

The Impact of Using Online Training Internship on Special Education Students at King Khalid University During the Coronavirus Pandemic

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This study aimed to uncover challenges faced by students transitioning from field training to virtual training due to primary school closures amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It also sought to explore the emotions of female students during virtual training and their satisfaction levels. Employing a narrative design within the qualitative method, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, including individual written interviews and focus groups. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the results. The study included 28 first-semester students in the academic year 2021, with 12 participating in individual written interviews and 7 in the focus group. The results revealed numerous challenges stemming from the transition, such as the closure of primary schools, hindering access to specialized teachers, and the difficulty in finding suitable substitutes for teaching children with learning difficulties. Additionally, there was a notable inability to obtain authorization to teach children with learning difficulties remotely.

Keywords: field training, virtual training, coronavirus pandemic, narrative study

INTRODUCTION

The Corona pandemic has had a major impact on various aspects of life, such as the educational aspect. Due to its rapid spread and the fear of transmission of infection among students and employees of schools and universities, ministries of education around the world - and not only in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia - have made bold and quick decisions to convert studies to virtual classes that ensure physical distancing. This process was called emergency distance learning, which the Education and Evaluation Commission (2020) defined as a temporary solution for teaching that can be prepared quickly. It can be relied upon in times of emergencies and crises, which differs from e-learning, which requires planning and preparation for a longer period (Education and Evaluation Commission, 2020). This type of education is used when a sudden event occurs that prevents students from practising their academic lives as usual, using any available means to deliver information and complete educational courses (Al-Bakri, 2021).

Despite the advantages of the decision to move to emergency distance learning, it had many disadvantages that inspired researchers to delve into its study. Emergency distance education, in one way or another, limited educational institutions from achieving their usual pedagogical and educational goals, especially at the beginning of the pandemic (Wajdi et al., 2020). One of these problems is the inability of students in colleges to go to the field to receive appropriate training and to be satisfied with virtual training. Field training is an important part of the journey of students in the college in general, and students of the special education department in particular, which prepares and qualifies them to become experienced teachers for dealing with their students in the future.

Studying such phenomena can be justified by looking at published research on field training for special education students, especially during the Corona pandemic. It appears, to the best knowledge of the researcher, that the problem of this study has not been previously discussed for the target group, whether in Arab or foreign studies.

In a descriptive study, Sawalha (2020), conducted a questionnaire in which 34 male and female students from the Special Education Department participated, to identify the level of field training at Al-Ahliyya Amman University. The results showed that the quality level of the field training program in general was within the high level, and the students also showed their satisfaction. It depends largely on the educational supervisor and the procedures for landing in-field training and the cooperating teachers in the schools. However, students' satisfaction with the schools and their administrations was moderate.

In another descriptive study, Al-Asiri (2020) explored the evaluation of field training students in special education departments in 14 universities in the Kingdom for different tracks: autism, hearing disability, visual disability, and learning difficulties, and excluded intellectual disability. The study also aimed to determine the extent to which field education meets the labour market under Vision 2030. The results showed that the overall level of student satisfaction with field training was high, and there were statistically significant differences in favour of the learning difficulties track. The results of this study recommended that departments need to create a unified guide for field training and increase the period of field training to more than one semester.

Regarding the topic of field education during distance education during the coronavirus pandemic period, there was a single Arab descriptive study - to the best of the researcher's knowledge- but it does not relate to male and female special education students, but rather to female students in the Geography Department. This study was conducted by Taha (2021), in which the researcher aimed to determine the necessary training needs for female field training students from the perspective of faculty members and the female students themselves. The results of this study concluded that female field training students were significantly weak in the three dimensions studied by the questionnaire. The first dimension was the use of hybrid learning, which means mixing distance education and direct education by dividing the school week into two parts so that half of the students receive their education directly in school. The second dimension was the use of electronic programs in teaching, and the third was the use of various electronic methods in classroom evaluation. Therefore, the study recommended the necessity of intensifying courses for field training students on all three dimensions to meet the challenges of hybrid education during the Corona crisis.

Moreover, reviewing foreign literature did not yield studies related to field training for colleges of education during the Corona pandemic period. Rather, there were studies related to field training for colleges other than higher education. For example, Dani et al. (2020) conducted a study on students of the Hospitality Department at the Indian University of Dehradun to identify the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on their field training. Through the students' responses to the electronic questionnaires, it was found that 97% viewed the field training as negatively affected by the pandemic, which strongly affected the development of their practical skills in dealing with the future in the field.

Park and Jones (2021) used interviews and an electronic questionnaire to determine the impact of the pandemic on tourism and hospitality students. The result of this study concluded that there were many challenges that students faced due to their transition from actual field training to virtual training, such as electronic problems, Internet networks, and meetings with remote supervisors. The study alerted researchers to the importance of good planning and careful design of educational experiences so that virtual training achieves its goals just like actual field training. However, despite the challenges, this situation helped reveal good alternative methods of education, where active learning strategies were utilized to enhance student engagement and satisfaction with virtual training.

