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Virendra Singh Ruhela
Assistant Professor/Course Coordinator, Department of HRD (Special Education), Disha, A Resource Centre for the Disabled, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

The impact of remote and blended learning on special education: Recent trends and implications

Virendra Singh Ruhela

Abstract
Special education is a specialized approach to education that caters to individuals with disabilities or exceptionalities. It aims to provide necessary support, accommodations, and instruction to help them achieve their full academic potential and integrate into society. The field has evolved over time, moving away from segregated classrooms to promote inclusive education. As awareness and commitment grow, special education plays a pivotal role in fostering a more inclusive society. Special education is a field that focuses on addressing the unique needs of individuals with disabilities. It has a rich history, with significant legislative developments and societal changes. The field has evolved from ancient civilizations to the present, with pioneering figures like Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan working to develop specialized approaches. The World Wars and the Brown v. Board of Education case highlighted the need for equal educational opportunities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) laid the groundwork for special education services in public schools. The 21st century has seen rapid advancements in assistive technology, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reaffirmed the rights of individuals with disabilities to an inclusive education.

Introduction

Special education is a specialized approach to education that caters to the unique needs and requirements of individuals with disabilities or exceptionalities. These exceptionalities can encompass a wide range of conditions, such as learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, emotional and behavioural disorders, sensory impairments, and physical disabilities. The primary objective of special education is to provide these individuals with the necessary support, accommodations, and instruction to help them achieve their full academic potential, develop essential life skills, and integrate into society to the best of their abilities. Special education is grounded in a legal and ethical framework that recognizes the right of all individuals, regardless of their disabilities, to receive a free and appropriate education. This concept was solidified in the United States with the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975, which mandated the provision of individualized education plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities. IDEA has since served as a model for similar legislation in many countries, emphasizing inclusivity and equal opportunities for individuals with special needs.

The field of special education has evolved significantly over the years, moving away from segregated, isolated classrooms to promote inclusive education. Inclusive education encourages the integration of students with disabilities into regular classrooms alongside their non-disabled peers, fostering a more diverse and supportive learning environment.

Special education is a multidisciplinary field that draws upon various professionals, including special education teachers, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, school psychologists, and other specialists. These professionals work collaboratively to assess individual needs, design tailored instruction and intervention strategies, and ensure that each student's unique requirements are met.

As the awareness of and commitment to special education have grown, so has the research and development of innovative teaching techniques and assistive technologies. These advancements have improved the quality of education and life outcomes for individuals with disabilities, helping them gain greater independence and self-sufficiency.

Corresponding Author:
Virendra Singh Ruhela
Assistant Professor/Course Coordinator, Department of HRD (Special Education), Disha, A Resource Centre for the Disabled, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

In conclusion, special education is a crucial field that serves as a beacon of inclusivity and equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities. It ensures that each person, regardless of their unique challenges, has access to the education and support necessary to thrive in society. By continually adapting to the evolving needs of its students, special education plays a pivotal role in fostering a more inclusive and compassionate society.

Special education is a field of education that focuses on addressing the unique needs of individuals with disabilities. This branch of education has a rich and evolving history, marked by significant legislative developments and societal changes. Below is a descriptive history of special education, with references to key events, legislation, and influential figures

Historical view of special Education
Early History
Ancient Civilizations: The history of special education can be traced back to ancient civilizations. Some early societies, like the Greeks and Romans, provided rudimentary forms of education for children with disabilities. These individuals often received personalized instruction, but it was not systematic or widespread.

18th and 19th Century
Segregation and Neglect: In the 18th and 19th centuries, individuals with disabilities were often marginalized and segregated from mainstream society. They received little to no formal education, and there was a prevailing attitude of neglect.

20th Century
Pioneers in Special Education: The early 20th century saw the emergence of pioneering figures such as Helen Keller, Anne Sullivan, and Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard, who worked to develop specialized approaches to education for individuals with sensory impairments and developmental disabilities.

World War I and II
The World Wars prompted a surge in interest in rehabilitation for injured veterans, leading to advancements in prosthetics and therapeutic services. These developments indirectly benefited the field of special education.

Brown V. Board of Education (1954)
This landmark U.S. Supreme Court case declared that separate educational facilities for black and white students were inherently unequal. This ruling had implications for special education, as it highlighted the need for equal educational opportunities.

