# Covid-19 Pandemic and Its Impact on Early Childhood Education, Policies and Practices

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## Abstract:

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the closure of educational institutions around the world, with more than 1.2 billion children out of the classroom; as a result, education has changed dramatically. Early childhood is one of the most important and dangerous stages of growth in human life, as it contributes to laying the foundations and pillars upon which the personality of the child is built in its many different aspects. Therefore, this paper aims at exploring the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood education, policies and practices. Use the qualitative descriptive approach Primary data was collected through interviews, as intentional sample of 40 faculty members in the Early Childhood Department at King Saud University was selected. The results showed that the importance of making drastic changes in the early childhood education system to cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. Also, the results highlighted that early childhood policies should be based on limiting and reversing negative long-term effects through implementing learning recovery programs, protecting education budgets, and preparing for future shocks. Moreover, the results of the interviews showed that improving early childhood practices in light of the Covid-19 pandemic depends mainly on developing the educational process, through a set of measures, including interest in investing in education, knowledge and skills, and qualifying and training teachers. Finally, this paper recommended the need to issue a guideline for formulating early childhood policies in order to draw a sustainable road map and develop innovative solutions to the challenges facing children at that stage.

**Keywords:** Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood Policies, Early Childhood Practices.

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# جائحة كوفيد-١٩ وتأثيرها على التعليم في مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة: السياسات والممارسات

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**المستخلص:**

أدى انتشار جائحة كوفيد-١٩ إلى إغلاق المؤسسات التعليمية حول العالم، مع خروج أكثر من ١.٢ مليار طفل من الفصول الدراسية؛ ونتيجة لذلك، تغير التعليم بشكل كبير. تعتبر مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة من أهم وأخطر مراحل النمو في حياة الإنسان، إذ تساهم في وضع الأسس والمرتكزات التي تبنى عليها شخصية الطفل بجوانبها المتعددة والمختلفة. لذلك، تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى استكشاف تأثير جائحة كوفيد-١٩ على التعليم والسياسات والممارسات في مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة. استخدم المنهج الوصفي النوعي وتم جمع البيانات الأولية من خلال المقابلات، حيث تم اختيار عينة قصدية مكونة من ٤٠ عضو هيئة تدريس في قسم الطفولة المبكرة بجامعة الملك سعود. وأظهرت النتائج أهمية إجراء تغييرات جذرية في نظام التعليم في مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة لمواجهة آثار جائحة كوفيد-١٩ وتداعياتها. كما أبرزت النتائج أن سياسات الطفولة المبكرة يجب أن تقوم على الحد من الآثار السلبية طويلة المدى وعكس اتجاهها من خلال تنفيذ برامج تعافي التعلم، وحماية ميزانيات التعليم، والاستعداد للصدمات المستقبلية. كما أظهرت نتائج المقابلات أن تحسين ممارسات الطفولة المبكرة في ظل جائحة كوفيد-١٩ يعتمد بشكل أساسي على تطوير العملية التعليمية، من خلال مجموعة من الإجراءات، منها الاهتمام بالاستثمار في التعليم والمعرفة والمهارات، والتأهيل والتدريب. المعلمين. وأخيراً أوصت هذه الورقة البحثية بضرورة إصدار دليل إرشادي لصياغة سياسات الطفولة المبكرة بهدف رسم خارطة طريق مستدامة ووضع حلول مبتكرة للتحديات التي تواجه الأطفال في تلك المرحلة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التعليم في مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة، سياسات الطفولة المبكرة، ممارسات الطفولة المبكرة.

## Introduction

Since ancient times, humanity has been subjected to many crises and challenges of various forms, including natural disasters, wars and epidemics, which affected all aspects of life, and left negative effects that humanity has suffered for many years (Fitri & Latif, 2021). Today, the world is exposed to one of the most severe epidemics known as the Covid-19 pandemic, which posed health, economic and educational challenges in all countries of the world, as it has caused tens of millions of injuries and hundreds of thousands of deaths, in addition to material losses estimated at hundreds of billions of dollars (Howard- Jones et al., 2022). Following the pandemic, the World Health Organization declared a state of emergency and called on all countries of the world to take preventive measures to try to mitigate the spread of the epidemic. Home quarantine and comprehensive closures were among the most important precautionary measures that most countries of the world took to confront the pandemic, which negatively affected all sectors of life, including social, economic, political and educational (Berger et al., 2022).

