

Difficulties of field training among university students during the COVID-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to uncover the difficulties that special education students face in field training at Al-Balqa Applied University during the corona pandemic. The study investigated whether these difficulties were affected by gender (males-females). To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher designed survey consisting of 36 items. The sample of the study consisted of 30 male and female students enrolled in the field training course in the first semester of the academic year 2020/2021. The results showed that field training difficulties associated with the subscale of the students and supervisors were high. However, the difficulties related to the training center were medium. The study also showed no statistically significant differences in the difficulties between students due to the gender variable.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Many studies indicated that field training is very important in preparing students who want to be teachers in the pre-service stage [1]–[6]. Field training in special education is defined as a period that lasts for one semester and takes place in governmental and private training centers. Field training aims to provide students with practical and technical skills and to improve their teaching abilities [7]–[9].

Field training in special education aims to provide students with an opportunity to develop their skills in working with people with special needs, and to practice what they have learned theoretically in class [10]–[14]. Al-Balqa Applied University seeks to graduate students who are well trained and qualified. To achieve this purpose, the academic plan for students specialized in special education includes the field training course with nine credit hours. The students were asked to practice what they have learned in class in special education centers and in government and private schools. Training of students is carried out through several stages. In the first stage, the students visit the training center and introduce themselves to the cooperating teacher, and get acquainted with his/her method of working. The second stage includes the actual practice, in which the trainee started teaching the students.

Students face many difficulties in field training, and these difficulties were divided into three types, namely: difficulties related to the student (the trainee), the training center (program), and the supervisors (the trainers) [7], [15]. Many studies suggested that the difficulties related to the trainer/student, included: the poor achievement of the students in other courses, unavailability of students, students' poor participation in

activities organized by the university, and their inability to master practical skills [15]–[18]. Difficulties related to the field training center include the lack of the equipment needed to implement the training, the distant location of training centers from the residence of students, the large number of trainees in the training center, the lack of technical facilities, and the lack of interaction between the trainee and the trainees [19]–[26].

Difficulties related to the supervisors include the lack of field visits, poor communication with the academic supervisor, the lack of consulting services, and the absence of students [19], [25], [27], [28]. As for the gender variable, several studies found significant differences concerning difficulties and in favor of females [7], [29]. Other studies indicated that there are no statistical differences in the difficulties in favor of males [30]. Another studies indicated that no differences in the difficulties based on the variable of gender [3], [4], [8], [22], [31]. The current study is significant because it investigates difficulties facing students during the corona epidemic that affected studying in schools and universities and the performance of students in field training. Al-Momani and Alrabadi [32] indicated that in light of the spread of this epidemic it is necessary to provide students with electronic devices and other tools to enhance the training process.

The problem of the current study appears in an attempt to investigate the difficulties that students faced in field training. The study aimed to answer the following questions: i) What are the difficulties facing field training from the students' point of view during the corona pandemic? and ii) Are there statistically significant differences in field training difficulties due to the gender variable? In order to answer these research questions, the researchers used the following null hypothesis: there are no statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha=0.05$) between the means of students' answers with respect to the difficulties facing them in field training during corona pandemic due to the gender variable. The importance of the study comes from the fact that this study handles these difficulties in special education in particular, since teaching people with special needs requires individualizing education, and specialized training centers.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The study relied on the use of the descriptive approach, as it is more appropriate to its nature and objectives. One of the most important features of this approach is that it describes specific phenomena or events, collects facts and information about them, describes their circumstances, and reports their condition as they exist in reality. In many cases, descriptive research does not stop at the level of descriptive description or diagnosis. It is concerned with determining what the phenomena or events covered by the research should be, in light of certain values or standards, and proposing steps or methods that can be followed to reach the image it should have in light of these standards or values [32].

2.1. Sample of the study

The study was based on a population of male and female students from Ajloun University College affiliated with Al-Balqa Applied University. Male and female students were randomly selected. The number of sample students to whom the study tool was applied was 30 students, equally distributed into 15 male and 15 female students. This is in the first semester of the academic year (2020/2021).