Finally, Patii and Sharma (2021) explored the virtual training experience of MBA students during the emergency distance learning period and made a comparison between their responses and the responses of the graduates who preceded them and who practised actual field training. The results showed that there were differences between the two groups, the most important of which was that the virtual training students, despite the pressure they felt, were better in some skills. The results noticed a slight increase in leadership

skills and a slightly greater increase in the ability to work within a team. There was also a significant increase in writing and speaking skills compared to graduates who preceded them in previous years, although the virtual training students had a limited scope of training compared to their predecessors. The study emphasized the importance of educational institutions focusing on developing virtual field training programs, as is the case with actual field training to adapt to changing circumstances and help provide students with the skills required for future work.

Through previous studies, we find that the current study agreed with Suleiman, (2016), Al-Laqani, (2020), Al-Sawalha (2020), Al-Asiri (2020), and Al-Qahtani (2021) in terms of choosing students from the Special Education Department in general as a sample for their studies. However, these studies selected samples from outside the learning difficulties track. This study also agreed with them in examining the field training experience but did not study it in light of emergency distance learning - virtual training - which has been researched in other studies on students who are not specializing in special education, such as (Taha, 2021; Dani et al., 2020; Park & Jones, 2021; Patii & Sharma, 2021).

Problem Statement

The problem of the study is manifested in two important matters from the researcher's perspective. The first matter came to the surface through the researcher's work for three consecutive years - six levels - as a supervisor of female field training students, moving between supervising female field training students 2 and 3. The researcher noticed that the female students were graduates of the eighth level in the first semester of the academic year 2022, who were the only students in the program who never had the opportunity to go to schools for training due to the closure of schools. Rather, they only went for one day to write a report about the school and the resource room for learning difficulties, which led to the emergence of several obstacles that limited the student's full benefit from the three field training programs.

As for the second matter, it was through reviewing previous Arab and foreign literature, that the researcher found an abundance of Arab and foreign studies that use the quantitative approach to examine the problems of field training students from many aspects. According to the best knowledge of the author, there is a scarcity of studies that relate to male or female students' field training and the challenges they faced during the coronavirus pandemic period in all educational specializations. Moreover, there is no study examining this topic using a qualitative approach, nor has it been conducted. No studies related to field education students in the Department of Special Education at King Khalid University have been conducted, whether using a qualitative or quantitative approach before or during the Corona pandemic.

Questions of the Study

Feedback is necessary to avoid problems and reduce errors. It was necessary to conduct a field study that addresses the stories of the target group of female field education students to evaluate strengths, identify weaknesses, and improve them. Therefore, a set of questions were formulated as follows:

- 1- What challenges did female field training students face in virtual training during the closure of primary schools?
- 2- What feelings did female field training students experience in virtual training during the closure of primary schools?
- 3- How satisfied were female students with converting field training to virtual training during the closure of primary schools?
- 4- To what extent were female field training students prepared to become teachers with learning difficulties after graduation?

Objectives of the Study

By listening to the students' narratives, the study aimed to identify the challenges that the students faced during the transition from field training to virtual training due to the closure of primary schools during the Corona pandemic. The study also aimed to identify the feelings that appeared among the female students during the virtual training and the extent of their satisfaction with it. Finally, identifying the readiness of female field training students to become teachers of children with learning difficulties in the future.

Significance of the Study

The study has theoretical and applied field importance. At the theoretical level, a survey was conducted of previous literature related to field training for special education students in particular, and educational specializations in general. It was found that there were no studies related to field training for special education students during the closure of schools due to the Corona pandemic. Therefore, research was conducted in studies related to the impact of the Corona pandemic on field training outside the boundaries of the College of Education. Also, the use of the narrative approach, which examines in depth the extent to which the stories narrated by the sample members are useful by presenting them in a chronological sequence reflects the meanings that the female students carry due to their not going to school during field training 1,2,3, where they reveal their feelings and share the challenges they face because of Virtual training, their satisfaction with it, and their readiness after graduation to become teachers in the future. The study also derives its practical significance from the importance of the topic it addressed, as this study helps improve the virtual training experience in circumstances that require closing schools for any reason. The results of this study can also be used in other programs in colleges of education, and elsewhere, after adapting them appropriately. The recommendations resulting from the study may benefit several entities, such as the Ministry of Education, universities, and relevant authorities, to bridge the gap resulting from educational loss and find solutions that support this category of students, male and female graduates, to prepare them well for the labour market. This study also came in response to the vision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2030 to move the educational process in the Kingdom to advanced positions among countries.

Study Limitations

The study was limited to several boundaries as follows:

- Thematic limits: The current study was limited to the challenges that female field education students faced during the coronavirus pandemic in a timeline from the beginning of the pandemic until their graduation in the special education department, and what their feelings were during that period.
- Spatial limits: The study was limited to the Department of Special Education - Learning Disabilities Track - at King Khalid University.
- Human Limits: Female field training students in the Department of Special Education - Learning Difficulties Track - at King Khalid University.
- Time limits: The first semester of the academic year 2021.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used the narrative design, which is one of the designs of the qualitative method (Creswell & Poth, 2018) because it is suitable to the objectives of this research. The goal of this study was to collect the stories of female field education students to describe their past and current personal experiences, aspirations, or future fears in a way Intensive training during field training 1, 2, and 3 during the period of school closure due to the Corona pandemic, and how these challenges caused educational loss for female field training students. Telling stories stimulates the process of deep thinking and recalling the details that the female field training students went through (Chan, 2017), giving this study more authenticity. In this design, the researcher can shed light on personal experiences deeply and richly, which enables the researcher to interpret the information that was shared by the sample members in a sequential timeline starting with the past, present, and future (Carless & Douglas, 2017; Wang & Geale, 2015).