Early childhood is one of the sectors most affected by the pandemic, since at least 40 million children worldwide have lost early childhood education, as childcare and early education facilities closed due to the closures caused by the spread of the Corona virus (Murray, 2021). Early childhood is considered one of the most important stages of life that a person goes through, as the early childhood stage greatly affects the other life stages that follow, whether in physical development, psychological and social development, or mental and cognitive development (Helgeland et al., 2022). The first five years of a child's life are particularly sensitive; since they are the basic building blocks for a child's growth, learning and development in the future, as the brain develops at a rapid rate during the first years, where more than a million neural networks grow every second, and at the age of five, about 85% of the child's ideas, skills and personality develop (Neppl et al., 2020). So this paper aims at exploring the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood education, policies and practices.

## Literature Review

The early childhood can be defined as the age stage that extends from the beginning of the third year of a child's life to the end of the fifth year of his life, or it is the stage that extends from the end of the infancy stage until the stage of entering school, as we can call it the pre-school stage (Afshordi & Liberman, 2021). Early childhood is one of the most important educational stages that a person goes through, as children at this stage are distinguished by their direct dependence on those around them, and at the same time they tend to be subjective and independent (Waizbard-Bartov et al., 2021). Also, the early childhood stage affects the life of the individual that includes all educational programs and strategies used in educating children from birth until reaching the eighth year of life (Fitri & Latif, 2021). The child develops and grows in the early childhood stage, which his physical, psychological, mental, social, linguistic and moral characteristics change continuously during this stage (Yoshikawa et al., 2020). Where the body mass of the child, whether male or female, increases until it becomes about 7 times what it was when he was born, this is due to the growth of muscles and bones, as the teeth grow at the beginning of the stage, and fall out at the end (Helgeland et al., 2022). The child at this stage is characterized by naive, simple one-way thinking; so that he can only focus on one side of what is presented to him (Lee, Joswick & Pole, 2022).

Early childhood education is a term used to describe educational programs that help educate children at an early age before entering primary school, meaning that they obtain all activities, skills, and experiences that help social and cognitive development before entering school (Timmons et al., 2021). The early childhood education process revolves around providing the child with a number of sciences, knowledge and behaviors, which is represented by activities, competitions and interactive games in which the child participates and benefits in building his personality, which enhances his self-confidence and creative and mental abilities (Spiteri, 2021). Teaching and learning strategies in early childhood are represented in achieving the strategy of creating an educational environment suitable for children's abilities and verifying their progress while building knowledge for children in a

simplified manner and relying on high thinking skills (Marsh et al., 2019). In addition, Egan et al. (2021) indicated that children who enroll in at least one year of early childhood education are more likely to develop the basic knowledge and skills that they will need in primary school education. The focus is usually on the use of play in educating children during this stage, so that they are taught social and academic lessons in order to prepare them for entering school, so they learn letters, numbers and writing, in addition to learning many values such as cooperation and participation in an organized environment (Nathan et al., 2022). Children who participate in early childhood education programs acquire very good social skills (Weiland & Morris, 2022). In a preschool setting, children learn important skills such as listening, sharing, and taking turns with other children (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021). Children will have the opportunity to interact with different peers, whether diversity of race, class, socioeconomic status or religion, as these early interactions build self-esteem and confidence in children at an early age that will remain with them throughout life (Djonko-Moore, 2022).

Early childhood practices are the overall desired activities practiced by children within kindergarten institutions, as these practices are linked to the principles and values of an early childhood education philosophy, which leads to enabling the integrated psychological development of children and achieving their childhood selves (Lafave, Webster & McConnell, 2021). Early childhood practices raises the levels of emotional, mental, physical and social ability of the child, as each type of these abilities is linked to the other types (Lee-Hammond & Bjervås, 2021). Also, Shepley & Grisham-Brown (2019) confirmed that early childhood practices represents a very important gateway to creating opportunities that develop children's potentials and shape their academic, social and cognitive skills, which in turn help them succeed in school and life. Moreover, Kirsch et al. (2020) illustrated that many aspects of children's development are closely related to the practices, skills, abilities and experiences that they have acquired through educational play activities.