2.2. Instrumentalities

The scale of difficulties of field training students of the Special Education Department during the corona pandemic. The scale was prepared by the researcher after reviewing some studies, such as [4], [7], [8], [21]. The scale/questionnaire consisted of 36 items divided equally into three sub-scales: the trainees, the training center, and supervisors. Scale correction: the researcher used a triple scale (always=3 degrees, sometimes=2 degrees, rarely=1 degree).

3. THE VALIDITY OF THE STUDY TOOL

3.1. Face validity

To ensure the validity of the study tool, it was presented in its initial form to a group of professors specialized in the field of education and psychology at Al-Balqa Applied University, the University of Jordan, and Yarmouk University. Their number reached 15 faculty members, and they were asked to express their opinion on the appropriateness of the fields and paragraphs. The tool was based on the nature of the study. The number of questionnaire phrases in its initial form was 42. The criterion of agreement (80%) was taken to delete, add, modify, or keep the phrases. Accordingly, duplicate phrases were excluded and others were modified until the questionnaire phrases became in their final form. It contains 36 statements distributed over different dimensions.

3.2. Constructive validity

To ensure the constructive validity of the scale, it was applied to a sample of 30 students outside the study sample. The Pearson correlation coefficient between each item and the sub-scale to which they belong was calculated using the statistical program (SPSS 21). This test is used to show the consistency of the items with the sub-scale they belong to. Consider the results in Table 1 showed that the values of the correlation coefficients between the items and the total degree of the subscale, in general, ranged between 0.394-0.775 and in statistical terms ranged between 0.01 and 0.05, which indicates the suitability of these items to their subscales. The results in Table 2 revealed that the values of the correlation coefficients between each subscale of the tool and the total degree of the tool/scale ranged between 0.792-0.913 and it is statistically significant 0.01, which indicates the suitability of these subscales for the tool.

Table 1. Correlation coefficients between each item and the total score of the subscale (n=30)

Difficulties related to the trainee/student		Difficulties related to the field training center		Difficulties related to supervisors	
Item	Correlation coefficient	Item	Correlation coefficient	Correlation coefficient	Item
1	0.428(**)	1	0.551(**)	0.564(**)	1
2	0.623(**)	2	0.542(**)	0.547(**)	2
3	0.775(**)	3	0.551(**)	0.724(**)	3
4	0.428(**)	4	0.623(**)	0.499(**)	4
5	0.721(**)	5	0.651(**)	0.670(**)	5
6	0.608(**)	6	0.627(**)	0.635(**)	6
7	0.721(**)	7	0.433(*)	0.747(**)	7
8	0.701(**)	8	0.394(*)	0.712(**)	8
9	0.683(**)	9	0.528(**)	0.605(**)	9
10	0.511(**)	10	0.533(**)	0.464(**)	10
11	0.609(**)	11	0.640(**)	0.569(**)	11
12	0.551(**)	12	0.531(**)	0.551(**)	12

*The correlation coefficient is statistically significant at ($\alpha=0.01$), **the correlation coefficient is statistically significant at ($\alpha=0.05$)

Table 2. Correlation coefficients between each subscale and the total degree of the scale (n=30)

Difficulties	Correlation coefficient with the total score of the subscales
Difficulties related to the trainee/student	0.792(**)
Difficulties related to the field training center	0.855(**)
Difficulties related to supervision	0.913(**)

*The correlation coefficient is statistically significant at ($\alpha=0.01$)

3.3. Stability of the scale/questionnaire

3.3.1. Cronbach's alpha

To verify the stability of the study tool (the questionnaire), the researcher applied it to 30 students from outside the study sample, and calculated the reliability coefficient using the Cronbach alpha coefficient, as shown in Table 3. The table shows that the stability coefficient for the subscales of the tool was high. These results were acceptable for the study since the stability factor is greater than 70% [33].

3.3.2. Index-validating

The validity index was calculated by calculating the square root of the reliability coefficient as shown in Table 3, as all of them express high stability rates ranging between (0.84-0.94). This result is acceptable for using the study tool (the questionnaire). Hence, the current study tool is highly stable, and the data obtained using the study tool are reliable.