To achieve the narrative research design, the researcher relied on interviews, which is one of the recognized methods in research that uses the qualitative approach in the fields of humanities and community sciences (Al-Abdul Karim, 2019). The researcher relied on semi-structured interviews that provided flexibility in navigating the narrative of the sample members' stories (Brinkmann, 2014). Two types of semi-structured interviews were used: individual written interviews and focus groups, and then the thematic

analysis method was used to analyze the interesting results that emerged from the various types of interviews.

Sampling

The population of this study included female field training students 3 in the Department of Special Education - Learning Difficulties Track - at King Khalid University. They were students for the eighth and final levels, studying in the first semester of the academic year 2021, and their number was 28 students. The number of sample members who participated in the individual written interviews was 12, and they were coded as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMPLE MEMBERS IN INDIVIDUAL WRITTEN INTERVIEWS

K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9	K10	K11	K12
All these students are field training students, section 3, studying in the first semester of the academic year 2022, and they were unknown to the researcher.											

The number of sample members who participated in the focus group was 7 female students, and they were coded as shown in Table.

TABLE 2
CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMPLE MEMBERS IN THE FOCUS GROUP

M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7
All these students are field training students, section 3, studying in the first semester of the academic year 2022, and they were unknown to the researcher.						

Instrument of the Study

The qualitative method is characterized by great flexibility that allows the researcher to choose more than one method to serve the objectives of the research and answer questions in a stronger way (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Therefore, the researcher used more than one type of semi-structured interview to give greater depth to the study. Two types were used, individual writing interviews and focus groups. Both interviews were conducted by preparing a set of basic topics that should be covered with the students and included several flexible and open-ended questions while avoiding specific questions whose answers were either yes or no. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because of the flexibility they provide field training students in giving answers and motivating them to share their experiences more deeply (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

The first type: was individual interviews, which were conducted in written form, to allow field training students to write more comfortably without revealing their names. This method provides more privacy for sample members if they do not wish to disclose their identity to the researcher. Whereas individual written interviews are an investigative technique through which specific data can be extracted that cannot be verbally (Schiek, 2014).

The second type is a focus group, which is one of the types of interviews that are used in the qualitative approach, as it is a group interview. This type of interview was chosen due to the researcher's desire to increase interaction between the female field training students, and to remind each other of the important experiences they went through during the lockdown period in primary schools (Al-Abdulkarim, 2019). This interview was a subsequent step to the individual written interviews that were conducted previously, to discuss some of the points raised by some female field training students in the individual written interviews.

Procedures of the Study

First: Individual semi-structured written interviews.

- The main topics that the students will talk about have been identified, which are (the challenges that the students faced during the virtual training and talking about their different feelings during that period, as well as presenting their opinions in the virtual method presented by the faculty members, and finally their willingness to become teachers with learning difficulties).
- Students were informed not to write their names in the interview.
- The students were urged to be honest and transparent in writing the interviews.
- The researcher conducted 12 interviews during two full weeks.
- Later, thematic analysis was carried out.

Second: Focus group

- After conducting individual written interviews and obtaining interesting results, the researcher considered it necessary to conduct a focus group for several female field training students, to discuss some points in greater depth.
- The students were informed that participation was voluntary for those who wanted to join the focus group.
- Coordination was made with the leader of the field female student group to conduct a focus group via the Zoom program after completing the evaluation, monitoring, and confirming grades.
- For female field training students not to feel embarrassed in participating in the focus group, the female students were asked to change their names on the screen before starting the interview.
- The interviews were transcribed in writing, to conduct a thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

The narrative analysis method was used for individual written interviews and for the focus group to answer the study questions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Reliability

Lincoln & Guba (1985) defined the reliability of qualitative research as the extent to which the data and the results of its analysis are trusted, and this is achieved through four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and congruency:

Credibility is defined as confidence in the truth of the results, and the extent to which the results match reality (Stahl & King, 2020), and it is the term that corresponds to the internal validity of quantitative research (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Al-Abdul Karim (2019) argued that credibility is the most important of the four criteria for ensuring the reliability of qualitative research. Therefore, the study relied on several methods. First, is triangulation, which means using more than one method to collect information. It is one of the strengths of qualitative research (Abdalla et al., 2018). Here, individual written interviews and a focus group were used. The person who conducted the interviews was the main researcher, as an assistant was not hired to conduct them, to ensure that the understanding of some of the field training students' responses would not change due to the multiplicity of people conducting the research. Interviews were also conducted for the female students without the researcher knowing their names, as the researcher was supervising them in Field Course 3 at that time, to ensure the credibility of the study. They were also urged to provide correct information without feeling embarrassed. Finally, the students were assured that the interviews were voluntary.

Transferability: It is the term that corresponds to external validity in quantitative research, which means the extent to which the results of the study can be applied to other contexts (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). It is considered somewhat difficult in qualitative research because qualitative research does not aim for replication. However, it may be possible to provide a dense description of the steps for implementing the study in all its details, sufficient to enable it to be applied in other similar cases (Stahl & King, 2020). To try to ensure transferability, the research was provided with in-depth details about the conditions for

applying the study, the method of applying the interviews, and the period for conducting them, to understand the phenomenon studied to help researchers in similar topics benefit from the results related to this research.