Recently, there has been great work and clear efforts to achieve the fourth goal of the sustainable development goals, especially those related to the childhood stage, where countries have enacted legislation, policies and regulations around the family and children (Sabol, Busby & Hernandez, 2021). Early childhood policies allow equal opportunities for generations, in that all children get equal access to knowledge, health and social requirements, as society and the state can ensure an adequate preparation of social actors to be more efficient and able to manage a stage that differs in its nature, actions and resources (Yoshikawa et al., 2020). Furthermore, educational institutions can also develop the mental and psychological abilities of children at a stage when children are more ready to teach (Berger et al., 2022). Therefore, ignoring the early childhood stage wastes many opportunities in education and upbringing, and poor children can be exposed to inappropriate health and nutritional conditions that negatively affect forever the opportunities to learn and receive the necessary skills (Shonkoff, Slopen & Williams, 2021).

## Research Problems and Questions

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of our daily lives, as manifestations of daily life have almost ceased in all parts of the world (Weiland & Morris, 2022). While the political and economic consequences have been very severe, the impact of the pandemic on family life is just as important, although it has not been studied with sufficient clarity (Howard- Jones et al., 2022). Distance education has come as a last resort to save the educational process from collapse and ensure its continuation in the required manner. However, educational leaders and teachers were forced to suddenly employ distance education in the educational process without gradual, sequential and deliberate steps that made the application of distance education difficult (Atiles et al., 2021). This difficulty varied according to the age stage, as its repercussions were greater on the early childhood stage compared to the adult stage, as children in the early childhood stage lack the skills and experiences that qualify them to engage in the distance education experience (Kim, 2020). Therefore, kindergarten teachers faced many challenges to provide children with the required behaviors and values, especially that the distance education process lacks practice-based

learning and tangible learning, as it does not include all elements of face-to-face education (Cahapay et al., 2021). Based on that, the researcher raises the following two main questions:
- What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the effectiveness of early childhood education?
-  What is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on early childhood policies?
- What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood practices?

## Research Methodology

In this research, the qualitative method was adopted in order to capture the opinions of research sample regarding research variables, as well as to provide more substantial facts about the phenomena under study. Qualitative method is a direct meeting that brings together the scientific researchers and members of the sample that they deem appropriate from their point of view to obtain information on the subject of scientific research (McGrath, Palmgren & Liljedahl, 2019). This is done directly without an intermediary, so the qualitative method is one of the most Common study tools, as it is commonly used in human behavioural and social research, which requires careful and in-depth study (Guenther & Falk, 2019). The primary source data used in this paper was collected using interview tool, which designed with the goals and objectives of research in mind, as intentional sample of 40 faculty members in the Early Childhood Department at King Saud University was selected.

The interview in scientific research in general is one of the tools of qualitative research, it is a type of scientific research. Focuses on the study of behavior and attitudes of people. This approach relies on collecting information through interviews and observations to collect data on a topic (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). The interview aims to obtain the information that the researcher wants from the respondent and to identify their features, feelings and behaviors in a particular situation (McGrath et al., 2019). In many studies related to the humanities, the researcher finds that face-to-face interview is the best way to obtain information, despite the ability to obtain it by mail or mobile (Brennen,

2021). The reason behind this is that there are some data that can only be obtained by face-to-face interview, where the researcher realizes that it is necessary to see and hear the voice and words of the respondents regarding the research topic (Bush & Prather, 2019). Despite the spread of the Corona epidemic, the research was adopted face-to-face interviews, as the researcher followed preventive measures, which include sterilization, not using papers as interviews will be recorded using the latest technologies in this field, making sure that all respondents are vaccinated, and maintaining social distancing. In this research, the interview consisted of (15) questions, equally divided into three areas that are early childhood education, early childhood policies, and early childhood practices.

To analyze the data that extracted from interviews, a grounded theory was used, since Glaser & Strauss was the first to adopt the grounded theory in 1967, and then it was developed in the early 1990s separately by them to be adopted as a general methodology for building theories (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). As it based on qualitative information and data where they are collected, refuted and analyzed through systematic interpretation in order to derive new meaningful facts and concepts (De la Espriella & Restrepo, 2020). The grounded theory is one of the qualitative scientific research methodologies that contribute significantly to the production of scientific research of high importance and value (McCann & Polacsek, 2021). The justification for using the grounded theory in this research is due to its style and way of dealing with various issues, which is based on creativity and innovation to discover problems and create practical solutions to them. This is what social research usually needs to be an important foundation for the development of society under complex circumstances.