Table 3. Stability coefficients for the domains of the study tool

	Items	Stability coefficient	Self-stability
First sub-scale	12	0.77	0.88
Second sub-scale	12	0.71	0.84
Third sub-scale	12	0.80	0.89
Total	36	0.88	0.94

3.4. Scale for interpreting data

To determine the length of the cells of the tripartite scale (the lower and upper limits) used in the study axes, a weight was given to the categories (high=3, medium=2, low=1), then the categories were classified into three levels of equal range through: category length = (largest value - lowest value) ÷ number of tool levels = $(3-1) \div 3 = 0.66$; and then this value was added to the lowest value in the scale. To determine the upper limit, the classification is low (1-1.67), medium (1.67-2.34), and high (2.34-3.00).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Results related to the first question: What are the difficulties facing field training from the students' point of view during the corona pandemic?

To answer this question, the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the responses of the participants were calculated as shown in Table 4. The table shows that the degree of difficulty for the first and third subscales was high, while it was medium for the second subscale. The first subscale "difficulties related to the trainee" came first with an arithmetic mean 2.63 and with a standard deviation of 0.32. The third domain "difficulties related to supervisors" came secondly with an arithmetic mean of 2.39 and with a standard deviation of 0.39. The second subscale "difficulties related to the field training center" was medium and came third with an arithmetic mean 2.17, and with a standard deviation of 0.37.

Table 4. The arithmetic means and standard deviations of students' responses (n=30)

Domain	Mean	Standard deviation	Degree
First subscale: difficulties related to the trainee/student	2.63	0.32	High
Second subscale: difficulties related to the field training center	2.17	0.37	Moderate
Third subscale: difficulties related to supervisors	2.39	0.39	High
Total	2.40	0.31	High

4.1.1. Difficulties related to the trainee/student

Table 5 shows that the degree of difficulties related to the trainee was high. It also appears that responses to item 8 "My academic achievement has decreased in other courses due to the large number of duties required in distance learning" came first with an arithmetic mean of 2.87, and with a standard deviation of 0.4. Responses to item 4 "I find myself alone without guidance during the corona pandemic," came second with an average of 2.83, and with a standard deviation of 0.46. Responses to item 10 "Poor communication with parents using counseling sessions" came thirdly with an arithmetic mean of 2.83, and with a standard deviation of 0.37. As for the items that ranked last, item one "I changed the training center due to the partial or total closure of the training center" ranked before the last, with an arithmetic mean of 2.33 and with a standard deviation of 0.71. Item 6 "I have no knowledge of the evaluation criteria in field training during the corona pandemic", ranked finally with an arithmetic mean of 2.23, and with a standard deviation of 0.82.

Table 5. Means and standard deviations of the participants' responses in the first subscale

No. of item	Item	Degree	Standard deviation	Mean
8	My academic achievement has decreased in other courses due to the large number of tasks required in distance learning	High	0.4	2.87
4	I find myself alone without direction during the corona pandemic	High	0.46	2.83
10	Poor communication with parents using counseling sessions	High	0.37	2.83
3	Because of the curfew, I did not get enough training	High	0.48	2.8
5	I am facing problems with appropriate teaching skills under distance education	High	0.66	2.67
9	The number of classes and activities are insufficient during the coronavirus pandemic	High	0.61	2.67
2	There is a gap between theory and practice, and the curfew increases the gap.	High	0.48	2.67
12	I feel that there is a need to develop my practical skills in my specialization	High	0.72	2.6
7	I am not completely devoted to field training, which affected my performance in training	High	0.67	2.6
11	Because of the ban gathering, the college did not provide activities related to field training this year as usual, and this affected my training skills.	High	0.73	2.47
1	I changed the training center due to partial or complete closure of the training center	Medium	0.71	2.33
6	I have no knowledge of the evaluation criteria in field training during the corona pandemic	Medium	0.82	2.23
	Total	High	0.32	2.63