The 1960s and 1970s
This period saw significant advancements in special education, with the passage of critical legislation in the United States. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act - IDEA) in 1975 laid the groundwork for the provision of special education services in public schools.

Mainstreaming and Inclusion
A major shift occurred in the latter part of the 20th century towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms whenever possible. This concept of "mainstreaming" emphasized the importance of educating students with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers.

21st Century
Advances in Assistive Technology
The 21st century has witnessed rapid advancements in assistive technology, such as communication devices and adaptive software, to facilitate learning and communication for individuals with disabilities.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)
This international treaty reaffirmed the rights of individuals with disabilities to an inclusive education and called for the removal of barriers to their full participation in society.

Ongoing Legal Framework
The IDEA continues to evolve, and it remains the cornerstone of special education services in the United States. Reauthorizations and amendments ensure that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

Introduction about Challenges in Remote Learning for Special Education
The advent of remote learning, accelerated by global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has transformed the landscape of education. While this shift has presented both opportunities and challenges for students and educators across the board, it has had a profound impact on special education. Special education, which serves students with diverse learning needs, has confronted a unique set of obstacles in the transition to remote learning. This introduction will provide an overview of the challenges faced in remote learning for special education, highlighting the multifaceted nature of these difficulties and underscoring their profound implications for the students with disabilities.

As technology and online platforms became essential tools for educational continuity, a digital divide became more pronounced. Students with disabilities often encounter barriers that extend beyond the general challenges faced by their peers. These challenges encompass a wide range of disabilities, including but not limited to learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, speech and language impairments, visual or hearing impairments, and physical disabilities. The problems faced in remote learning for special education are both practical and pedagogical. They include difficulties in accessing technology and digital resources, ensuring a personalized learning experience, and providing essential support services.

This introduction draws from a growing body of research and educational reports that have documented the challenges associated with remote learning in special education. Studies have investigated the digital divide, the limited availability of assistive technology, the struggles in adapting Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to the online environment, and the emotional and social difficulties faced by students with disabilities in this new educational paradigm. Prominent research by the U.S. Department of Education (2020) and organizations like the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) have shed light on these

issues, emphasizing the need for tailored solutions.

Furthermore, the challenges in remote special education have far-reaching consequences. Students with disabilities may experience learning loss, exacerbation of their disabilities, and an increased risk of isolation. Educators and parents are tasked with bridging these gaps, often without adequate training or resources. This introduction underscores the critical importance of understanding and addressing the challenges in remote learning for special education. It sets the stage for further exploration and discussion of these issues, aiming to encourage the development of innovative solutions that can ensure equitable access to quality education for all, regardless of their learning abilities or disabilities.

Remote learning presents unique challenges for students with special education needs, educators, and parents. These challenges are amplified for individuals with disabilities, as they often require more individualized support and accommodations. Here are some of the key challenges in remote learning for special education, along with references to relevant sources:

Limited Personalized Instruction

Special education often involves tailored instruction, which is difficult to deliver remotely. Teachers may struggle to adapt their teaching methods to the online environment, making it challenging to meet individual students' needs effectively.

Technology Accessibility

Not all students with special needs have access to the necessary technology or internet connectivity. This can create a significant barrier to remote learning.

Communication and Interaction Challenges

Many students with special needs require direct and frequent interactions with educators, therapists, or aides. Remote learning may limit the ability to provide these critical services.

Lack of Hands-On Learning

Some students require hands-on learning experiences, which are hard to replicate online. For example, students with motor skill difficulties may struggle with activities that require physical manipulation.

Engagement and Motivation

Students with special needs may find it challenging to stay engaged in remote learning, as they miss the social interactions and in-person support they receive at school.

Parental Support and Training

Parents often play a more significant role in facilitating special education during remote learning. They may need training and resources to effectively support their child's learning needs.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Implementation

Adhering to the individualized goals and accommodations outlined in a student's IEP can be challenging in a remote setting. Educators need to find ways to adapt IEP goals for virtual learning.

Assessment and Progress Monitoring

Assessing and monitoring the progress of students with special needs in a remote setting can be difficult. Finding alternative methods for evaluating and tracking their development is essential.

Behavioural and Emotional Support

Students with emotional or behavioural disorders may struggle with the lack of structure and support provided by in-person schooling. Remote learning can exacerbate these issues.

