean score of the responses of the sample and the results of the T-test according to the gender variable

Dimension	Gender	NO.	Mean score	Sum of score	T value	Sig.
Level of psychological stress	Male	30	30.72	921.50	456.500	0.902
	Female	31	31.27	969.50		

It is clear from the previous table that the value of the significance level reached (0.902), which is greater than the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$). Therefore, there are no statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the evaluation of the respondents about psychological stresses resulting from remote education among parents of students with learning difficulties during the Covid-19 pandemic due to the gender variable. The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to measure the presence of differences according to the academic qualification variable. The following two tables show these results.

Table 6. The ranking scores of the responses of the sample according to the educational level variable of the parent

Dimension	Groups	No.	Mean score	Kruskal-Wallis H	Freedom value	Sig
Level of psychological stress	elementary	7	9.14	0.179	2	0.914
	intermediate	3	1067			
	Secondary	8	9.38			

It is clear from the previous table that the value of the significance level reached (0.914), which is greater than the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$). Therefore, there are no statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the evaluation of the respondents about psychological stresses resulting from remote education among parents of students with learning difficulties

Conclusion

The results of this study showed that there was a high degree of agreement among the study sample towards the psychological stresses resulting from the emergency distance education among the parents of students with learning difficulties during the Covid-19 pandemic, with a relative weight of 71.0%. The presence of an average level of psychological stress resulting from distance education among parents of students with learning difficulties during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study sample feels anxiety about the interruption of their children's

communication with their peers and friends due to the emerging Covid-19 pandemic. The study sample members were concerned that their children might not respond to their efforts during the emerging Covid-19 pandemic.

Recommendation

In light of the results of the study, and after referring to the discussion of the main focus of the study, the study proposes several recommendations. The study recommends providing educational means to guide parents on how to deal with the psychological pressures they are experiencing in light of the continuation of distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is important to find alternatives for children to spend their time in useful ways during periods of home quarantine and directing parents and raising their awareness of the importance of staying away from negative and bad news that may cause them psychological stress. The study also recommends strengthening the children's relationship with their colleagues and peers during the emerging coronavirus pandemic through social media, video chats, and other technical alternatives

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