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Kindergarten Teachers' Perspectives in the State of Kuwait during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

Objectives: This study examines the lived experiences and the challenges of kindergarten teachers with Distance Learning during the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic in the State of Kuwait. Like many other regions, kindergarten schools were not exempted from challenges that emerged as a result of the impact of COVID-19. **Methods:** The study is based on phenomenology, which is a qualitative research design to highlight both the perspectives and experiences of eighteen kindergarten teachers during this time. **Results:** Findings suggest that there has been lack of assistance, support, sufficient planning, communication, inadequate curricula, and an absence of community support from the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, findings highlight a merging need to reframe Distance Learning in kindergarten. **Conclusion:** Suggested recommendations to support the findings focus on the inclusion of appropriate teacher training and online collaborations with schools and families that can help children have more efficient learning experiences.

Keywords: COVID-19, Distance Learning, Kindergarten, Teachers, Kuwait

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Introduction

As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak in December 2020, substantial societal education challenges emerged worldwide. There have been 1.6 billion children and youth out of school in 161 countries (Saavedra, 2020). Bozkurt, Jung, Xiao, Vladimirschi, Schuwer, Egorov, & Paskevicius (2020) suggest that this crisis has resulted in the respective ministries of education and governmental departments to be anxious and hesitant about deciding on the best method to continue the education process while protecting students from viral exposures. For this reason, many educational institutions have shifted to online teaching platforms. The State of Kuwait, like many other wealthy countries, has the financial infrastructure to move to Distance Learning. However, many challenges for teachers and students currently exist. Although kindergarten public schools in the State of Kuwait are considered non-compulsory education and serve young children between 4-6 years of age, the Ministry of Education (MOE's) still takes complete responsibility for the schools' policies and regulations.

In February of 2019, the government of the State of Kuwait decided to suspend schools without providing proper clarification to stakeholders. There were unclear directives regarding the education format for the 2019/2020 school year, which impacted the learning process for children whose learning was disrupted for more than six months of the academic year. There was notable conflict between the government and parliament members regarding how to restructure the new academic calendar in accordance with the Health Authority's recommendation (Aljarida, 2020). On 16 July 2020, the Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education, announced the end of the academic year 2019-2020, as a result of the repercussions of the emerging Corona Virus (COVID-19) epidemic. Provided that the remainder of the second semester curriculum, 2019/2020, would be merged with that of first semester of the following 2020-2021 school year and would be adjusted and taught remotely for all stages (Alrai, 2020). Accordingly, kindergarten schools in Kuwait prepared for the transition to an online teaching environment. The MOE also announced online workshops focused on familiarizing teachers and

department heads with online platforms taking place between 17 - 20 June 2021, in preparation for the academic year that would start on October 4, 2021 (KUNA, 2020).

The Ministry Head Supervisor of Kindergarten Schools (MHSK) developed a general plan for Distance Learning. The primary goal of MHSK was to establish and propose general policies for kindergarten education planning. The proposed plan, which will be referred to as The General Plan for Kindergarten e-learning, emphasized the need to activate electronic learning mechanisms. This would be achieved by reviewing and applying required knowledge, skills, and training according to specific age-appropriate steps and visual presentations. It also included the use of age-appropriate learning resources such as educational software, activity books, not to be exclusive. The plan included five primary axes; namely: 1-the instructional staff, 2-the learner, 3-the curriculum, 4-the accompanying activities and learning resources, and 5-follow-up evaluation(s). The General Plan for Kindergarten e-learning indicated that the key stakeholders concerned with its implementation, are: 1-teachers, 2-learners (children), and 3-guardians; and that the plan would be supervised and monitored by the Heads of Department, the Ministry Supervisor, and kindergarten administrations (Al-Muslim, 2020).