**Research Results**

Demographic characteristics Search sample

Given the frequency of the research sample, which is 40, the Table 1 below shows the summary of demographic characteristics of the respondents. As the number of males reached 30(75.0%), while the number of female reached 10(25.0%). In addition, the Table 1 shows that the number of respondents of the age distribution of 28 to 35 was

3(7.5%), age group from 36 to 45 was 13(32.5%), age group from 46 to 55 was 15(37.5%), and lastly age group above 55 years old was 9(22.5%). Regarding academic rank, the number of the professor was 21(52.5%), the associate professor was 14(35.0%), while the assistant professor was 5(12.5%). Moreover, the number of sample of years of experience from 1 to 5 was 3(7.5%), from 6 to 10 was 8(20.0%), from 11 to 15 was 17(42.5%), and more than 15 years was 12(30.0%).

**Table 1:** Demographic characteristics of the Respondents (N= 40).

| Variable | N (%) |
|---|---|
| **Gender** | |
| Male | 30 (75.0%) |
| Female | 10 (25.0%) |
| **Age** | |
| 28-35 | 3 (7.5%) |
| 36-45 | 13 (32.5%) |
| 46-55 | 15 (37.5%) |
| 56 and Above | 9 (22.5%) |
| **Academic Rank** | |
| Professor | 21 (52.5%) |
| Associate Professor | 14 (35.0%) |
| Assistant Professor | 5 (12.5%) |
| **Years of Experience** | |
| 1-5 Years | 3 (7.5%) |
| 6-10 Years | 8 (20.0%) |
| 11-15 Years | 17 (42.5%) |
| 16 Years and More | 12 (30.0%) |

**Respondents' Answers on Interview Questions**

As mentioned previously, the research consists of three main questions that are directly related to research objective. Interview questions and answers are summarized s as follows:

**1.What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the effectiveness of early childhood education?**

The educational crisis created by the Covid-19 pandemic is one of the most serious issues that the world and its educational systems have faced. Therefore, the majority of respondents stressed the significant

impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood education and development, as explained by:

It has a great impact, where kindergarten institutions have not received sufficient attention so far from those in charge of educational policy, and they still suffer from many problems that hinder them from achieving their goals.

**In addition, this was stated by:**

Early childhood education is facing great risks, which added to the negative reality other additional challenges and increased the size of the great pressures in front of the entire components of the educational process represented by children, curricula and the teacher.

Most of the respondents focused on the fact that distance education is one of the solutions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, due to its suitability to the nature of the problem, and to provide opportunities to continue the educational process, as illustrated by:

I think that the transition from traditional education systems to online education systems in kindergartens may be successful and useful in the time of Corona, as teachers have realized that distance learning in a new way, and have adapted tasks to the new form of lessons that may reflect positively on their qualifications and experience.

**In addition, this was commented by:**

I believe that the conditions that the entire world is suffering from at the present time, represented by the spread of Covid-19, forced educational institutions, including kindergartens, to switch to distance learning in order to ensure the continuity of the teaching and learning process.

Despite most of the international and regional reports indicated the existence of a worrying and blurry picture about the health, educational and social repercussions on children, as there is a possibility that the educational process will stop if other waves of the Covid-19 pandemic begin, which means a return to distance education that faces many challenges in several countries due to the lack of the technological infrastructure for that. Thus, some respondents pointed out the difficulty of this step, especially in the early childhood stage, where distance

education needs experiences and methods that children at this age do not master. This was confirmed by the respondent, who explained:

The Corona pandemic forced kindergartens to switch to distance learning, although children at that early stage are not ready for the distance education process, as there is a lack of application in this regard; such as technology support, distance education, and training, as the children do not have sufficient knowledge and experience about distance education.

**Also, this was discussed by:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted many real challenges facing the early childhood stage, which lie in the lack of direct interaction between the child and the teacher, social skills problems as a result of the absence of the recognized school environment, and problems with Internet connectivity and the provision of virtual education supplies for the child such as laptops or tablets.

