

Introduction

Education of children with disabilities in Ethiopia

- different types of schooling practices for children with disabilities
 - Regular schools with Inclusive Education Resource Centers (IERC)
 - Regular schools without IERC
 - Special schools with boarding and non-boarding privileges
 - Special units that are attached to regular primary schools
- Before the Covid-19 pandemic, little progress was evident
 - 0.9% of children with disabilities enrolled at the pre-primary school level
 - 11.1% enrolled at the primary school level
 - 2.8% enrolled at the secondary school level
- Currently, there is limited empirical data on how extent the Covid-19 pandemic adversely affected the participation of the children with disabilities
- School personnel (directors and deputy directors, unit leaders, itinerant teachers, general education teachers, and assistant teachers) have a much wider role and an array of responsibilities for the education of children with disabilities

Objective and research design

Objective of the study

- The overall objective of the study was to examine the impact of school closures due to Covid-19 pandemic on the education of children with disabilities of primary school going age
- Telephone-based survey to be administered to key school personnel
- In designing the survey, the study followed a mixed approach method where both open and close-ended questions were developed
- Permission for the research and ethical approval (ref no. 13/2-10/1982/35) was obtained from Federal Ministry of Education
- A pilot study helped with identifying specific sections that required more attention and explanation. Also, it helped in fine-tuning the translated versions of the survey questionnaires
- Purposive sampling approach was applied by setting criteria
- A total of 100 school personnel were interviewed from 3 regional states (Oromia, Amhara, SNNPR) and 1 city administration (Addis Ababa)
- School personnel were directors/deputy directors, unit leaders, itinerant teachers, general education teachers, and assistant teachers

Research design Continued ...

- School personnel:
 - 68% were working in urban schools and 32% in rural schools
 - 52% were male and 48% female, largely equally distributed within each region
 - 35% have diploma, 57% undergraduate degree, and 8% masters degree
 - over 50% were working in regular schools with IERC, 37% in regular schools without IERC and 12 % in special schools
 - 72% had worked for 6 years or more, out of which 48% had over 10 years of experience
 - An equal number of itinerant teachers and general education teachers (n=35 each)
 - An equal number of unit leaders, assistant teachers & directors/deputy (n=10 each)
 - They teach children with visual (n=91), hearing (n=74), cognitive (n=71), physical (n=59) and behavioral (n=49) impairments. Language & communication, & multiple disabilities also included.
 - They teach from grade 1 to 8
- 68% of the data was collected by using the telephone and 32% face-to-face
- The data was collected by using the local language (Amharic) and hard copies of the survey questions were completed to make sure that all questions were addressed
- The data was transcribed and translated into the English language, and then inputted into Survey Monkey

Findings

Activities during school closure

- 59% did not report receiving any guidelines from the Woreda Education office
 - *Of the 41% who had received guidelines, 39% were in touch with students and/or their parents*
 - *Of the 59% who had not received guidelines, only 2% mentioned any contact*
- Teachers from regular schools with IERC were more often in touch with parents and/or children during school closure using a combination of walk over and telephone
 - *No school personnel from special schools reported being in touch*
- No difference in frequency of contact based on type of school, which on average, was once (71%) or twice (29%) a month
- The main purpose of the contact was to provide information about COVID-19 and to encourage learning at home through radio and TV programs
- NGO support were found to be much more common in urban areas than rural (50% vs 7%)

Findings Continued ...

Barriers to learning and concerns for children with disabilities during school closure

- School personnel reported the following barriers that children with disabilities faced in continuing their learning during school closures
 - Unavailability of accessible materials for the child's individual needs (98%)
 - Financial barriers for parents (79%) and teachers (35%)
 - Lack of personal assistant and additional academic support (67%)
 - Safety and hygiene (85%)
 - Inaccessible distant learning modalities (73%)
 - Negative impact on children's emotional well-being (67%)
 - Risk of domestic violence (53%)
 - Loneliness and anxiety (99%)
 - Lack of motivation to engage in learning and playing (95%)
 - Parental and caregiver neglect (77%)

Findings Continued ...

Efforts adopted to get children with disabilities back to school

- 71 % described various actions that had been taken before and after schools reopening
 - Awareness raising, collaboration, discussion and physically showing that schools were ready to receive their children
 - Telephone, physical visits to the house, brochures and letters sent to the parents, involvement of community leaders, orientation to the parents at the school
- 62% observed that almost all the students with disabilities had returned to school and 35% noted that there were half or more that had returned
- 29% noted that there was nothing special done by them or the school for this purpose. Of these, 10% referred to the efforts made through mass media at national and regional level

Findings Continued ...

School personnel's concerns and supports for children with disabilities while schools reopen

- Safety and hygiene (100%)
- Having forgotten what was learnt prior to school closure (92%) and their motivation to learn (87%)
- Previous systems of support being in place as children returned to school (26%)
- Conducting training prior to schools being opened
- Discussions in the school regarding “how to teach learners safe”
- Providing staff with awareness on the risk and impact of Covid-19
- Running the school in shifts, dividing children into smaller groups, re-arranging the seats in the classroom, organization of tutorial classes, guidance and counselling
- Much emphasis on extra/additional support and care more than what was before

Recommendations from the participants

- School personnel suggested training (90%), availability of accessible teaching and learning materials (83%) and financial support to schools (74%)
- Availability and timely distribution of accessible learning materials to students in their homes
- Investment and development of accessible remote learning options based on the needs of the children and realities of their situation
- Digitalizing the teaching learning process to support learning
- Strengthening the collaboration between parents and schools, with the intent to raise awareness, provide guidance and developing parental capacity to help, support and teach their children at home
- Home visits by teachers to provide support to parents and children and also as way of following up on their learning

THANK YOU!