In September 2019, the MHSK, decided to offer two essential asynchronous learning times of no more than 15 minutes (on a specified time of day) in kindergarten education, to be regulated by the Ministry Head Supervisor of Kindergarten (Al-Fadhli, 2020), instead of the regular learning system, which starts from 7:30 am to 12:20 pm and contains four learning periods. Later, the MHSK added two lessons, to follow the previous asynchronous lessons, for kindergarten learners, within the same day, with the expectation that these learning activities would be developed and monitored by the class teachers. With this new approach, the kindergarten students would watch the recorded lessons with the help of their guardian(s), who also had to help them upload the applied activities to the platform to monitor the student's performance (Al-Muslim, 2020). Table 1 and 2 illustrate the schedule of learning activities in regular learning system and E-learning system bounded by time for kindergarten learners.

Table 1

Kindergarten school regular learning system schedule time

	Class	Time	Duration
1	Welcome Children	7:30 - 7:50	20 m
2	Morning Activity	7:50 - 8:20	30 m
3	First Period (Teamwork)	8:20 - 8:40	20 m
4	Hand Washing	8:40 - 8:50	10 m
5	Breakfast	8:50 - 9:10	20 m
6	Washing Hands and Teeth	9:10 - 9:25	15 m
7	Recess	9:25 - 10:10	45 m
8	Second Period (Corners Time)	10:10 - 11:05	55 m
9	Snack	11:05 - 11:15	10 m
10	Third Period (Extra-Curricular Activities)	11:15 - 11:55	40 m
11	Fourth Period (Dismissal)	11:55 - 12:20	25 m

Table 2

Kindergarten school e-learning schedule time

First Period		Break	Second Period	
08:00 - 08:15	08:15 - 08:30	08:30 - 09:00	09:00 - 09:15	09:15 - 09:30
Platform lesson	Teacher Activity		Platform lesson	Teacher Activity

The kindergarten school curriculum is based on the National Association for the Education of Young Children. According to Al-Ansari (1995); cited in (Aleisa, Bogotch & Barakat, 2018), “the curriculum is not related to a subject, but rather stems from the needs of children and depends on their psychological characteristics in order to achieve their integrated and balanced growth, which has become the focus of the educational process” (p.18). The MHSK’s plan factored in essential aspects of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, displayed in the recorded educational lessons and activities. The plan was carried out by using a variety of teaching methods and presentations within the school schedule. However, as the

MOE was required to facilitate a distance learning environment within a short period of time, to comply with COVID-19 health and safety regulations, notable challenges were identified.

Children's Distance Learning Environments

Bozkurt et al. (2020) emphasize that Distance Learning is an education model that is constantly evolving. The model has been accepted by the general public and regulated education. Rates of online enrollments in higher education institutions, have been rising globally, demonstrating that distance learning is becoming a more viable teaching and learning method (Flowers, White, Raynor & Bhattacharya, 2012). Distance Learning is recognized as a popular form of learning, which can reach different student groups via online course materials and online interactions (Al-Ashmoery, Messoussi, & Touahni, 2015; Andrade, 2015; Fedyinch, Bradley & Bradley, 2015). Distance Learning is classified as either asynchronous or synchronous. Asynchronous learning occurs when students can choose their own time for participation in learning through different media tools and complete learning tasks at their own pace. Conversely, synchronous learning is conducted through live video/audio meetings with immediate feedback (Hrastinski 2008). One of the most demanding requirements of Distance Learning is the successful integration of technology in teaching.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, all educational establishments in Kuwait, including kindergarten schools, transitioned to Distance Learning. Twenty months into the pandemic, during October 2020, “the MOE committed to technology, specifically effective Distance Learning after eighteen-years of unsuccessful attempts in public schools” (Alhouti, 2020). At the onset of the pandemic the MOE launched national Distance Learning projects to provide e-learning services for schools and universities, such as Microsoft Teams, Blackboard, and YouTube. At this time, there was an urgent need to build a robust infrastructure to support distance learning. Such needs included: 1- the need to establish legal legislation, 2- the need to prepare suitable digital infrastructure for Distance Learning to meet the requirements of

success (i.e. access to internet hardware and software) 3- the need to develop appropriate curricula that aligns with the new learning system, and 4- the need to provide training to the administrative and educational staff, learners, and parents.