Dependability: It corresponds to consistency in quantitative research, as consistency means that if the study were re-applied in the same circumstances, it would produce similar results (Al-Abdulkarim, 2019), and since results in qualitative research are distinct for a specific time and place (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). This problem can be solved through a detailed description of the design of research procedures and data collection steps.

Confirmability: It is a term that corresponds to objectivity in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and it means addressing the concern that may appear to the reader regarding the influence of the researcher's subjectivity on the study's procedures and results (Al-Abdulkarim, 2019), or in other words that the interpretations and results reflect experiences. Participants' experience does not include researcher biases (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Therefore, the researcher sought the help of a colleague in the Special Education Department to review the steps of the research, including procedures and data analysis, and to ensure impartiality in presenting and discussing the data analysis report.

RESULTS

In this section, the results will be presented and discussed through four narrative sections organized chronologically, starting from the beginning of the pandemic at the academic level that precedes the students joining a field course (1) and ending with their graduation, while primary schools were still closed. The results of the analysis of both the individual written interviews and the focus group will be integrated into the four sections in a manner consistent with the narrative approach to be sequential from the beginning of the pandemic until the moment the interviews were conducted, and then followed by a discussion of the results.

Enthusiasm From the Beginning, However!

Field training is an important part of the lives of College of Education students in general, and this is also the case with special education students. In every semester in which they progress academically, different and conflicting feelings form between enthusiasm and anxiety, and between aspiration and apprehension. In the fifth level, these conflicting feelings are at their peak. These students become students in field training (1) in the next semester. Despite the conflicting feelings, enthusiasm and aspiration to go through the experience prevail over all other negative feelings. Student K5 wrote, "Since the beginning of our study, the field training courses were the courses we most wanted to reach." Among all the courses in the program," which was confirmed by her fellow student K11 when she expressed her great enthusiasm for field training, "Frankly, since my acceptance into the learning disabilities major, I have been very excited about the field training courses, especially the third one, as I will devote myself to it completely, as I have no other subjects to share with me. I imagined myself as a teacher and had my students to whom I taught, and I saw the achievement I had achieved with them."

But the unexpected happened, an event that confused the entire world in all its sectors. When December 2019 came, the Coronavirus began to spread among the people. Chaos occurred and this disease was announced at the end of the same month (World Health Organization, 2019). The alarm was sounded, and the disease began to approach until the first confirmed case arrived in a citizen coming to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on March 2 (Saudi Ministry of Health, 2020). The situation worsened, and the Ministry of Education announced the suspension of studies in all public and higher education institutions on March 9, 2020. (Saudi Ministry of Education, 2020), and everyone was concerned. Students K7 expressed:

This news was very difficult for us, and questions crowded my thoughts: How can it be prevented?! How is it transmitted from one person to another?! How can one deal with it?! What are the symptoms of this virus?! Can someone infected with it recover?! When I asked myself these questions, I began searching for answers to on several websites that are

interested in presenting new information about this virus. I read many articles that talk about the pandemic, and while I was following the developments, I almost fell into a state of panic, fear, stress, and anxiety about my health and the health of my family due to the many rumours we hear and read, all of which revolve around this topic (K7, 2021).

The concern was not limited to the health aspect, but rather extended to the educational aspect, as educational institutions made a great effort regarding the transition to emergency distance learning, and converting all classroom lectures to virtual classes for fear of the spread of the disease among students. Student K8 expressed her concern about the educational situation. "It was Fear and anxiety that plagued me, not only in terms of my health but also regarding my studies, so questions were running through my head: What would the academic situation be like? And would it be right for it to be only remotely? And many of the questions I asked myself, these were indeed days full of thinking, anxiety, and extreme pressure."

This pandemic was a challenge for these institutions, as emergency distance learning forced them to move to teaching through means they had not previously dealt with. Despite the difficulty of the situation, this period allowed these institutions to be prepared to make emergency plans in the event of a future crisis (Hodges et al., 2020).

I Am in Field Training (1 And 2) and the Schools Are Closed, What Should I Do?

The female students have reached the sixth level, and they will have to study the field training course (1). Due to the importance of the field training courses, the Special Education Department and its members had to quickly adapt to the problem of closing primary schools by finding alternative solutions and activating virtual training, especially since female students in the learning difficulties track were not enabled to teach through the teaching platform - due to the lack of access - which was activated to teach all stages of general education in the Kingdom, including the primary stage.

The field training (1) was based on visiting schools to write reports in general, such as those related to the school environment, the learning disability children, the learning disability teacher, and the resource room. Because the situation occurred suddenly, everyone had to respond immediately to the current situation and act quickly even though many faculty members and students had never experienced distance education. Therefore, faculty members searched for alternative methods, using all possible means to deliver information and complete courses in a way that suits their students, such as using Blackboard, Zoom, emails, and WhatsApp groups (Golden, 2020).