Legal and Ethical Concerns

Ensuring that students with special needs receive an appropriate education in compliance with the law (e.g., Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) can be a challenge in the remote environment.

It's important to recognize that educators, parents, and students have been working together to address these challenges and find innovative solutions to support special education during remote learning. Collaboration and flexibility are crucial in overcoming these obstacles and ensuring that students with special needs continue to receive the education and support they require.

Benefits of Remote and Blended Learning in Special Education

Remote and blended learning can offer several benefits in the context of special education. These benefits are especially relevant in situations where traditional, in-person education may not be feasible or suitable for students with special needs. Here are some advantages of remote and blended learning in special education:

Personalized Learning

Remote and blended learning can be tailored to the individual needs of students with special education requirements. Teachers can provide customized materials, assignments, and support, addressing each student's unique strengths and challenges.

Accessibility

Remote learning allows students with physical disabilities or health conditions that limit their mobility to access education from the comfort of their homes. It eliminates the need for physical accommodations and long commutes, making education more accessible.

Flexible Scheduling

Special education students may have varying schedules and needs. Remote and blended learning can accommodate flexible schedules, allowing students to learn at their own pace and during the times that work best for them.

Reduced Distractions

Some students with special needs may find traditional classroom settings distracting or overwhelming. Learning from a quieter and more familiar environment can help them concentrate better on their studies.

Individualized Instruction

Special education teachers can provide one-on-one instruction, which is often essential for students with severe disabilities or specific learning needs. Remote learning platforms enable this personalized approach.

Parent and Caregiver Involvement

Remote learning often requires parents or caregivers to play an active role in the education process. This can help build a strong partnership between home and school, allowing for consistent support and communication.

Safety

In situations where the physical safety of students is a concern, such as during a pandemic or in areas with high crime rates, remote learning can provide a safer alternative to in-person education.

Assistive Technology Integration

Remote and blended learning platforms can be configured to integrate various assistive technologies, such as screen readers, speech-to-text software, and communication devices, to better support students with disabilities.

Reduced Anxiety

For some students with special needs, social anxiety or sensory sensitivities can make traditional classrooms stressful. Learning remotely can reduce these triggers and promote a more comfortable learning environment.

Increased Self-Esteem

Success in a remote or blended learning environment can boost the self-esteem and confidence of special education students who may have experienced challenges or stigma in traditional school settings.

Data Tracking and Assessment

Online platforms often provide robust data tracking and assessment tools. Special education teachers can use these tools to monitor progress, identify areas for improvement, and adjust teaching methods accordingly.

Greater Participation and Engagement

Some students who may be hesitant to participate in a classroom setting may feel more comfortable engaging in remote discussions or using digital tools, which can lead to increased participation and engagement. It's important to note that remote and blended learning may not be suitable for all students with special needs, and a one-size-fits-all approach should be avoided. The appropriateness of these methods should be determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the specific needs and preferences of each student. Additionally, ongoing communication and collaboration between educators, students, and parents are essential to ensure the success of remote and blended learning in special education.

Technology and Assistive Tools in Special Education

Assistive technology refers to a wide range of tools, devices, software, and equipment designed to enhance the independence, functionality, and quality of life for individuals with disabilities. These technologies can assist people with various impairments, including physical, sensory, cognitive, and communication disabilities. This full description of technology and assistive tools will cover several categories, their applications, and relevant references.

1. **Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Devices**

AAC devices help individuals with communication disorders express themselves. These devices include speech-generating devices, communication boards, and software applications.

2. **Screen Readers**

Screen readers are software applications that convert text on a computer or mobile screen into synthesized speech or Braille, making digital content accessible for individuals with visual impairments.

3. **Mobility Aids**

Mobility aids include wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, and canes, designed to improve the mobility of individuals with physical disabilities.

4. **Hearing Aids and Cochlear Implants**

These devices improve auditory perception for individuals with hearing impairments, ranging from mild to profound.

5. **Assistive Listening Systems**

These systems, like FM and infrared systems, enhance sound quality for individuals with hearing impairments, particularly in noisy environments.

6. **Braille Displays and Braille Notetakers**

Braille displays and notetakers enable individuals with visual impairments to access and create digital content in Braille.

7. **Text-to-Speech and Speech-to-Text Software**

Text-to-speech software converts written text into speech, aiding individuals with reading difficulties. Speech-to-text software, on the other hand, converts spoken language into text, assisting those with writing and communication challenges.