To effectively apply Distance Learning, especially in kindergarten schools, teachers must become skilled in using relevant software to enhance learning outcomes; learning how to integrate technology with teaching is a requirement during COVID-19. According to (Chen & Chang, 2006), children's access to technology benefits, such as cognitive, social, emotional development, and enhanced decision-making abilities, is dependent on the teachers' skills in using and integrating technology. Furthermore, Chen & Chang (2006) showed that technology competence requires acquiring specific attitudes, skills, and classroom practices. It is not enough for teachers to have an advanced degree in early childhood education or be familiar with computers to display the best attitudes, skills, and practices. Early childhood teachers require professional training in order to use technology in an effective way with young children (Haugland, 1999; NAECY, 1996). Thus, early childhood teachers need to learn new methods and skills to teach online instead of using traditional educational methods. Well-designed courses and seminars can enhance teachers' motivation to use new technology (Chen & Chang 2006; Kerry & Farrow 1996). Due to the emergency situation and limited timeframe provided by the MOE for teacher preparation using learning platforms courses, the uninvolved of teachers in the Distance Learning plan portrayed an unclear educating plan overall. Although teachers had positive sentiments about learning communities, it was observed that they were unwilling to work together and felt constrained due to the autonomy restrictions (Al Shammari, Testerman & Halimi, 2020). They needed more direction, training, or resources (Alsaleh, 2021). Demonstrating the necessity of instruction in Kuwaiti educators, they felt unprepared and overworked while rushing to deploy online education during the COVID-19 pandemic and need more support from the MOE (Alsaleh, 2021). Support resembling, access to the Internet in schools, as well as, educational and digital resources to support the online teaching curricula and finally collective autonomy (Alsaleh, 2021). Flores & Gago (2020) summarized the main challenges teachers face, including inadequate student equipment,

immersing students in their learning, a lack of time, inadequate preparation for online teaching, and a lack of parental support. Furthermore, Orhan & Behan (2020) conducted the same result in a case study to identify teachers' attitudes and experiences towards distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating their judgement as a technology-driven process rather than a teaching method. All in all, the results indicated that teachers had a negative perspective towards it due to the students' poor level of communication and interaction.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Distance Learning structures offered the children and teachers the convenience of not having to meet in-person. However, there were notable limitations of Distance Learning spaces, which can differ depending on the teachers' and/or childrens' technical abilities to access online sites and use computers. Such limitations may include access to internet, as well as, little experience with Distance Learning resources (Fedynich 2014; Wedenoja 2020). Importantly, young children's Distance Learning and online access necessitates adult supervision, which requires adult availability and participation (Schroeder & Kelley 2010; Youn et al. 2012). Furthermore, relative to adult learners, younger children may need more experiences and hands-on activities to concentrate, develop cognitive skills, and learn. Arguably, Distance Learning cannot provide ample opportunities for these hands-on experiences. It is essential to take into account children's developmental stages and identify the relevant resources that can encourage childrens' engagement and learning. Many video networking platforms are helpful tools for Distance Learning towards children. Even though such platforms allow for real-time class meetings and discussions, similar to those held in face-to-face classes, they do not have the same social experiences. Young children can lack the technical skills required for Distance Learning tasks, such as typing responses into a chat screen or sharing files containing written material (Kim, 2020).

The lack of literature regarding Distance Learning for younger children during the COVID-19 pandemic necessitates this research. As a result, the study focused on how kindergarten teachers, using Distance Learning methods, are dealing with the pandemic, their perceptions of COVID-19 impact on children's education, and obstacles to delivering

the education in pandemic situations. Additionally, the study shared teachers' stories regarding teaching and learning methods, as well as, highlighting MOE's support and strategies for sustaining education.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

- (1) What are the reflections of the COVID-19 pandemic on MOE's support strategies from kindergarten teachers' perspectives?
- (2) What are the challenges and obstacles that teachers have experienced delivering education during COVID-19?
- (3) What are the reflections of the COVID-19 pandemic on kindergarten teachers?