The faculty members sent video clips and pictures related to schools, the classroom environment, resource rooms, and imagining the presence of children with learning difficulties to write reports. There were also some requirements for the students to search for clips and write reports about them. Student M4 said, "The subject teacher used to send us weekly via the Blackboard program a group of pictures and video clips with the requirements that we must complete and submit the following week." This did not suit most of the students, whether in the individual written interviews or the focus group, especially the topic of imagining the situation of a child with learning difficulties, which may be due to the newness of the experience to them and the course professor. Student K10 wrote: "I am tired of imagining situations and imposing assumptions." Through the individual written interviews and the focus group, it appeared to the researcher that most of the female students had difficulty concerning self-learning and searching for sources of information, which constituted a real challenge for them in this period. When clarified by the female students, the reason was that they were accustomed to obtaining ready-made information in previous courses. There was also no training to search for information from different channels.

Student M2 also shared her opinion on this method, "We were asked to write reports about the school and the resource room by searching for video clips, and even when we searched in the search engines we did not find a special resource room for students with learning difficulties, but we found a resource room for ordinary students." She added, "The truth is that I have never seen a learning difficulties resource room on the ground before. In the videos that I obtained, I saw a group of chairs, tables, corners, and students, but I do not know what is happening there." Student M3 confirmed her words by saying, "We have never

seen a real resource room before, and we should have written a model report about it.” But Student K8 had a different opinion about self-learning:

If there is a positive thing that I got out of the virtual training, it is the strengthening of my self-learning. It improved my information-searching skills. I was given many assignments in all stages of the virtual training, all of which I did on my own, as I did not see in reality how to explain, for example, or make a plan to modify behaviour or use measures. I watched video clips to learn how to explain to students with learning disabilities, in addition to how to design a plan to modify behaviour. I asked some of the faculty members and researchers in these fields, and I took information from them, despite some of the negatives that I encountered in not having experienced field training on the ground, there are some positives as well, and I am grateful for them (K8, 2021).

Field training (1) ended with collective dissatisfaction, and the move was made to field training (2) and hopes were restored to open primary schools, but the situation continued as it was, and a feeling of frustration spread among the students. Student M3 said, “We finished field training (1) by watching the clips and writing reports. We thought that field training 2 would take place on the ground because it was more important.” As for her colleague M2, she was not hopeful that the situation would improve, saying, “All the expectations that we made before field training (1) had ended, and we did not hope that field training (2) would be in schools. The faculty member will ask for it, we will do it just to get the grades.” But there was a bright side. The majority of participants confirmed that the field training (2) was better than the previous one, despite the presence of some reservations. This may be because a period had passed since the pandemic and the faculty members in charge of the field training course (2) had arranged their techniques and method of teaching. There was more benefit in terms of dealing with diagnostic standards for learning difficulties, and student M7 confirmed, “Field training (2) was better than field training (1) because we had new models, and they were applied. The faculty member was explaining in the lecture and we were applying.”

Student K11 mentioned, “The faculty member was teaching us how to deal with standards, and in each lecture, he discussed with each student individually to ensure that she understood the requirements of the course, and he was checking our assignments. Frankly, it helped us a lot, and I loved the field training (2).” Student M6 confirmed that one of the methods that one of the teaching members used was to bring a live model to which Student K2 applied. She indicated, “In field training (2), the requirement was that I explain to a student, who is his daughter, and she had a hearing problem, and for me, this almost touched reality, I was able to act despite the mistakes, but of course it is better than field training (1).”

The seventh level has ended, and the field training course (2) has ended with it. All that remained was the eighth and final level and after that the joy of graduation.

A Frustration, Even at Field Training (3)?!

The female students are in the final level and have now reached the final field training course (3), which the student devotes herself to fully without participating in other courses. However, the situation continued, and the primary school children were still learning remotely. The female field training students were still training virtually, which did not give the student the feeling and real experience that she gained from teaching real children with learning difficulties. These students have not experienced an important part in forming their knowledge that affects their understanding of the way of work that they will do in the future as teachers of learning difficulties, which all of their previous colleagues have experienced in the Department.

After completing the actual field training (1 and 2), the student will be ready to assume the role of teacher with all her duties since the first week in the field training (3), but were the students prepared for this? This is the question that the researcher asked them during the interviews, and Student M5 answered, “No, of course, our preparation was weak,” and everyone in the focus group agreed with her on that. Before arriving at the field training, they must have mastered the conduct of diagnostic tests, the skills of writing

an individual educational plan, formulating various types of goals, and knowing the strengths and needs of a child with learning difficulties. Thus, the only thing left for the student in Field Training 3 is to write teaching plans, apply them, and create the educational methods that pertain to her, in addition to making a behaviour modification plan for a child with learning difficulties.

Therefore, appropriate solutions had to be found to make the most of field training (3) in light of the female students' inability to master the requirements of the previous levels. One of the solutions was for female students to go to schools to report on the school and a resource room for learning difficulties, which is one of the requirements of field training (1) that the female students had never experienced before. Despite the enthusiasm of the female students to go to school to write the report, Student M3 said, "It is true that we were happy to go to school, but the schools were very depressing and there were no female students. I wished that we had been able to teach the children for a long time." Despite the course teacher's keenness to have them go to schools and write reports and see learning difficulties resource rooms, they mostly did not see visiting schools as a useful or enjoyable step due to the primary schools being devoid of children and not being prepared. Student K7 confirmed, "Unfortunately, some schools did not receive us, and their excuse was the presence of female students. When we went to another school, its readiness was weak even though they had prior knowledge of our arrival." Student K8 agreed with her opinion saying, "I was hoping that schools would cooperate more with us, so our going to schools and giving us teaching powers through the platform is not only beneficial to us, but to society in general." However, Student K6 had a different opinion about the school's cooperation with them and answered questions that aroused their curiosity. This was also the case with Student K1, despite her reservations about not meeting the learning difficulties teacher. "I did not face a problem while going to school. The school administration cooperated with me greatly and allowed me to tour the school. The school answered all my questions, but there were no learning difficulties teacher, which constituted an obstacle in writing my report."