8. **Cognitive Assistive Technologies**

These tools assist individuals with cognitive impairments, including memory aids, task schedulers, and software that simplify complex tasks.

9. **Environmental Control Systems**

These systems allow individuals with limited mobility to control appliances, lights, and other devices in their environment through voice commands, switches, or touch screens.

10. **Eye Gaze and Head Tracking Systems**

These technologies enable individuals with severe physical disabilities to control computers, communicate, and interact with the world through eye movements and head gestures.

Assistive technology continues to evolve and expand, offering innovative solutions to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities. Researchers, educators, and professionals in various fields continually work to enhance these technologies and make them more accessible and effective for those who rely on them.

"Teacher and Parent Perspectives" in the context of education and child development. Please note that this description will be general, and specific perspectives may vary based on cultural, regional, and individual factors. I'll also provide some references for further reading.

Teacher and Parent Perspectives in Special Education
Teacher Perspectives
Educational Experts
Teachers are often considered experts in the field of education. They are responsible for imparting knowledge, facilitating learning, and assessing student progress. Teachers have a unique perspective on educational methods, curriculum development, and classroom management. Their experience and expertise play a crucial role in shaping the educational experience for students.

Pedagogical Approach
Teachers develop their teaching methods and strategies based on their understanding of pedagogy, which is the art and science of teaching. They consider students' learning styles, abilities, and needs when designing lessons and instructional materials. Their perspectives on pedagogy influence how they deliver content and engage with students.

Student Growth and Development
Teachers closely observe students' intellectual, emotional, and social development. They use this perspective to adapt their teaching methods and provide individualized support when necessary. Teachers are also instrumental in identifying learning disabilities and behavioural issues, collaborating with parents to address these challenges.

Classroom Environment
Teachers are responsible for creating a positive and inclusive classroom environment. They work to foster a sense of community and respect among students. Their perspective on classroom management and discipline is critical to maintaining a conducive atmosphere for learning.

Parent Perspectives
Primary Caregivers
Parents are often a child's first and most influential teachers. They play a significant role in their child's early development by providing a nurturing and supportive environment. Parents' perspectives on child-rearing and education are shaped by their values, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds.

Educational Partners
Parents are crucial partners in their child's education. They communicate with teachers and school administrators to stay informed about their child's progress and any challenges they may face. Their perspective on their child's academic and social development is essential for collaborative problem-solving.

Supporting Learning at Home
Parents often engage in activities at home that complement classroom learning. This can include helping with homework, reading with their children, and exposing them to cultural and educational experiences. Their perspective on the importance of extending education beyond the classroom can greatly influence a child's success.

Advocates for Their Children
Parents are advocates for their children's needs. They may request special accommodations or support services for children with learning disabilities or other challenges. Their perspective on their child's strengths and weaknesses is crucial in identifying and addressing educational issues.

Policy Implications in Special Education
Inclusion and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
There is an ongoing emphasis on inclusive education to ensure that students with disabilities are educated alongside their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible. This policy aims to create a more inclusive and diverse learning environment.

Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)
IEPs continue to be a cornerstone of special education, allowing for personalized education plans that meet the unique needs of students with disabilities.

Response to Intervention (RTI) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)
These frameworks have gained importance, as they focus on early intervention and individualized support to help struggling students before a formal disability diagnosis is made.

Equity and Disproportionality
Efforts are being made to address disparities in special education, particularly the overrepresentation of certain groups of students, such as students of colour, in special education programs.

Transition Services
Transition services are becoming more comprehensive to better prepare students with disabilities for life after school, including employment and independent living.

Future Directions in Special Education
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
UDL is a framework that aims to make education more accessible to all students by designing curricula that are flexible and accommodate a wide range of learning styles and abilities.

Technology Integration
The use of technology, including assistive technology, in special education is expected to increase. It can provide customized learning experiences and support for students with disabilities.

Mental Health Services
The focus on mental health support in schools is likely to expand, addressing the social and emotional well-being of all students, including those with disabilities.

Teacher Training and Professional Development
Training educators to effectively work with students with disabilities is an ongoing priority, and it's expected to continue in the future.

Parent and Family Involvement
The inclusion of parents and families in the special education process will remain a critical element for the success of students with disabilities.