Many respondents referred to several developmental pillars of appropriate methodological practices in the field of early childhood learning during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This idea was most strongly supported by:

In the era of Corona, children are growing and learning better within the social environment in which they feel safe and appreciated, and receive a continuous response to their physical, psychological and social needs. However, education cannot be abstracted from the emotions that are vitally linked to the extent to which children participate in activities within the educational environment.

**In addition, this was commented by:**

In my opinion, the COVID-19 pandemic has provided opportunities for children to test their newly acquired skills and abilities, in addition to facing some problems that are slightly above their abilities.

Some respondents indicated the necessity of making drastic changes in the early childhood education system to cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, as clarified by:

The Corona pandemic should push those concerned with the educational aspect to adopt modern practices and build a developed system according to an advanced legislative framework and clear

standards and outputs. Where this system involves everyone to develop the skills of teachers and caregivers by working to develop the quality of university programs, professional certificates and continuous professional development.

**Also, this idea was mentioned by:**

Under these exceptional circumstances, early childhood education must be at the centre of the attention of educational policy makers, and work to find community participation with civil society institutions, in order to hold courses and seminars for those responsible for raising the child.

Regarding future challenges, the respondents agreed on the need to pay attention to the issue of childhood and make it a top priority in the next stage, due to its impact on the future, so that the Covid-19 pandemic would truly be an opportunity to open new horizons to come up with initiatives and outputs that would achieve hopes for all children, as explained by:

The focus in the future should be on the importance of rethinking the early childhood education system, especially after the Covid-19 epidemic, based on the educational resources we have to educate our children and form them for the future we envision.

Also, this was discussed by:

It is also necessary to think in a scientific way, and to study all future and expected scenarios in the stage of coexistence with that pandemic and beyond.

**- What is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on early childhood policies?**

In Saudi Arabia, early childhood received attention, as the education policy document stipulated that the state encourages nurseries and kindergartens, in pursuit of raising the level of education and child care. As the philosophy of early childhood education in Saudi Arabia is based on building a developmental perspective capable of nurturing and educating children from birth to six years, based on educational theories that aim to engage children through learning, which is the cornerstone for exploring and experiencing what is around them(Policy document of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1390, Ministry of Education). In light of

this, the inevitability of conducting a scientific review of early childhood policies, the difficulties that impede their achievement, and the most important proposals to activate and modify them in order to comply with the Corona pandemic and its repercussions. Therefore, many respondents stressed that the of the Covid-19 pandemic on early childhood practices were negative, as the reaction was not in the required way, as the policies that are followed in kindergarten institutions are not applied correctly to allow keeping pace with the great changes that occur in society and the world as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This was explained by:

From my point of view, the significant impact of the pandemic on early childhood policies cannot be denied, as it prompted policy makers to adopt an approach consistent with promising global practices, and to formulate policies related to early childhood development based on evidence and data.

**In addition, this was supported by:**

This pandemic has a great impact, so it is necessary to activate the role of the concerned authorities by continuing to participate in the implementation and follow-up process and to strengthen their communication with children and listen to them to find out their needs and requirements. In addition to conducting random testing experiments during the initial stages of policy development, as well as testing the reactions, feasibility and effectiveness of the most appropriate options and tools and adopting the best ones.

To mitigate the effects of COVID-19 pandemic, countries has worked to limit and reverse the long-term negative impacts by implementing early childhood learning recovery programs, protecting education budgets, and preparing for future shocks. This was clarified by:

The Corona crisis contributed to the intensification of efforts to build an integrated system for early childhood and to draw a sustainable road map for the development of innovative solutions to the challenges facing this stage.

**Also, this was explained by:**

The impact is very high, so I think that early childhood policies during and after the Corona pandemic should include the proposed

stages, their requirements and the process of formulating them, with a detailed explanation of each step of the policy formulation process, reinforced with a checklist at the end of each step. This is in order to ensure the strengthening of local capacities related to policy formulation, and to provide policy makers with detailed, consistent, sustainable and effective tools and frameworks for policy formulation related to early childhood development.

Some respondents mentioned that countries should prepare an early childhood policy that defines the path of action at this stage, and clarifies the quality aspects that we will focus on. This is done by developing awareness programs on the aspects of their children's development through the use of multiple means of communication, as illustrated by:

I think that education policies must be keen to develop creativity in children, as well as technology and sustainable development, which is consistent with the requirements of the Corona pandemic.

