



## Adaptation of students with disabilities in Special Schools during the Covid-19 pandemic

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### ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic has had negative implications for the education sector, including Special Schools. This study was conducted to analyze formal pedagogical practices in Special Schools and the adaptations made by students with disabilities during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study was conducted using qualitative research methods and a phenomenological approach. Robert K. Merton's adaptation theory is used to analyze the types of adaptations made by students with disabilities to formal pedagogical practices during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study finds that the Covid-19 pandemic reproduces formal pedagogical practices in two formats, namely online and hybrid. Apart from that, the form of adaptation of students with disabilities is largely determined by their physical, cognitive, and mental conditions. Among them are students with intellectual disabilities who have the innovation adaptation type, then students with deaf-speech impairments who have the conformity adaptation type, and students with autism have the ritualism adaptation type. This type of adaptation reflects the dynamics and complexity of students with disabilities when carrying out the learning process during the Covid-19 pandemic.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 26/02/2024

Revised 30/03/2024

Accepted 01/04/2024

Published 03/04/2024

### KEYWORDS

Special Schools; students with disabilities; Covid-19 pandemic; adaptation; education.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30743/mkd.v8i1.8971>

## INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic which spread massively in 2020 had negative implications for various sectoral aspects, such as health, social, economic and education (Wei et al., [2021](#); Islam & Habib, [2022](#); Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). In particular, the education sector as a foundation and systemic incubator for creating quality human resources has experienced stagnation for some time (Onyema et al., [2020](#)). This stagnation is caused by formal pedagogical practices that cannot be implemented optimally by educational institutions. The learning process carried out directly must be hampered by the government's physical distancing policy (Hermawan, [2021](#)). This also has implications for the formal pedagogical process in special educational institutions, such as Special Schools which accommodate students with disabilities.

Special Schools are educational institutions designed to comprehensively develop competencies for students with disabilities (Rumrill et al., [2011](#)). The diction "comprehensive" here refers to all aspects of the education dimension, starting from the curriculum, teachers, infrastructure, learning materials, to the learning environment for students with disabilities. Disabled students are people with disabilities who have limitations in physical, cognitive, and mental aspects (Schalock et al., [2021](#)). Because of this, it will be very difficult for students with disabilities to take part in the learning process at regular schools. For this reason, Special Schools are educational institutions specifically for students with disabilities in various categories, such as the blind, deaf, speech impaired, mentally retarded, quadriplegic, autistic, and others (Moriña & Carnerero, [2022](#)).

One form of resilience and adaptation of formal educational institutions to the Covid-19 pandemic is by implementing an online learning system (Maatuk et al., [2022](#); Adedoyin & Soykan, [2023](#); Pratama et al., [2020](#)). Technically, this learning process is carried out using technological instruments – such as laptops, computers, and cellphones – and is carried out online to avoid physical contact. Generally, online learning systems can be implemented well by general education structures that have students or students with normal conditions (Ali, [2020](#)). Because students or general



students can access various technological and non-technological instruments to participate in the learning process. However, this study is normative in nature and does not specifically discuss formal pedagogical practices in Special Schools which are also affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In a linear dimension, Special Schools as special education institutions have more complex challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Bearing in mind, Special Schools have students with disabilities with various categorizations and require direct formal pedagogical practice. Formal pedagogical practices in Special Schools are not only limited to material and substance aspects, but also aspects of independence, interaction, and socialization (Rifa'i, [2022](#)). However, no studies have been found that specifically discuss formal pedagogical practices in Special Schools during the Covid-19 pandemic with a sociological approach. For this reason, this study wants to know the conditions of Special Schools during the Covid-19 Pandemic analytically and comprehensively.

On the other hand, Special Schools must also carry out structured adaptation or resilience so that they can constantly carry out formal pedagogical practices. Definitively and theoretically, adaptation is a dynamic social process and is carried out to adapt to certain social realities (Chotim, [2022](#)). In sociological studies, adaptation can be seen as a context that intersects with "cultural goals" and "institutional means" (Merton, [2020](#)). For this reason, there are five types of adaptation that can be carried out by individuals or social structures, namely conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. In this study, this type of adaptation can be used to analyze the forms of resilience carried out by students with disabilities in formal pedagogical practices at Special Schools.