Method

Research Design

A phenomenological approach, a qualitative research design, was utilized to determine the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic on kindergarten teachers. Phenomenological research focuses on "describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013: 76). As cited on Moustakas (1994) The approach "seeks to disclose and elucidate the phenomena of behavior as they manifest themselves in their perceived immediacy" (van Kaam, 1966: 15). The empirical phenomenological technique has two descriptive levels, according to Giorgi (1985): The original data, known as Level I, is made up of naïve descriptions gathered through open-ended questions and dialogue. Level II defines the experience's structures based on reflective analysis and interpretation of the research participant's narrative or story (p. 69). During COVID-19, this study attempted to understand the teachers lived experience based on their narrative and perceptions about the education system during the pandemic to ensure younger children in Kuwait received adequate learning.

Participant Selection

The study sample represents the population of Kuwaiti kindergarten teachers in Kuwait public schools with diverse teaching experiences. Once academic approval from the MOE was granted, the researchers employed a snowball sampling technique to recruit participants through

a two-pronged approach. First, participants were solicited through interview requests via email to various school districts. Individualized token email invitations from the researcher’s personal email addresses were sent out to potential participants within the various school districts. Second, a snowball sampling technique was utilized by using their professional networks within the kindergarten arena. More specifically, requests were posted in the official kindergarten Telegram channel seeking participants. This approach was used to adhere to health regulations and school closures and resulted in identifying 18 kindergarten-teachers to participate in the study. Table 3 shows the number of teachers participating in the study by district, and Graph 1 shows their years of experience.

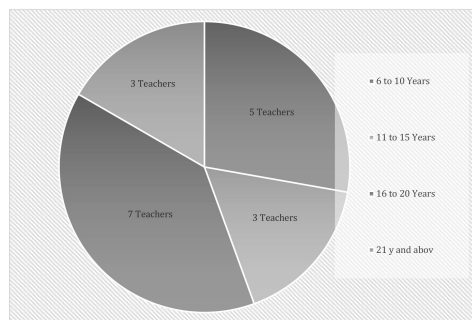
Table 3

Teacher Participation by District

District Name	Number of Teachers
Hawalli	2
Al-Asimah	1
Al-Ahmadi	1
Mubarak Al-Kabeer	3
Al-Farwaniya	8
Al-Jahra	3
Total	18

Graph 1

Teacher participation by Years of Experience



Limitations and Delimitations

According to Creswell (2013), 'limitations of studies stem from two main areas: the chosen methodology and the study population' (p. 366). Study limitations include the period where the Distance Learning applied in the academic year 2020-2021 in the State of Kuwait. This study delimitations are as followed: 1- Kuwaiti kindergarten teachers within the six districts who work for the MOE in the Kuwait kindergarten public school system were identified as participants.

Data Collection

The researchers were informed by reading about kindergarten teachers' objections to the lack of comprehensive linking of their work to Distance Learning adaptation, on social media. The authors' designed an open-ended interview form that focused on:

- a - The participants' views regarding online teaching, the challenges that they faced when they switched to online learning, and the impact of online learning on them and their students,
- b - The effects on the future of online teaching, and
- c - In addition, researchers required demographic information, such as the teacher's age, years of experience, and school role.

A total of three kindergarten education professionals were consulted regarding the validity of interview protocol. Based on their feedback, the protocol was modified and adapted accordingly. A pilot study was conducted with two kindergarten teachers to be finalized based on their feedback. At the start of the interview, the purpose of the study was reiterated, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and participants gave their verbal consent. Willing participants engaged in interviews ranging from 30 - 45 minutes via telephone. All participants' names were securely coded with a numeric identifier to maintain participants' confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The data were classified and interpreted for broad themes using a code list produced by the researchers based on a literature review and expert researchers in the field feedback to generate topics and categories after listening three times to participants' audio recordings. Further-

more, because the interviews were performed in Arabic, the coding process was also conducted in Arabic to eliminate any chance of losing significance in the participants' words and perspectives, compromising the research findings' accuracy and trustworthiness.