**In addition, this was supported by:**

There are many measures must be taken by the state to support teaching and distance  education, ranging from broadcasting video lessons and using distance learning platforms via the Internet, as well as organizing online professional development and peer-to-peer learning opportunities for teachers to meet remotely and share experiences with online learning while crisis.

Some respondents illustrated that investing in the early childhood category during the Covid-19 pandemic will have economic, social and value repercussions in the future, which will achieve the concept of well-being and lifelong learning, as clarified by:

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of investing in early childhood development, the need to improve learning environments in formal and informal settings, increase spending on early childhood development, and improve early learning outcomes for young children.

**Also, this was supported by:**

Investing in early childhood is the best way for countries and societies to confront the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, it is an inexpensive investment for educational institutions or government

budgets. Rather, it is a spontaneous work that families, communities and governments undertake in all cases, and by it we overcome many of the negatives and problems that we instill in the hearts of children.

Recent studies indicate that more than 200 million children, mostly from Africa and South Asia, have not been able to reach the necessary capabilities to enable them to reach the level of their peers due to poverty, poor health, nutrition and care as a result of the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic.In this regard, some respondents emphasized that the current COVID-19 pandemic has revealed structural weaknesses in early childhood institutions, which has weakened their chance towards achieving sustainability and equality, as mentioned by:

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities within and between countries, including institutions that support and educate children.

**In addition, this was supported by:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the weakness of policies in early childhood development, so care must be taken to achieve equality and improve poor children's abilities to learn, acquire health, good food, and cognitive, emotional and social skills in the future, as well as respond to the changing nature of work based on early learning and to create a more flexible educational system in light of uncertainty.

**- What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on early childhood practices?**

The majority of respondents' opinions included the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on early childhood practices, as explained by:

There is no doubt that the Corona pandemic has a negative impact on children's practices, especially in the early stage, where the confinement of children at home and depriving them of practicing their favorite sports and going out to society led to the emergence of the trait of introversion, and the fear of merging with others, which may lead to the emergence of a state of social phobia.

**In addition, this was stated by:**

The restrictions imposed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic have greatly affected the practice of many movement-related activities that the

child performs in schools specialized in early childhood education, whether running a lot, continuous movement, climbing and jumping.

Quite the contrary, some respondents mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic has reflected positively on the practices of children by implanting some values and principles that can be built upon in the coming stages, as stated by:

I think that the Corona crisis had a positive impact on the intellectual practices of children, as it made them gradually move from doing the easy things to the more difficult ones, and expanding the circle of private things to become public. This is in addition to the development of creativity in children, by not using the method of memorization that limits their abilities and makes it a rigid educational template.

**Also, this was explained by:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has left enough space for children to explore and experiment, and to engage in activities that they like and want to do. As this pandemic has created a new type of educational practice, as the presence of the child in an exciting environment that secures him to explore and learn safely, not in the traditional indoctrination way, but through the acquisition of life experiences.

Another response by:

The Covid-19 crisis has contributed to the development of responsibility in children, as holding children with some simple responsibilities at this age builds them with many different skills that they can use in their daily lives.

Many respondents stressed the importance of developing teaching practices related to early childhood, as teachers play a large and important role in advancing this stage and contribute significantly to the provision of many educational services, as well as teachers transfer many experiences to children through clarity and simplicity, as explained by:

To improve early childhood practices in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, I believe that developing the educational process is the basis, through a set of measures, most notably the interest in investing in education, knowledge and skills, through the rehabilitation and training of teachers and leaders to use and employ advanced programs and applications.

**Also, this was clarified by:**

Early childhood teachers play a very important role during and after the Corona pandemic, as they convey their experiences to children clearly and effectively. Therefore, teachers must be highly experienced and role models in all their practices and behaviours, because the child at this stage is distinguished by his/her ability to imitate behaviours from others.

On the other hand, some respondents focused on the importance of the role of parents in improving early childhood practices, since COVID-19 pandemic forced educational institutions to establish a continuous and positive relationship and to achieve a real partnership with the families of children in everything related to their growth and learning, as illustrated by:

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an urgent need to adopt best practices by raising community awareness of the importance of parents spending productive time with their children, as well as the presence of teachers and leaders who aspire for the best and change.