In this context, students with disabilities have the same rights as general students to be able to access education equally – including in Special Schools (Rioux, [2012](#); Liasidou & Symeou, [2018](#); Liasidou & Mavrou, [2017](#)). However, previous studies regarding students with disabilities were only limited to aspects of human rights, inequality, and social discrimination. For this reason, the study of the social practices of students with disabilities in educational spaces which have implications for emancipatory aspects is seen as an important topic to research. For this reason, it is hoped that this study will be able to see the reality of students with disabilities from a phenomenological perspective to examine their experiences and forms of adaptation to formal pedagogical practices in the Covid-19 pandemic situation.

This study was carried out in a structured manner to find out the conditions of Special Schools during the Covid-19 Pandemic. This also includes examining the formal pedagogical practices implemented in Special Schools during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Apart from that, specifically, this study was carried out to identify the forms of adaptation made by students with disabilities in three categories - namely mentally retarded, deaf-mute, and autism - as part of the categorization or variation of data. This study uses Robert K. Merton's adaptation theory as the main basis for analyzing the forms of resilience and adaptation carried out by students with disabilities in formal pedagogical practices at Special Schools. This study was conducted at two private special school managed by some foundations, in the city of Surabaya.

## METHOD

This study uses qualitative research methods with a phenomenological approach as a research perspective. The phenomenological approach is used as a mechanism to examine the world of human life, which is experienced subjectively, objectively, and intersubjectively (Tumangkeng & Maramis, [2022](#)). Then, this study was carried out in several special schools in the city of Surabaya, namely the FH Special School and the WT Special School. These two schools were chosen by researchers because they are private special education institutions that have students with low socio-economic typologies. With limited and complex conditions, researchers want to see how students with disabilities adapt to formal pedagogical practices during the Covid-19 pandemic. On the other hand, these two special

schools are special educational institutions that accommodate various categories of students with disabilities. Starting from the blind, speech impaired, deaf, mentally retarded, to autism. Research informants in this study include two types of informants, namely teachers and parents of students with disabilities. Determining the informants in this study used the snowball technique which is dynamic and extends from one informant to another.

Then, the data collection method was carried out using two mechanisms, namely observation and in-depth interviews (primary data) as well as books, the internet, and scientific articles (secondary data). In this case, observations were carried out to determine formal pedagogical practices and social processes carried out by students with disabilities. Then, in-depth interviews were conducted with eight informants consisting of three teachers and five parents of students with disabilities. In-depth interviews cannot be conducted with students with disabilities because of their cognitive and mental limitations, so they are unable to reveal information credibly.

**Table 1. List of informants**

No.	Name (Initials)	Information
1	TK	Mrs. TK is a teacher at the WT Special School which focuses on students with deaf-speech impairment
2	AZ	Mr. AZ is a teacher at the FH Special School which focuses on students with intellectual disabilities
3	FD	Mrs. FD is a teacher at the FH Special School which focuses on students with intellectual disabilities
4	SA	Mrs. SA is the parent of a student with intellectual disability
5	GK	Mrs. GK is the parent of a student with intellectual disability
6	RI	Mrs. RI is the parent of a student with autism
7	YA	Mrs. YA is the parent of a student with deaf-speech impairment
8	EL	Mrs. EL is the parent of a student with deaf-speech impairment

Source: Primary Data, 2023

In this context, the FH Special School has a total of 30 students with disabilities and the WT Special School has 11 students with disabilities. The data analysis method in this study uses three stages of data analysis, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1992). In this case, researchers conducted in-depth interviews with research informants and gradual observations of formal pedagogical practices during the Covid-19 pandemic. Then, the researcher transcribed the data verbatim as a basis for analyzing and categorizing the data systematically. After this, the researcher wrote down the research results by embedding conclusive and contextual propositions.

## DISCUSSION

### Formal pedagogical practices in Special Schools: Between online and hybrid

This study found that FH Special School and WT Special School conceptualized two formal pedagogical practices, namely online and hybrid. Technically, the school allows the class teacher to design learning methods that are effective, dynamic, and of course comfortable for students with disabilities. Therefore, there is differentiation of learning mechanisms in several classes. For example, at the FH Special School, where class XI for the mentally retarded and classes VIII and IX for the deaf apply online learning methods that tend to be imitative. Where this formal pedagogical practice is carried out by making WhatsApp video calls, doing assignments, and taking exams. In other words, there are no formal pedagogical practices like other public schools that use PPT or Zoom Meeting.

