

The Effects of COVID-19 on Student Teachers

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Introduction

There are many individuals who knew from an early age that they wanted to become a teacher while there are others who developed a passion for teaching due to personal experiences or just being introduced to the profession. Teachers in society are often looked upon or undermined as if the profession is not as important as to that of a doctor, nurse, accountant or even engineers. Teachers are the backbones of society as they play an integral role in the development of molding and imparting knowledge in the minds of the past generations and the upcoming generations who aspire to become future doctors, nurses and engineers of tomorrow. Just like any other area of study, pre-trained teachers are also being affected drastically as they are forced to deal with the harsh realities of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This article will discuss, the effects of COVID-19 on student teachers in Jamaica such as the negative implications of switching around of practicum and finally year courses, limited resources and finally, students' mental health status.

The effects of COVID-19

The switch up of practicum and final year courses

There are over 800 pre-trained teachers that were on par with completing their final year teaching practice between September and December of 2020, however due to the new norm, these students were forced into an alternative of completing their final year courses before their practicum instead [1]. This alternative has caused total chaos as final year students who failed courses previously and desired to re-sit in the upcoming semester were unable to do so because:

1. Some courses were only offered in a specific semester which ends up being in the upcoming year
2. Students were not allowed to re-sit courses while doing practicum [2]
3. Students ended up not graduating with their batches
4. Many students resorted to taking leave of absence as student loans do not cover redoing of courses.

Limited resources

Prior to the pandemic, there were multiple cries of not being able to afford tuition, limited access to resources such as Wi-fi, personal computers, laptops, and books in order to complete their assignments [3]. With such a drastic change, the country and the world at large were forced to make a full 360 degree turn without much warning. This 360-degrees turn brought about by the Covid19, has taken a toll on the minds of many student teachers [4]. Though there were multiple complaints for the same, individuals were able to utilize the libraries and computer labs within their institution to gain access to some books, Wi-Fi on college campus and use of computer to complete their assignments.

Secondly, many individuals were able to work and pay their tuition via payment plans and other alternatives. Now with this pandemic, the options are limited as many parents and students themselves has lost

their jobs and as a result the stakes are high; as tuitions fees are harder to come by and payment plans are higher to meet [5]. In an era where technology has become the new norm, many are unable to purchase Wi-fi much less megabytes (data plan) to assist with online classes and to complete assignments [6]. Imagine being in a household where there is no Wi-fi, parents have lost their jobs and student teachers need to attend classes online but can't afford it; or having data plan but is only able to attend the classes for a certain time in order to save megabytes for the other classes, so that way they won't miss the remainder for the week or miss out on what is being taught in the more difficult courses [7].

Mental health status under attack

In being forced to study under the "new norm" of technology under these conditions, many student teachers asked themselves "will we ever complete our area of studies, how are we going to make it through, are these circumstances good for our mental health [8], how will we impact the children of tomorrow if we ourselves are not equipped and up to standard with the new norm and will this pandemic ever end?" As student teachers, mental health plays an integral role in how they feel as a person, how their feelings affect their actions and attitudes, how they will teach, how they interact with their peers and students of tomorrow [9]. If their mental health as influencers of tomorrow isn't stable and intact, then this will leave a negative impact on the teachers' college and student teachers as individuals and the children, they encounter [10].

Conclusion

The truth be told, there's no quick fix to this pandemic and as student teachers, they are only forced to adapt to the changes or be left behind in the dust. "The race is not for the swift but for those who can endure" and as such, it is vital that student teachers do their very best to stay in the race of studies and overcome as graduates with their mental health intact.

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