Findings

Tables, relating to the study questions, themes, categories, and codes, were presented. Direct quotations were used to create a clear and consistent image of the participants' perspectives, as well as, to make it easier for readers to assess and interpret the findings. The first research question addresses the reflections of the COVID-19 pandemic on MOE's support strategies from kindergarten teachers' perspectives. Collecting participants' responses, the data illustrate that the experiences with Distance Learning had an abundance of flaws and wasn't suitable for younger children between the ages of 4 to 6 years old. More specifically, eight out of eighteen interviewees blatantly said the experience was a complete failure, while nine out of eighteen stated that they experienced flaws in the experience (Table 4). Seventeen of the participants shared an agreement that they needed more training courses for using the learning platform. The MOE provided only three days of training for teachers to grasp the platform usage despite the large amount of free time at the beginning of the academic year. One participant who had 20 years of experience stated, "we used to go to work without accomplishing anything from the beginning of official working hours, which began on September 1st, until the training courses began on October 1st." Furthermore, all participants collectively shared the perspective that three days of training were not enough to comprehend the program. Training courses were issued by the heads of department, who were also inexperienced in using the software. One participant with 21 years of experience shared, "our department leaders, who are our seniors, attended training courses set up by their ministry supervisors, who, in my personal opinion, have little grasp of technology, resulting in us learning no information." Taking initiative into their own hands, the participants began to educate themselves to maximize their knowledge to create their lessons Table 4.

A second finding that was noted from the participants perspectives was that the Distance Learning plan of MHSK was unclear and fickle.

Despite that, kindergarten level education is asynchronous, which the Minister of Education confirmed in public questioning in June 2020 (Aldustor: National Assembly News Network, Sep 2020), the MHSK was adamant in applying synchronous learning for kindergarten level, which was a clear violation of the decisions of the Minister of Education (AlziadiQ8.com, 2020, 23 June). One participant with 16 years of experience emphasized that:

“The intention was to begin broadcasting live classes with the children at 8:00 a.m., even if there were no children present, in direct opposition to the Minister’s decision. Despite our protests, they insisted on carrying it out. As a result, we began to post our concerns on social media platforms, and I personally posted my disagreement to the MHSK’s account, though the comment section was afterwards disabled. We [the teachers] kept raising our objection until it became trending, prompting [the Minister] to reverse her decision one day before it was to be implemented.

This was not the only decision-change that happened from the MHSKs.”

Nine of the eighteen participants agreed that the MHSK’s planning was inconsistent, and often changing during the first semester. Some of the changes included: 1- the time teachers’ lessons have to be posted, 2- the length of lessons, and 3- the order of steps within lessons Table 4.

Table 4

MOE’s strategies provided to kindergarten from a teachers’ perspective during COVID-19

Theme	Category	Code	Quotations
MOE’s strategies	Negative	Unclear Vision/ Fickle decisions (n = 15)	“Ministry supervisors were flopped, every day they had a different opinion”. Nala.
			“Ministry supervisors were flopped; they were not clear with teachers” Shaha.
			“Their decisions are all surprising. In the beginning they told us that the lessons would be from the ministry, then they asked us to record short comments, and then they asked us to record full lessons. Their decisions are fickle, and improper” Zahra.

Cont. Table 4*MOE's strategies provided to kindergarten from a teachers' perspective during COVID-19*

Theme	Category	Code	Quotations
		Short time for training (n = 17)	<p>“Those who provided the courses were the supervisors who were not specialized in this field, so they lacked discernment, and therefore we did not benefit from them”. Hala.</p> <p>“The training period was insufficient, only three days, and only theoretical”. Asma</p>
		Lack of equipment (Internet/Devices) (n = 10)	<p>“They forced us to buy computers because the educational platform features do not work on phones or tablets”. Asrar.</p> <p>“They made us buy computers at the beginning of the semester until we found out we could use our phones on the platform. Why did they make us buy it?” Haya</p>
		Legalized distance learning (n = 17)	<p>“Distance Learning and the Ministry’s platform are entirely incompatible with children’s education”. Polla</p> <p>“Kindergarten level needs interaction education, despite the difficulty of applying the process of distancing during the Corona period”. Asma</p> <p>“The child must learn, but the plan must be implemented perfectly... Distance Learning is a successful idea, but it has not been applied appropriately for the child”. Nala</p>
	Positive	Recorded lessons (n = 3)	<p>“The Ministry provided recorded lessons”. Asma</p>

Second Research Question: What are the challenges and obstacles that teachers have experienced delivering education during COVID-19? Table 5.