"There are two forms of assignment, bro. First, the assignments that I give in each student's notebook. Later the children just have to do the work at home and collect it at school next week. Then secondly, there is a form of assignment that I send via the WA group. Sometimes I take screenshots of these tasks or send them photos. Then to collect it, the task can be directly photographed or videoed. It depends on what subject you are studying, Mr. Rafi." (Mrs. FD, teacher in FH Special Schools).

On the other hand, there is class X which houses students with disabilities in the autism category who only implement methods of doing assignments and taking exams. According to informant Mr. AZ as class Because of this, Mr. AZ immediately came to the student's house to meet and give assignments and exams. Mr. AZ also teaches students' parents regarding the technicalities of assignments and exams so that they can practice at home.

"Autistic children are different from other types of disabilities, sir. Children with autism must receive intense learning, a comfortable space, and definitely meet physically with the teacher. Yes, because Covid-19 is like this, it definitely won't be possible if you want to go online like that," (Mr. AZ, teacher in FH Special Schools).

The online learning process is a variable in educational institutions to continue implementing formal pedagogical practices (Cramarenco et al., [2023](#); Pangarso & Setyorini, [2023](#); Batdı et al., [2023](#)). However, these studies only explain that technology platforms – such as Zoom Meeting and Google Meet – are used constantly by students and the public. This research found that students with disabilities are not compatible with carrying out these technological practices due to physical, mental, and cognitive limitations. What's more, autistic students cannot use any technological instruments to support the learning process. This research illustrates that online formal pedagogical practices reduce the competence of students with disabilities.

Formal pedagogical practice with a hybrid format, a combination of online and offline, was carried out by the WT Special School when the Covid-19 pandemic was starting to decline and mass vaccination was being carried out on a massive scale. According to regulations, the school provides requirements for mandatory vaccination and wearing a mask/face shield when going to school. Students go to school at 08.00 in the morning and go home at 10.05. When entering school, students will recite daily prayers and short letters. After that, students carry out the first learning process until the third learning process. Then, at 10.00 the students go home after reading the closing prayer and the homeroom teacher gives them assignments to do at home.

"School hours are also faster, bro, hybrid schools only start from 8 to 10. The subjects also adapt to the schedule that has been used since the beginning of the odd semester. For example, on Tuesday there are skills, such as facials and shampooing. Then on Thursday there is art, such as drawing and coloring. "Finally, on Friday there will be simultaneous sports from elementary to high school." (Mrs. TK, teacher in WT Special Schools).

In this context, the formal pedagogical practices carried out are a form of adjustment to the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic and the conditions of students. In fact, the school also implements the concept of school only having three days a week, namely Monday, Wednesday and Friday. This is an effort by the school to maintain the health and mentality of students, which are still fluctuating. Then, the hybrid format is also filled with more vocational subjects, such as drawing, coloring, dancing, computers, and so on. This is done because vocational lessons cannot be done online. In a linear context, schools also consider that vocational lessons and informal aspects – such as interaction and socialization – have been left behind due to the Covid-19 pandemic. For this reason, the school uses three days to optimize formal pedagogical practices that intersect with vocational aspects.

**Table 2. Differentiation of online and hybrid formal pedagogical practices**

No.	Online	Hybrid
1	The formal pedagogical process is carried out online	The formal pedagogical process is carried out by combining online and offline
2	Consists of three learning techniques, namely WhatsApp video calls, doing assignments, and taking exams	Learning techniques follow formal learning mechanisms such as before the Covid-19 pandemic and are supplemented with assignments
3	School hours are more dynamic and flexible	School hours are structured, namely starting at 07.30 and leaving at 10.00. Then, go to school on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday
4	The teaching and learning process is more focused on formal assignments (Indonesian, Mathematics, Science, etc.)	The teaching and learning process is more focused on skill activities (facials, make-up, dancing, drawing, and operating a computer)

Source: Primary Data, 2023

This study found some differentiation in aspects of formal pedagogical practice between online and hybrid. First, it can be seen from the teaching and learning activities which are very different from a technical and implementation perspective. Namely, online learning is carried out remotely and hybrid learning combines online and offline learning. Second, the online learning mechanism has three activities, namely WhatsApp video calls, doing assignments, and taking exams online. Meanwhile, the hybrid learning mechanism tends to be like normal learning before the Covid-19 pandemic. Third, school active hours for online learning are more dynamic and flexible. Meanwhile, active school hours in hybrid learning are more structured according to a predetermined schedule. Fourth, in the context of material content in online learning, it focuses more on material and assignments from formal lessons (Mathematics, Indonesian, Natural Sciences, etc.). On the other hand, hybrid learning transmits more skills content at school, such as dancing, drawing, facials, make-up, and operating a computer.

