

Special education teachers' perspectives on using individualized education plans for online education for children with Autism aged between 5 to 10 years in the Gampaha district.

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Background: Autism spectrum disorder is a development disability, with deficits in social communication and interaction along with restricted, repetitive behaviors or interests (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022).

Education can benefit multiple skills development along with therapy sessions such as behavioral health services and vocational training services for children with autism. (Myers et al., 2007). With the outbreak of the COVID – 19 pandemic, many changes occurred in the education system with the commencement of online education. This study describes Special education teachers' perspectives on their practice, experiences, and impact on students' learning outcomes with regard to using Individualized Education Plan (IEP) during online education for children with autism.

Objective/s: This study aimed to explore special education teachers' experiences of using IEPs in online education, to describe the perspectives of special education teachers on the practices of using IEPs during online education, and to describe special education teachers' perspectives on the impact of online IEPs on students' learning outcomes compared to onsite education.

Methods: This cross sectional, mixed method study included 30 special education teachers who are using online IEPs for children with autism between 5 to 10 years of age in the Gampaha district. Participants were recruited from government schools, private schools and community centers using a snowball sampling technique. A Self- administered questionnaire with four main sections, including both open-ended and close-ended questions, was used to collect data. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis and quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical analysis.

Results: The majority of the participants (77%) had 0-1 year of experience of using IEPs in online education for children with autism. Among these participants, 70% believed that they do not have enough information and experiences regarding online IEP implementation. Also, online learning was perceived to have a negative impact on learning outcomes of students. Participants mainly shared their perspectives on the challenges faced during online education, the impact of caregiver involvement, specific advantages of online IEPs and suggestions to improve the outcomes of online education.

Conclusion/s: Using IEPs in online education for children with autism was considered as unsuccessful according to the majority of the participants. However, through improving awareness of the teachers and caregivers, providing relevant facilities and by adding specific modifications to the IEP process, the teachers held that effectiveness of online learning can be improved.

Key words: *Autism Spectrum Disorder, Individualized Education Plans, Online education, Special education teachers*