4.1.2. Difficulties related to the field training center

Table 6 shows that the degree of difficulties related to the training center was medium. Item one "I was enrolled in a training center regardless of my desire due to the lack of centers operating during the corona pandemic" came in the first place with a mean of 2.73, and with a high degree. Item 12 "The small number of students who are always regular at the centers with special needs," came in the second place with an arithmetic mean of 2.7 and with a high degree. Item 5 "Technological support is insufficient to train us in light of distance learning and absence of students" was in the third place with an arithmetic mean of 2.4, and with a high degree. However, item 11 "The small number of operating centers during the lockdown reduced the possibility of choosing the best training center", and item 4 "A large number of students in the training center due to the closure of many centers" ranked last, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Arithmetic means and standard deviations of the participants in the second subscale

No. of items	Items	Degree	Standard deviation	Mean
1	I was enrolled in a training center regardless of my desire due to the lack of centers operating during the corona pandemic	High	0.64	2.73
12	The small number of students who are always regular at the centers with special needs	High	0.53	2.7
5	Technological support is insufficient to train us in light of distance learning and the absence of students	High	0.77	2.4
3	It was difficult to use transportations because of the defense, which has affected my commitment during training	High	0.77	2.4
2	I was not consulted when the cooperative teacher/trainer assigned for me	Medium	0.75	2.3
8	The training centers assign us tasks that exceed our capabilities, such as asking us to teach students at home	Medium	0.82	2.23
6	Difficulty in communication between the trainee and the cooperating teacher due to the absence of the cooperating teacher due to the procedures for reducing the working hours to 50%	Medium	0.87	2.2
7	Lack of equipment and materials (internet, educational aids)	Medium	0.73	2.13
10	The safety tools and materials (mask/glove/sterilization materials) are not available in the center	Medium	0.95	2.00
9	Some centers were forced to lockdown during training, which shortens the training time	Medium	0.87	1.93
11	The small number of operating centers during the lockdown reduced the possibility of choosing the best training center	Low	0.77	1.57
4	There was a large number of students in the training center due to the closure of many centers	Low	0.86	1.47
Difficulties related to the field training center		Medium	2.17	0.37

4.1.3. Difficulties related to the supervisors

Table 7 shows that the difficulties related to the supervisors was high. It was also found that item 1 “I was assigned tasks that I could not fulfill due to the nation-wide lockdown” came in first place with arithmetic mean of 2.9 and with a high degree of difficulty. Item 9 was in the second place, “I face technical difficulties on the internet when communicating with the academic supervisor as this is the main method under the ban” with an arithmetic mean of 2.77 and with a high degree of difficulty. On the other hand, item 11 “The training supervisors and the cooperating teacher try to reduce my stress level due to fear of coronavirus” and item 12 “Distance supervision replaced face-to-face supervision because of lockdowns and ban-gatherings” were ranked last with a medium degree of difficulty.

Table 7. Arithmetic means and standard deviations of participants' responses in the third subscale

No. of item	Items	Degree	Standard deviation	Mean
1	I was assigned tasks that I could not fulfill due to the nation-wide lockdown	High	0.31	2.9
9	I face technical difficulties when communicating with the academic supervisor.	High	0.50	2.77
3	Poor communication between the supervisors and the training center due to the lockdown	High	0.47	2.7
10	The academic supervisor relied on the evaluation of the directors and the cooperating teachers to evaluate me because of their inability to visit the training centers.	High	0.55	2.67
2	It was not possible to hold face-to-face meetings at the university with the academic supervisor due to the closure of teaching on the campus, which weakens training.	High	0.72	2.63
8	Inability to exchange visits of students between centers weakened exchanging experiences.	High	0.73	2.53
7	Field visits by the supervisor were not sufficient which weakened field training	High	0.73	2.47
6	The supervision of cooperating teachers at the centers was low due to reducing working hours to 50%.	High	0.73	2.47
4	The time used in field training is insufficient because of the lockdown.	Medium	0.87	2.17
5	Field visits by the academic supervisor are not sufficient, and this weakened field training.	Medium	0.91	2.07
11	The training supervisors and the cooperating teacher try to reduce my stress level due to fear of coronavirus	Medium	0.95	1.83
12	Distance supervision replaced face-to-face supervision because of lockdowns and ban-gatherings.	Low	0.51	1.5
The third domain: difficulties related to the supervision process		High	2.39	0.39