### **Adaptation of students with disabilities in formal pedagogical practices in Special Schools during the Covid-19 pandemic**

The results of this study show that students with disabilities make various types of adaptations. Adaptation is an integral part of an individual or structure when responding to dynamic social reality (Chrzanowski, [2022](#)). In this case, students with disabilities as educational subjects must carry out an adaptation process to be able to continue carrying out the learning process during the Covid-19 pandemic. Adaptations made by students with disabilities in formal pedagogical practices are also an integral part of not reaching a state of anomie. In this case, anomie can be understood as a situation that arises as a logical consequence of the lack of distribution of means and mechanisms to achieve a goal (Poloma, [2007](#)). If this is not provided proportionally, a situation of anomie will arise in society which often has implications for situations that violate norms. From the concept of anomie, a sub-concept called adaptation was born which is arranged typologically to see conditions of conformity and conditions of non-conformity.

This study categorizes three categories of disabilities, namely intellectual disability, deaf-speech Impaired impairment, and autism. In this case, students with intellectual disabilities tend to be able to participate in formal pedagogical practices in online or hybrid formats. However, students with intellectual disabilities tend to experience problems when doing assignments or exams online. In fact, parents often carry out assignments or exams due to their inability to read and write. However, students with intellectual disabilities are quite responsive in operating cellphones for video calls on the WhatsApp platform. This shows that students with intellectual disabilities can use cellphones but are hampered by the technical aspects of formal pedagogical practice.

On the other hand, students with deaf-speech impairments show excellent adaptation in the context of pedagogical practices with online or hybrid formats. This can be seen from how students



with deaf-speech impairments are able to use cellphones for their learning needs very well. In fact, several times students with deaf-speech impairments reminded teachers not to be late for class. Apart from that, students with deaf-speech impairments can also do assignments and exams very well. In fact, this can also be seen from the grades obtained by students with deaf-speech impairments who tend to be good and achieve well. Then, students with deaf-speech impairments always arrive on time when they must go to school. It is a social fact that students with deaf-speech impairments have much better cognitive abilities than students with other disabilities.

In addition, students with autism experienced poor adaptation during formal pedagogical practices carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic. Students with autism are unable to operate cellphones as instruments to support the learning process. As a result, the homeroom teacher must come to the homes of students with autism to provide assignments and exam questions. Apart from that, students with autism are also unable to complete assignments or exams during pedagogical practice in an online format. This has implications for reducing the quality of students with autism at school. However, when they enter the hybrid format, students with autism can again go to school for formal learning. Students with autism do have mental conditions that tend to be less stable and need extra assistance from teachers. Therefore, formal pedagogical practices in an online format have no effect on increasing competence for students with autism.

The facts above show the differentiation of the three categories of adaptation for students with disabilities, namely the mentally retarded, autistic, and deaf-mute. If we use Robert K. Merton's adaptation theory, then the cultural goals in the substance of the research are formal pedagogical practices during the Covid-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, institutional means in the substance of the research are mechanisms and ways for students with disabilities to participate in the learning process during the Covid-19 pandemic. So, if Robert K. Merton's adaptation theory is elaborated, it will be seen what form of adaptation students with disabilities take in formal pedagogical practice during the Covid-19 pandemic.

First, students with deaf-speech impairments are included in the conformity adaptation type. From the results of observations and in-depth interviews which are expressed in a structured manner in the data findings above, students with deaf-speech impairments in carrying out the learning process really represent students who can understand the subject matter, assignments and even exams very well. Even though the Covid-19 pandemic is hampering the learning process, students with deaf-speech impairments can adapt by being able to operate cellphones, do assignments in Google form and textual format, and take exams with satisfactory grades.

The learning process as a cultural goal can be followed even though there are several obstacles that initially hinder it, such as the internet network. However, students with deaf-speech impairments managed to overcome these obstacles by continuously purchasing internet packages at affordable prices to maximize the learning process that took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. Learning assignments can also be done well and submitted on time. Students with deaf-speech impairments are independent and intelligent individuals, and several times deaf-mute students have also succeeded in making the school proud in dance competitions from Surabaya to East Java. Likewise, during exams, where students with deaf-speech impairments always do the questions well and always submit answers on time.