There were many difficulties and obstacles faced by teachers in the

process of Distance Learning. Among the difficulties were the expression of dissatisfaction with the online lessons designed and provided by the Ministry of Education. Fourteen of the eighteen participants stated that the lessons were dull and monotonous, with a high level of stagnation. Furthermore, nine of the participants claimed that the ministry's lessons contained numerous problems relating to presentation methods, order of ideas, linguistic errors, and unclear visuals. One participant with 20 years of experience said:

“The ministry’s video lessons are poor and contain no valuable information. It has linguistic faults, erroneous pronunciation by the presenters, a shallow informative level, and unsuitable visuals...one of them told me that watching the Peppa Pig series [a British preschool animated television series] is more beneficial for them in terms of information level.”

As a result, the children who have signed up for the online platform had a low interaction rate. All of the study participants agreed that at the start of the academic year, the number of students watching recorded lessons was lower than expected; [and] the viewers continued to decrease as the semester went on. Seeing the numbers of online learners’ decline, participants expressed a sense of demotivation, and the quality of lessons began to deteriorate. One participant with 16 years of experience expressed:

“I’ve noticed that we’re making an effort to design the lessons, but the kids aren’t participating. This is something that infuriates us. I am designing a ten-minute lesson for twenty-two students and only two watch them. The sole purpose of creating the lessons now isn’t for students, it is to satisfy my supervisors and principals.”

In addition to the limited interaction from and with the children, the participants also noted the lack of support from parents. Sixteen of the eighteen interviewees shared a perspective that parents are not supporting children who are learning at a kindergarten level. The common perspective among these eleven participants echoed sentiments that believed this to be true for the following reasons: 1- parents do not value kindergarten education, 2- parents are more concerned with elementary-high school education due to the pass and fail system, 3- parents have many kids and it is difficult to divide time between all of them, especially if the parents

work, 4- kindergarten's online school hours overlap with elementary online school hours, and 5- parents seem to value other level education more than kindergarten level education.

Table 5

The challenges and obstacles that teachers have experienced delivering education during COVID-19

Theme	Code	Quotations
Challenges and Obstacles	Lack of Technology experience (n = 17)	<p>"I paid money for personal courses" Asrar</p> <p>"We had absolutely no background on educational platforms. The programs were new to the educational/administrative staff and children" Fay</p> <p>"Honestly, at beginning my daughters used to design lessons for me for two months, and then I learned from them" Jana</p>
	Unpremeditated Ministry's lessons (n = 10)	<p>J"The course that was provided by our moderator was not understandable, I had to follow tutors on YouTube to understand how to use the platform" Aman</p> <p>"All the ministry's lessons have grammatical errors, incorrect pronunciation, very weak level of comprehension, and wrong lesson steps. All to the extent of showing inappropriate images rated over the age of 18, and the error was discovered at night, and it was withdrawn from the platform and modified after it was spread" Hala.</p>
	Lack of Children interaction (n = 18)	<p>"I have 20 children registered in my class, and not a single child has seen the lessons I offer on the platform or even a parent" Zen</p> <p>"I have no interaction with children. I have 22 children registered. Only two kids interacted with me during the whole semester" Jana</p>
	Lack of parent's support (n = 16)	<p>"Parents underestimate the importance of kindergarten learning level, no matter what we do they don't appreciate it" Nala</p> <p>"The lack of children's interaction is due to the parents' view of the kindergarten learning level. Parents were criticizing us and telling us: Are you really teaching?!" Nora</p>

Cont. Table 5

The challenges and obstacles that teachers have experienced delivering education during COVID-19