**Also, this was supported by:**

I believe that the Corona pandemic contributed to improving the communication between parents and their children, which was reflected in their practices. As the pandemic helped provide the time needed to teach the child many good practices, such as the freedom to explore and learn, and the availability of appropriate stimuli for mental growth and development of motivation. Also, the Covid-19 pandemic has strengthened the role of parents in developing creativity in children, through the use of toys, and providing them with an appropriate amount of information about school before entering it.

Moreover, Respondents' answers focused on discussing the issue of the social and psychological impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on early childhood practices, as this pandemic created a state of unsafe attachment for children due to their staying close to their mothers and fathers, while depriving them of playing with their peers, which affected their social communication skills, low language skills, reduced flexibility, psychological toughness, and psychological and social adjustment mechanisms. This idea was confirmed by:

The Covid-19 pandemic had a negative impact, represented in creating a state of unsafe attachment due to children staying close to their parents, in addition to the anxiety, horror and isolation that arose in children, and thus creating avoidant dependent personalities. As these repercussions require parents to raise their knowledge of how to deal with psychological and social factors in their children and to enhance the role of parents in supporting their children during the education process.

**In addition, this was supported by:**

The pandemic has increased the number of children who suffer from a language delay and social communication disorder, especially children born during the pandemic, due to their sitting at home and not mixing with their peers, and the lack of social interaction and friction. Depriving the child of playing with peers has drawn a distorted form of social relations in the child's mind, as many children may suffer later in the case of refusing to go to the traditional school, as well as the cases of school dropouts may increase in exchange for increased clinging to the home.

In light of the psychological stresses imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, which will lead to serious consequences for children, such as delayed cognitive, emotional and social development, some respondents proposed a set of suggestions for mitigating the risk of mental illness when entering school, as explained by:

Children affected socially and educationally by the Corona pandemic need various training programs to help them make up for what they missed in life experiences, which they were unable to experience on the ground, such as training clubs that include educational and interactive activities with their peers, in addition to adding more information and experiences to the educational curriculum for the kindergarten stage.

Also, this was indicated by:

I propose to provide awareness-raising information programs for children and parents in various media, in order to spread culture about improving early childhood practices.

## Conclusion and Recommendations:

The results of the interviews showed that there is a significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on early Childhood education,

policies and practices. The results showed that the importance of making drastic changes in the early childhood education system to cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. Also, the results highlighted that early childhood policies should be based on limiting and reversing negative long-term effects through implementing learning recovery programs, protecting education budgets, and preparing for future shocks. Moreover, the results of the interviews showed that improving early childhood practices in light of the Covid-19 pandemic depends mainly on developing the educational process, through a set of measures, including interest in investing in education, knowledge and skills, and qualifying and training teachers. In light of these results, this paper recommended the need to issue a guideline for formulating early childhood policies in order to draw a sustainable road map and develop innovative solutions to the challenges facing children at that stage. The research also recommended the need to improve the reality of early childhood in Saudi Arabia, in cooperation with many concerned institutions, which provides an honourable model for how to care for this category and provide it with all the elements that distinguish it in its various later life stages. In addition, there is a necessity for spending more money on early childhood programs in the post-Covid-19 pandemic, because it will reflect positively on human capital and will benefit everyone.

Attention to early childhood has great implications in the future, so our educational and social institutions must put this stage at the forefront of priorities, as it is the beginning of the formation of the child's personality skilfully, socially, behaviourally, and psychologically, and the entrance to achieving the concept of lifelong learning. This paper confirms that interest in early childhood education will achieve a wide range of goals, including developing children's mental skills, by improving linguistic abilities and diverse information, and stimulating their innovation capabilities through early investment in cognitive capacity and thinking patterns to produce a participating and active socially human being. The results of this study will also help governments make all efforts to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, provide care and supplies to protect children, and work to strengthen the

legislative framework in terms of national laws, regulations and institutional frameworks. Moreover, this paper calls on the private sector to adopt good practices to enhance social responsibility in early childhood education and care, as well as launch initiatives and programs aimed at strengthening this responsibility in early childhood and working to implement it. Finally, this research was limited to explaining early childhood education, policies and practices, so it is possible for future research to focus on quality standards that are concerned with measuring the success of implementing the early education system in the post-Covid-19 pandemic, or teaching strategies in early childhood education based on formulating a set of educational and pedagogical rules and regulations that aim to apply early education in a correct manner.

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