Second, students with intellectual disabilities still cannot do basic things, such as reading, writing and arithmetic. For this reason, formal pedagogical practices as cultural goals and mechanisms or ways of following the learning process as institutional means substantively categorize students with intellectual disabilities as representatives of innovation. Where students with mental retardation have great difficulty when following the learning process because they cannot read the questions given by the teacher. Of course, because they cannot read the questions, students with intellectual disabilities

also cannot write well and it can be seen from their answers that they tend to be careless with disproportionate writing.

In participating in the learning process, students with mental retardation must be guided directly by a companion, namely their parents or older siblings. Because if they are not helped, students with mental retardation will not be able to do assignments or exams well at all. Because of this, students with intellectual disabilities very often receive reprimands and threats from their parents not to be promoted because the grades they get are always bad compared to the KKM standards. This fact is very relevant to the proposition of the sub-concept of innovation as a typology of adaptation which emphasizes the substance of cultural goals with different institutional means from the normative regulations socialized by the FH Special School and the WT Special School.

Third, there are students with autism, who have neurological problems and obstacles which have implications for social behavior, ways of thinking and social interactions. In this case, students with autism fall into the ritualism typology category. The proposition of the ritualism sub-concept is to reduce the essence of cultural goals and still follow the institutional path of institutional means. This is reflected in the data findings which show that students with autism only follow a series of learning processes without understanding the substance of the learning process. So, students with autism seem to ignore the goals of the learning process but still carry out various assignments and tests from the teacher. From the data findings it was also revealed that students with autism were sent to the FH Special School so that they would not be unemployed or have no activities. So, to fill the free time, students with autism are sent to school by their parents at the FH Special School.

**Table 3. Types of adaptation of students with disabilities in formal pedagogical practice**

No.	Disability Category	Adaptation Type	Rationalization
1	Intellectual disabled	Innovation	Oriented to the goals of formal pedagogical practice (cultural goals), but uses methods that are not in accordance with regulative rules (institutional means)
2	Deaf-Speech Impaired	Conformity	Oriented to the goals of formal pedagogical practice (cultural goals) and uses methods that are in accordance with regulative rules (institutional means)
3	Autism	Ritualism	Reducing the essence of formal pedagogical goals (cultural goals) and only following the methods or mechanisms of the learning process that are appropriate to the regulatory (institutional means) (institutional means)

Source: Primary Data, 2023

This study also saw that doing assignments and exams is a kind of routine for students with autism without understanding the essence of the subjects taught by the teacher. On a linear basis, it is also seen that students with autism find it difficult to do assignments and exams when guided by their parents and only want to do it when guided by the teacher. Students with autism like to go to school offline because they just want to meet their peers and socialize with their teachers. But when in class, students with autism seem quite bored doing assignments and exams in the spectrum of formal lessons, such as Mathematics, Indonesian, Science, and so on. Students with autism are more enthusiastic during sports lessons which are of course inherent in interaction, socialization, and communication with their friends.

Other studies illustrate that general students and students with disabilities adapt by following regulatory instructions from educational institutions to take part in online or hybrid learning processes (Lestari et al., 2021; Meleo-Erwin et al., 2021; Jia et al., 2022). However, this study does not capture the dynamics and obstacles felt by students with disabilities as part of the educational subject in participating in the learning process. Therefore, this study offers aspects of experience and adaptation that can describe the dilemmatic situation of students with disabilities when following formal pedagogical practices during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, analysis using Robert K.

Merton's adaptation theory is contextually able to show the types of adaptations used by students with disabilities in a comprehensive manner.

## CONCLUSION

Special Schools during the Covid-19 pandemic reproduce formal pedagogical practices in two formats, namely online and hybrid. This is done as a form of resilience for the Special School to continue to be able to carry out formal pedagogical practices for students with disabilities. In this case, students with disabilities who are categorized into several types – such as the mentally retarded, deaf-mute and autistic – experience various forms of adaptation. The form of adaptation of students with disabilities is largely determined by their physical, cognitive, and mental conditions. For example, students with intellectual disabilities have an innovation adaptation type, then students with deaf-speech impairments have a conformity adaptation type, and students with autism have a ritualism adaptation type. This type of adaptation reflects the dynamics and complexity of students with disabilities when carrying out the learning process during the Covid-19 pandemic. Formal pedagogical practices in Special Schools are not relevant online, because they have a negative impact on the development of students with disabilities.

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