4.1.4. Are there statistically significant differences in training difficulties due to the gender variable?

To identify the differences between participants' responses about the field training difficulties due to the gender variable, the Mann-Whitney test was used because the sample size was less than 30. Table 8 shows that there are no statistically significant differences between the responses of the participants on all types of difficulties due to the gender variable. The T and P values are not statistically significant at the

significance level of 0.05, so the null hypothesis was accepted. This indicated that gender did not affect the participants' responses to difficulty related to the trainee, training center, and supervisors.

Table 8. Mann-Whitney test on the field training difficulties due to the gender variable

Dependent variable	Gender	Number	Ranking level	Sum of ranking	T value	P-value
Difficulties related to the trainee/student	Female	15	14.7	220.5	100.5	0.624
	Male	15	16.3	244.5		
Difficulties related to the field training center	Female	15	15.1	226.5	106.5	0.806
	Male	15	15.9	238.5		
Difficulties related to supervisors	Female	15	14.46667	217	97	0.539
	Male	15	16.53333	248		
All types of difficulties	Female	15	14.6	219	99	0.595
	Male	15	16.4	246		

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Discussion of the results of the first question

The results showed that difficulties related to the trainee/student during the corona pandemic were high with a mean of 2.40 and with a standard deviation of 0.31. This result is consistent with the results of other studies [15]–[19]. These results suggested that the wide-nation lockdown and the partial closure imposed by the corona crisis has affected the academic achievement of field training students. Their academic achievement has decreased due to the large number of homework's required in distance learning. They also did not take field training in a separate semester, but they are enrolled in other academic online courses. Moreover, they did not get enough training because of the curfew. Besides, the number of classes and activities are insufficient during the coronavirus pandemic. Because of the ban gathering, the university did not provide activities related to field training in 2020, and this affected their training skills. They also changed the training center due to partial or complete closure of the training center. In addition, the field training students did not do exchange visits between the centers, which weakened the opportunity to benefit from the experiences of the trainees and teachers in other centers due to the corona crisis.

Similarly, students face difficulties related to the supervision process with a high degree, and this is consistent with several study [19], [25], [27], [28]. This result suggest that the impact of the corona pandemic was also high on the aspects related to supervision. The reasons for the difficulty include the lockdowns, ban gatherings, and using distance learning. The absence of direct supervision during the crisis decreased the active participation of the supervisors in solving the problems that students face in field training.

The difficulties related to the training center were medium. This result was in line with other studies [19], [25], [27], [34]. This result shows that the impact of the corona pandemic was medium on the field training center because the large majority of these centers were private. However, they were affected financially due to the small number of students. The closure of some centers, the lack of equipment and the internet, and the large number of trainees affected negatively their training process.

5.2. Discussion of the results of the second question

The results showed that there were no statistically significant differences concerning the difficulties of field training due to the variable of gender. These results were consistent with the other studies [3], [4], [22], [31]. These results can be explained by referring to the fact that both males and females were affected by the lockdowns and the government measures to face the corona pandemic. Both genders are affected equally by the crisis because males and females enrolled in the same centers and there are no special centers for males or females, as is the case in neighboring countries such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and for this reason, the impact of gender in these difficulties was absent.

6. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the Corona pandemic has created difficulties for field training students. These difficulties whether related to the trainee student, the training center, and supervision process caused because of this pandemic. The results showed that students were affected to a high degree by difficulties related to the trainee and supervision process. The results also showed that students were affected moderately by the difficulties related to the training center. Therefore, the researcher recommends choosing suitable centers for students. These centers should be equipped with sufficient technological facilities to deal with distance learning during the pandemic coronavirus. The study has some limitations: the complete and partial lockdown that was imposed from time to time, and the inability of some students to access the internet.




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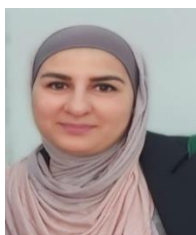
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