During the field training (3), the requirements for the field training (2) were reviewed and the students' mastery of them was ensured in conjunction with assuming the role of the learning difficulties teacher. One of the solutions to fulfil this role was for the students to communicate with the mothers of children with learning difficulties to obtain their approval, and begin implementing Field training requirements remotely. However, there was no significant response, so we moved to the alternative plan, which is virtual training, and conducting the field training requirements as much as possible on children from the family or acquaintances of the student herself. If the child is in the third grade of primary school, he studies the skills of the fourth grade, and so on. The student, for example, writes reports, conducts diagnostic tests, watches the child during the classes he attends on the platform remotely, records lessons via video in a way that preserves the privacy of both the student and the child, and finally presents a behaviour modification plan for one of the undesirable behaviours that the child performs, such as nail biting, or playing, or using a mobile phone for a long time. Student M4 said, "For me, I benefited a lot from the behaviour modification plan and the steps for preparing it, dividing it, and designing the schedules for a child of my relatives." However, there was a reservation about this method because the child was from the same family. Student M6 said: "It was difficult because the child I chose is my brother, and he excels academically and answers questions quickly even if the lesson is unknown to him, in addition to wasting time joking and laughing. It was difficult also in choosing appropriate photography angles, and re-shooting more than once."

As for those who were unable to work with a child, they would perform diagnostic tests and various models by default, and they would have to come to college with one of their colleagues who had the same situation to do the lesson work, with one of them acting as the teacher and the other playing the role of the child who already had instructions from a professor. In the course, the student performs an action that poses a challenge to the student who is playing the role of the teacher, which is what the students who did this experience liked very much. Student M1 said:

I am one of the students who did the lesson at the university, and it was a very enjoyable and useful experience because the course teacher gave the student to whom the lesson was taught instructions to do certain things, such as being very active, asking permission a lot, or wanting to talk outside the topic of the lesson. It was not I had planned that I would face

this behaviour, unlike my colleagues who recorded video clips in their homes. They had a normal child in front of them, and he had no behaviour, from behind the camera, where you can tell him that when to calm down, you will take candy, and naturally there will be laughter and joking because he is a child from the same family. (M1, 2021).

Student M4 confirmed her by saying, “It was a wonderful experience when I went to the university and taught the lesson with my colleagues as if the simulation was real with the presence of special raw materials such as the blackboard, and the actions of the student for whom I had not taken an account.” What distinguished this method was that all the female students who attended learned from the mistakes of their colleagues, unlike the video clips that were sent privately to the course teacher. Student M4 said, “If the video was filmed, we would not watch all the videos, and each student would keep the application for herself, unlike benefiting from the application of the female colleagues in front of us. Learning from the mistakes of others was a wonderful experience!” Thus, the last semester of the bachelor’s degree ended and the students graduated.

We Graduated Without Going to the Field. How Do We Compensate for What We Missed?!

Through the interviews, the researcher noticed that all the female students, without exception, were overcome with a great state of enthusiasm and longing to go to field training to apply what they had learned from theoretical sciences to school. Student M2 commented, “In the first levels, we visited a daycare centre. Our enthusiasm was high to repeat it more than once. This visit doubled our enthusiasm for field training.” But the semester ended, and with it, the field training (3) ended, and many hopes of going to the field were dashed, despite the appearance of a glimmer of hope after the return of studies in the middle and high school levels, and the hope that the primary school students would return, but that did not happen. Student M2 said, “I had hope for field training (3) and I was very excited and my optimism was based on the return of middle and high school students, and it was expected that the elementary school would join the rest.” Her colleague M4 shared the same opinion, as she said, “Every time we notice that the extension continues to close schools, but the frustration grows more every time.” The students did not have the opportunity to gain the direct experiences that they would have had if they had taught children with learning difficulties in their schools. In a sad tone, Student M1 said, “It is a shame we did not go to the field, as it is the thing we were most waiting for during our studies.” She followed her words by saying, “What saddens us most is that we are the only group. We only went to the schools for one day to write a report on the schools, which the course teacher asked of us.” Her colleague M3 added to her words, as she expressed her opinion strongly, saying, “Despite the field training course teachers’ attempt to provide the best possible, our failure to go to the schools constituted a point. Our weaknesses are difficult or impossible to compensate for through indoctrination, acting, or even imagination.”

The department and its members tried to adapt to the situation to provide the best possible experience and were keen for field training to take place in primary schools due to the presence of learning difficulties programs there. Despite the suggestions of female students to go to middle or secondary schools, or to go to special education institutes, that was not the case. It may conflict with the objectives of the course, firstly, because there are no learning difficulties programs, and secondly, there is no authority to authorize field training students to teach children with learning difficulties through the educational platform, in addition to not activating the learning difficulties classes on the platform appropriately. Student M2 said, “We were frustrated because we could not go into the field. Despite the decision to return to the middle and high school levels, I was hoping that the university would transfer the training to the middle stage, to the secondary stage, or even to special education centres. I wanted to benefit from meeting the learning difficulties teacher, and learning from her.” Student M4 said, “I was hoping we can attend with any teacher with learning difficulties through the platform to learn about the method and games that the teacher presents to the students.”