Theme	Code	Quotations
	Unsuitable Curricula (n = 14)	<p>“Our lessons do not attract children’s attention like the lessons shown on children’s channels that include colors and songs. Our lessons are all on the same page” Adel</p> <p>“The success of Distance Learning depends on the direct interaction of the teacher with the children through the camera and hearing her voice, and this thing does not apply to us because of our customs and traditions [that prevent this]. I know a teacher who does not record her voice because her husband prevents her” Polla</p>
	Physiological pressure (n = 10)	<p>“In traditional education, preparation for a lesson used to take less than an hour, but now it takes two to three hours to prepare a five- to seven-minute recorded lesson. The longer the video, the more time it takes to prepare”</p> <p>“I’m so tired, I’m thinking of taking an unpaid leave, I cried 3 to 4 times a day” Ana.</p> <p>“We are complaining of dryness and sensitivity of the eyes from the frequent use of the computer” Jana</p> <p>“The pressure was too much on us, I’m a mother and a teacher at the same time... When applying remote lessons, I used to cry even though I was up to date with technology”. Haya</p>

Third study question addresses the reflections of the COVID-19 pandemic on kindergarten teachers: Table 6.

Table 6 addresses a difference in the participants’ opinions about the Distance Learning experience for the kindergarten level. Ten out of eighteen participants believed that the experiment had failed significantly and did not make a good impression on them. At the same time, eight out of eighteen participants indicated that the experiment was good with several flaws. One participant with 10 years of experience expressed:

“From my point of view, the ministry made great efforts, and I am thankful for it. In an exceptional circumstance, the state has made great efforts to reach this stage of Distance Learning that it would not have reached in normal circumstances, and this is an effort they are thankful for it. At first, it was not easy because it was something new for us.”

Table 6

Teachers' perceptions about Distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic

Theme	Code	Quotations
Teachers' perceptions about Distance learning	Negative (n = 10)	“There is no planning, proper implementation and application, and no responsibility on parents' part” Adel
		“The plan was flawed; it was not suitable for children”. Haya
		“The experience of Distance Learning for children was completely unsuccessful. I spend three quarters of my day preparing recorded lessons and don't get the children interaction at the end. Actually, I do my job to please my bosses at work.” Jana.
		“Distance Learning is a disaster experience. Without the cooperation of parents, we cannot interact with children. Also, the lessons were not appropriate for the kindergarten level” Adel
		“[Distance Learning] Not good. Everything was done in a hurry. The teaching process is like giving lectures, it is not appropriate for the age of children”. Aman
	Positive (n = 8)	“The ministry did a good job. It worked hard, the ministry supervisors were prepared, the asynchronous education gesture was a good plan”. Nora.
		“It was a successful experiment in a way. It was causing stress on the child due to the large number of recorded lessons that the child had to attend. If it is reduced, it is better”. Dana.
		“[Distance Learning] The beauty of it is that it is available all day for the child, but I wish there was more interaction from the children”. Asma
		“[Distance Learning] Successful with some deficiencies. We need help from parents” Zahra

Cont. Table 6

Teachers' perceptions about Distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic

Theme	Code	Quotations
		<p>“[Distance Learning] A successful experiment, but it contains drawbacks. We need more training courses with more clarity of vision and decisions”. Shaha</p>
		<p>“[Distance Learning] It was a little successful. Curriculum needs to be modified to suit the nature of Distance Learning”. Rola</p>
		<p>“It was necessary to take into account the times of teaching for the kindergarten level with the times of other school level”. Fay</p>

Discussions and Conclusions

The data gathered from participants' comments show that the Distance Learning experience had numerous problems and was not appropriate for children between 4 - 6 years old. The reasons given ranged from a lack of clarity about the ministry's goals to a lack of sufficient support for teachers. There is also a low level of interaction between children and their parents, which adversely impacted teacher morale. Initially, the MOE's vision was unclear for teachers regarding the effectiveness of Distance Learning in kindergarten. An article titled, "The Fate of Kindergartens is Unknown if 'Distance Learning' is Implemented Next Year," reaffirmed this as it highlighted the exclusion of kindergarten education from the MOE's plan (Al-Anba, 2020). As a result, teachers have been struggling for months with conflicting ideas about how and when to implement instruction, which has negatively impacted the quality of their lessons. Furthermore, the MOE's lack of support for teachers was unfounded and untenable regarding any substantial data. There was insufficient time for training to use new educational platforms and software, and the platforms were new to all stakeholders. Consequently, teachers were compelled to rely on themselves by enrolling in private courses or forming educational groups to assist one another since years of experience did not help them in the new circumstances. Moreover, the educational training was given to

teachers only, while parents and children were not considered. Introducing parents and students to the system could have resulted in higher levels of participation as the system is new to the teaching staff, the parents, and students who would require adequate training. These findings parallel with these publications, (AlShammari et al., 2020; Alsaleh, 2021; Flores & Gago, 2020; Orhan & Behan 2020).