For the most up-to-date information on policy implications and future directions in special education, I recommend checking official government websites, academic journals, and reports from organizations specializing in special

education, such as the U.S. Department of Education, the Council for Exceptional Children, and the National Center for Learning Disabilities. These sources will provide you with the latest developments in this field.

Inclusive Practices and Equity in Special Education
Inclusive practices and equity in special education are critical components of providing all students with disabilities the opportunity to receive a high-quality education in a supportive and fair learning environment. Here are some key points and references related to these concepts:

Definition of Inclusive Practices
Inclusive practices in special education involve educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms alongside their non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible. This approach aims to create a sense of belonging, provide access to a challenging curriculum, and promote positive social interactions.

Legal Framework
The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the United States is a key piece of legislation that mandates the provision of special education services and encourages inclusive practices.

Equity in Special Education
Equity in special education focuses on ensuring that all students with disabilities have access to high-quality instruction, support, and resources to meet their individual needs. It means addressing disparities and removing barriers that can hinder a student's success. A reference to the concept of equity in education can be found in the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
UDL is an educational framework that promotes inclusive practices. It emphasizes designing curricula, materials, and assessments to be accessible to all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

Collaboration and Co-Teaching
Collaboration between special education teachers and general education teachers, as well as co-teaching models, are strategies to support inclusive practices. This promotes the sharing of expertise and resources to benefit all students.

Culturally Responsive Special Education
Inclusive practices should also consider the cultural and linguistic diversity of students with disabilities. Culturally responsive special education recognizes the importance of understanding and respecting cultural differences to provide effective and equitable services.

Early Intervention
Ensuring equitable access to special education services begins with early intervention. Early identification and intervention can help address learning and developmental challenges before they become significant barriers to a student's education.

Monitoring and Accountability
To ensure equity in special education, it's important to have systems in place for monitoring the progress of students with disabilities and holding schools accountable for their educational outcomes.

Professional Development
Special and general education teachers need ongoing professional development to implement inclusive practices effectively. Quality training and support are essential. Reference: National Center on Accessible Educational Materials, Professional Development for Accessible Educational Materials.

Parent and Community Involvement
Parents and the community play a crucial role in advocating for inclusive practices and equity in special education. Collaboration and engagement with families are important for supporting students with disabilities.
These references and concepts can provide a foundation for understanding and implementing inclusive practices and equity in special education. Keep in mind that practices and policies may vary by location and are subject to change over time, so it's important to stay updated with current research and regulations in your specific area.

Conclusion
Special education is a specialized approach to education that focuses on the unique needs of individuals with disabilities or exceptionalities. It aims to provide necessary support, accommodations, and instruction to help these individuals achieve their full academic potential, develop essential life skills, and integrate into society. The concept was established in the United States with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975, which mandated the provision of individualized education plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities. The field has evolved over time, moving away from segregated classrooms to promote inclusive education, integrating students with disabilities into regular classrooms alongside their non-disabled peers. Special education is a multidisciplinary field that involves professionals such as special education teachers, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, and school psychologists. As awareness and commitment to special education grow, so does the research and development of innovative teaching techniques and assistive technologies. Special education plays a crucial role in fostering a more inclusive and compassionate society by continually adapting to the evolving needs of its students. Special education is a field that focuses on addressing the unique needs of individuals with disabilities. It has a rich history, marked by significant legislative developments and societal changes. The field has evolved from ancient civilizations to the present day, with pioneering figures like Helen Keller, Anne Sullivan, and Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard developing specialized approaches for individuals with sensory impairments and developmental disabilities.
The World Wars I and II prompted interest in rehabilitation for injured veterans, leading to advancements in prosthetics and therapeutic services, indirectly benefiting special education. The Brown v. Board of Education (1954) highlighted the need for equal educational opportunities, and the 1960s and 1970s saw significant advancements in special education, such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act - IDEA) in 1975.

Mainstreaming and inclusion have been emphasized in the 21st century, with rapid advances in assistive technology facilitating learning and communication for individuals with disabilities. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) reaffirmed the rights of individuals with disabilities to an inclusive education and called for the removal of barriers to their full participation in society.

The ongoing legal framework of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensures that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). Remote learning for special education presents challenges, including the digital divide, limited availability of assistive technology, struggles in adapting Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to the online environment, and emotional and social difficulties faced by students with disabilities.

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