Among the aspirations that the students wished for was to enhance cooperation between the department and the schools, which they saw as necessary for the proper success of field training. However, due to the closure of schools, it was somewhat difficult to act to solve some of the problems related to field training,

due to the lack of female students in primary schools at all. Student K8 had an opinion that schools should be prepared appropriately to cooperate with the Special Education Department, especially since the recent period of school closures. Schools were allowing some primary school students to attend schools if they needed additional help, and students with learning difficulties certainly needed that, so female students could visit schools to write reports. There were no female teachers or students with learning difficulties, and this may be due to the parents' unwillingness for their children to go to school for fear of infection. Student K8 stated, "Our wish to go to field training 3 was great, because it was the most important field training for us, and the possibility of its application on the ground was very high if the problems were dealt with and appropriate solutions were found." This was the majority opinion in individual written interviews or the focus group.

Several female students had another wish, which was to intensify the specialization subjects support them more with the practical side, and reduce the general subjects. Student M4 said, "At the beginning of my field training studies, I learned that one of the universities in the Kingdom intensified the practical side in the early levels. In my opinion, it is a beautiful idea, so the student can access the field training courses. We missed this thing, and most of the courses we studied were theoretical, whether general courses or specializations. We were most shocked that our virtual training was mostly theoretical." Student K1 confirmed this statement by saying, "We faced many challenges in the virtual training. It lacks positive communication, making it difficult for us to communicate our ideas. We also felt bored, and lack of seriousness in doing the requirements because they were dominated by the theoretical aspect." Moreover, Student K4 strongly expressed her opinion through individual written interviews, "We were wronged in our entire studies and training, as most of the courses we taught were outside the specialization, which made us study specialization subjects in the last levels. The same thing happened with field training, and when the pandemic happened, subjects with learning difficulties were taught remotely. Field training has become virtual training. I wish the focus had been on the specialized subjects from the first levels, and the practical aspect therein had been focused more."

One of the points that the female students raised was that the students who preceded them and trained in the field were better than them, as they deal with children who have real learning difficulties, which certainly affects gaining a positive experience. Student M7 said, "There is a difference between me and any female graduate. She is dealing with a real student, and I am dealing with a hypothetical student." Although the graduates were under great pressure, they fully performed the role of learning difficulties teacher at a rate of 6 classes per week for approximately 3 months, a number that does not compare to the number of classes performed by the virtual training students. Each of these students recorded one video clip of a lesson she conducted with children of the family, or she led one virtual class in the college building. However, the students felt that their predecessors were much better at the academic level. Student M1 said, "I expect, despite the pressure, that the situation for them is easier because they see the student in front of them, and notice the difficulties she faces, and on this basis, they can formulate goals that suit the child's condition." Student M6 confirmed her words by saying, "I think they are better because they faced the training themselves, so they are more confident in themselves." In the same opinion, Student M3 said, "Even if what was required of them was tiring, they certainly learned better."

The largest number of female students, whether participating in individual written interviews or the focus group, expressed negative feelings about preparing to become teachers with learning difficulties after graduation. This was due to their lack of confidence in the educational outcomes they obtained from converting vocational training courses at all levels to Virtual training. Student K3 stated, "In the field of learning difficulties, a mistake has a high price, and it is the future of the child I will teach." Student K4 expressed her fear of making teaching mistakes in the future, and not knowing the appropriate way to deal with the child. She said, "I have a very great fear that I will not succeed in teaching. I have a child with learning difficulties, and I will not know how to use the methods with him, especially if he is stubborn, or has hyperactivity. I am also afraid that there will be no one to supervise him and guide me if I make a mistake." Their colleague, M3, had the same opinion: "I fear that I will do injustice to my students because I lack the experience." Despite the feelings of fear that the female students talked about, a small number, not exceeding three female students, believed that their fear, which is a natural feeling, made them ready to

become a teacher, and that they would learn more through their interaction. Student K8 said, “My feelings are unstable, as fear is gripping me because I have not done actual field training. But I will be happy to give what I have, and I will gain experience by going out on the field.” Student M7 and K11 expressed their willingness without any reservations, as they said, “Yes, with pleasure,” and the other, “Yes, I am fully prepared to go into the field after graduation.”

Finally, through the students’ narratives on the challenges they faced during the virtual training, the different feelings they experienced, and the extent of their readiness to become teachers with learning difficulties in the future, they did not express their satisfaction in general with the field training at its three levels after transferring to the virtual training. Student M6 said, “Honestly, and unfortunately, I say that I did not benefit fully from Field 1, 2, and 3, as the information, theories, teaching methods, and individual educational plan all needed to be applied on the ground and not fantasies and speculations of my own! I was hoping to experience going down to the ground and discovering the information for myself.” Student M4 said, “The name of the course is (field training) and it means that we apply what we have learned in the work field with real children whose behaviour and levels of understanding and awareness I can see. However, for the field training to be mostly theoretical, it is not useful to me, as I learned in the previous levels theoretically, and it is necessary to apply to something real.” Student K3 affirmed this opinion while providing a proposal that might help compensate for the educational loss of these graduates, saying, “Despite the attempt of those responsible for the field to provide the utmost effort, not going to field training is a shortcoming that is impossible to compensate for through indoctrination, imagination, or acting. Therefore, I hope there will be mandatory courses for three months after graduation so I can practice properly with real examples.” The students’ stories did not end there, but the challenges that stood in the way of their proper training had consequences that must be paid attention to, and solutions should be developed for them.