To go more in depth, the training courses provided were not sufficient and the individuals who facilitated the courses were deemed inexperienced by the teachers. This resulted in teachers wanting to individually pay for their training courses out of pocket and learning information from other sources, which as a result added more stress and effort into completing the requirements assigned to them. Moreover, the quality of lessons was negatively affected due to the MHSK's fickle plan. Lessons were constructed that did not provide age-appropriate learning spaces and resources for kindergarten students. The kindergarten curricula are designed for traditional modes of learning and were not properly configured for to engage kindergarten students. Due to its improper configuration, teachers were unable to track and evaluate the progress of the children. In addition, parents did not show support in the education of their kids, causing them to explore alternative learning resources for their children.

Teachers expressed high hopes for overcoming the education crisis during the pandemic; however, the challenges were more substantial than anticipated. Despite the continuous attempts to express their suggestions and opinions on the Distance Learning plan through the formal channels, newspapers, and social media outlets, their voices were silenced by the decision-makers; (Alkhalidy, 12 Oct 2020). When issuing their opinions to their ministry supervisors, they were shunned and forced to proceed with the directions given to them, even though the directions were contradictory. This is evidenciary support that demonstrates how stakeholders were not involved in the decision-making process as mentioned in Aleisa, Bogotch & Barakat (2018) and Alhouti (2020).

Due to COVID-19 being an unexpected pandemic, the MOE tried its best to provide appropriate resources for teaching kindergarten-level children. Although the plan took a long time to reach the public and contained many limitations, much effort was put into producing the

educational plan. Due to the limitations of the educational plan, the physical and psychological instability, such as class timing, location of classes, different instructions, etc., teachers resulted in mistrust with decision-makers on one hand, and mistrust with parents on the other. Consequently, the educational plans, curricula, and implementation methods were substandard as mentioned in Alkhayat (2022), reflecting children's lack of interaction. During the planning, implementation, and reflection phases of Distance Learning, a variety of challenges must be addressed, such as training, planning, and online curricula. Along with, appropriate teacher training, as well as, online collaborations with schools and families, can aid children to have more efficient Distance Learning experiences moving forward.

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رياض الأطفال في دولة الكويت خلال جائحة كوفيد - 19 من وجهة نظر المعلمات: دراسة الظاهرة (الفينومينولوجي)

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دولة الكويت

الملخص

الهدف: تبحث هذه الدراسة في التجارب المعيشية والتحديات التي تواجه معلمات رياض الأطفال مع عملية التعلم عن بعد أثناء تداعيات جائحة COVID-19 في دولة الكويت. مثل العديد من المناطق الأخرى لم تكن مدارس رياض الأطفال معزولة عن التحديات التي ظهرت نتيجة لتأثير COVID-19. **المنهج:** استندت الدراسة إلى مدخل دراسة الظاهرة، وتصميم بحث نوعي يسلط الضوء على وجهات نظر وخبرات ثمانية عشر معلمة في رياض الأطفال خلال هذا الوقت. **النتائج:** تشير نتائج الدراسة إلى وجود نقص في المساعدة والدعم والتخطيط الكافي والتواصل والمناهج الدراسية غير الملائمة وغياب الدعم المجتمعي من وزارة التربية والتعليم. علاوة على ذلك، تسلط النتائج الضوء على الحاجة الملحة لإعادة صياغة نظام التعليم عن بعد في رياض الأطفال في دولة الكويت. **الخاتمة:** تركز التوصيات المقترحة لدعم النتائج على تضمين تدريب المعلمين المناسب وخلق التعاون عبر الإنترنت مع المدارس والأسر الذي من الممكن أن يساعد الأطفال في الحصول على خبرات تعلم عن بعد أكثر فاعلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كوفيد-19، التعليم عن بعد، رياض أطفال

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