DISCUSSION

It is clear from the results that the transition from actual field training to virtual training during the coronavirus pandemic has caused the emergence of many challenges that students of the learning disabilities track faced. These challenges were represented by the closure of primary schools, and thus the inability to benefit from the experience of learning difficulties teachers, in addition to the extreme difficulty in finding a substitute child for a child with learning difficulties to teach, with their inability to obtain the authority to teach real learning difficulties children remotely. They also faced difficulty in self-education skills and obtaining information from their sources, which affected their skill and cognitive development. These results agree with Dani et al. (2020), which confirmed that virtual training did not have a positive impact on the skill and cognitive outcomes of the trainees.

It appears from the results that resorting to virtual training puts great psychological pressure on the students’ feelings. There was a lack of acceptance among the students of the reality that the pandemic was imposed on the world and everyone had to deal with the new circumstance in alternative, unusual ways. Patii and Sharma (2021) confirmed that the transition to virtual training put students under great pressure. In addition, all the female students in the sample, without exception, were mostly frustrated by not practising field training effectively in schools after the great enthusiasm they felt before the arrival of the Corona pandemic. All members of the sample, whether in individual interviews or written focus groups, were sceptical about the effectiveness of virtual training in preparing them appropriately. They regretted that they did not receive actual field training like their previous female graduates, even though the female graduates had more requirements than them. This point contradicted Patii and Sharma (2021), who confirmed that the virtual training students were better at the required skills in their proficiency in the labour market despite the limited training requirements compared to those who graduated before them.

As clear from the analysis of the individual written interviews and the focus group, satisfaction increased slightly as the level of virtual training progressed. However, overall, it did not meet the desired satisfaction in its three levels despite the efforts made by the faculty members to find alternative solutions and ideas to conduct the educational process in a manner as appropriate as possible. Students’ encounters

with many challenges and negative emotions had a severe negative impact on their skills and cognitive preparation. This result was consistent with students' general dissatisfaction with actual or virtual field training in previous studies (Soliman, 2016; Taha, 2021; Al-Laqani, 2020). On the contrary, students had a high level of satisfaction with field training programs (Sawalha, 2020; Al-Asiri, 2020; Al-Qahtani, 2020).

Moreover, it appears that the female students developed negative attitudes and feelings towards the virtual training, which led to their dissatisfaction with it due to the challenges they faced. These trends greatly affected their self-confidence, their level of education, and their skills to become teachers in the future. Only two female students out of all the sample members in the two interviews expressed their willingness to enter the labour market, which is consistent with (Dani et al., 2020) and disagrees with (Patii & Sharma, 2021), which emphasized that virtual training enhanced leadership and teamwork skills, and also developed students' writing and speaking skills. However, their study recommended the need to develop virtual training to provide students with the skills necessary for future work, which is the same recommendation confirmed by Park and Jones (2021).

However, it is not possible to go back in time, and searching for solutions to compensate for the educational loss is imperative. Field training does not concern the student only, as she is part of an educational system, and any defect in her preparation upsets the balance of the educational process as a whole. Now that life has returned to normal, and children have returned to their schools, we must think seriously about how to compensate for the educational loss, by strengthening communication between the university, represented by the department, and the graduates' committee with the schools to open the way for training or volunteering for a semester after graduation for those who want to do so. This could be a solution that helps female students enhance their self-confidence, hone the skills they learned during virtual training, and practice them in reality.

Bachelor's programs in colleges of education have been closed in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, but attention must be paid if the programs are opened again to ensure the development of study plans by enhancing the practical aspect in all specialization courses. This step is important to allow male or female students to reach the field training courses fully. The courses must also enhance students' development of research skills from reliable scientific channels, in addition to motivating students to use self-education skills, so that the students should not rely on obtaining information directly from a faculty member so that they do not become prisoners of indoctrination and the problems that have arisen.

In conclusion, no one knew that there was a pandemic that would affect all aspects of life, including educational life, which led to great confusion at the beginning of the pandemic. Hodges et al. (2020) argued that educational institutions must make emergency educational plans and prepare themselves well in anticipation of any event that affects the educational process, as life is full of surprises.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With the recent trend towards remote work in most fields, there is an urgent need to prepare a plan with clear objectives for virtual training in all educational programs to provide students with the skills necessary for the labour market similar to actual field training. The study recommends providing voluntary training services after graduation for female students who received virtual training in cooperation between universities, and public and private schools that have programs for learning difficulties, to compensate for their educational loss. It also recommended activating the role of the Alumni Committee to coordinate meetings between graduates and virtual training students to share experiences and learn from them. There is a need to have emergency plans prepared in advance before any circumstance occurs that prevents education from continuing in the desired manner without the occurrence of fundamental problems. The study also recommends conducting additional studies aimed at uncovering more solutions to address educational loss and proposals that can be used to meet the challenges of going into the field without obtaining actual field training.

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