Teachers' Challenges During COVID-19

Tryastuti Irawati Belliny Manullang, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia
Endang Rochyadi, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia
Sunardi, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia
Ace Suryadi, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia
Dingding Haerudin, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia

Corresponding author:
Tryastuti I.B. Manullang,
manullang@upi.edu

Abstract

The existence of COVID-19 in Indonesia was officially announced by the president in March 2020 before the virus emerged in Wuhan China. School closure was conducted and the policy of distant learning was officially released by the Ministry of Education. This research aimed to find the challenges that teachers in Indonesia encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and how teachers overcome the learning process challenges. The study was conducted towards primary school teachers in some provinces in Indonesia through an online survey with close-ended and open-ended questions. Our research findings showed teachers encounter challenges that include the disturbance in teaching and learning regarding accessibility, learning quality, school-home relationship, and technology awareness. Teachers also changed their ways of teaching by sending the learning materials via Google Classroom, WhatsApp (cross-platform messaging), and a few still conducted face-to-face meetings with strict policies.

Keywords: COVID-19, education, inclusion, Indonesia

1. Research Background

The latest outbreak of COVID-19 in Wuhan turned into a globally distressing public health emergency. At the end of 2019, COVID-19 emerged in several local hospitals of Wuhan, Hubei Province, China (Jin et al. 2020). On 11 February 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) termed this etiological agent as COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease, 2019) (Ferrer, 2020). Today, people around the world have been infected by Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) which is the fifth pandemic since the 1918 flu pandemic (Liu, Kuo, & Shih, 2020). The pandemic outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) has emerged as a global health threat that affected countries around the world including Indonesia.

COVID-19 was officially announced in Indonesia by 2 March 2020 as soon as the first case was found and upon the announcement more cases were found. Indonesia has been greatly affected by COVID-19 with the case fatality rate (CFR) being 8.9% at the end of March 2020 (Setiati, 2020). According to Indonesian population census results in September 2020, the country has 270.020.000 inhabitants that live in approximately 16,056 islands. The geographical condition of the country has become a challenge as the

municipal and national governments also release different policies in tackling the COVID-19 issues.

After the president announced, for the first two weeks schools were closed and learning was moved at home. The policy was taken as prevention of the spread of the COVID-19 and students were given learning activities with a special curriculum related to the COVID-19 which were prepared by the Education Department. After two weeks, schools then started but conducted virtually and no face-to-face learning was allowed. Following the end of the school closure, the Ministry of Education released Circular Letter Number 4 of 2020 concerning the implementation of education policies in the emergency period of the spread of COVID-19. One of the policies regulates the learning process at home. The circular letter also seemed to reveal the Indonesian education challenges that have existed but are increasingly visible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The implemented home learning focuses on life skills and interests, as well as on the individual student's condition, causing this distance learning process even more challenging as teachers were required to take advantage of information and communication technology to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of learning.

The online learning or distance learning policy has affected the teaching and learning process. As clearly stated, low- and middle-income countries are at a far more disadvantaged starting point for an effective transition to online learning platforms (GEM Report, 2020). But even when distance learning options are available and accessible, several conditions negatively affect disadvantaged students' opportunity to learn. They have to rely more on the support of parents and caregivers with little or no education (GEM Report, 2020).

Inclusive education in Indonesia has officially been implemented since 2004 (Sunardi & Sunaryo, 2016). Initially, it was implemented as a part of the Indonesian government commitment towards education for people with disabilities and it was marked by starting the piloting project in nine provinces (Poernomo, 2016). Based on the Indonesian Minister of National Education Regulation in 2009, inclusive education is defined as a system of education that provides opportunities for all learners who have abnormalities and have the potential of intelligence and/or special talents to follow education or learning in an educational environment together with learners in general. Under the same regulation, the district or municipal governments are asked to nominate at least one primary school and one secondary school in each district to organize inclusive education and the school must accept students with special needs.

Since the regulation was implemented, the number of students enrolled in mainstream schools assigned as 'inclusive schools' has been increasing (Poernomo, 2016). However, the regulation causes schools labelled as inclusive schools and students with special needs often refers to inclusive students which deteriorate the meaning of inclusive education itself. Besides inclusive schools and mainstream schools, there are also special schools. This condition affects the implementation of inclusive education,

and one of which is the view that the 'inclusive schools' are mostly schools that accept a few students with disabilities at the schools. However, schools labelled as inclusive schools should promote inclusive learning where all students' needs should be accommodated.

COVID-19 pandemic outbreak has caused teachers to shift and adapt their teaching to the new and unprecedented situation. During this pandemic, there has been much research on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning at mainstream schools and special needs schools. However, research on 'inclusive schools' is hardly found. Therefore, this research intends to scrutinize the impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of learning and teaching at the mainstream primary schools, specifically schools that are mandated as inclusive schools in a few places in Indonesia. The main objective of this paper is to investigate a new and essential research question "What are the challenges teachers encounter during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak at the inclusive primary schools in Indonesia?"

2. Method

This study was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach by involving twelve elementary school teachers at the elementary schools in several provinces in Indonesia, including West Sumatra, West Java, Yogyakarta and South Kalimantan, which provide inclusive education. These areas are chosen since the provinces have been implementing inclusive education in their areas. The schools are elementary schools labelled as inclusive schools. The schools are government-owned schools located in the districts. The data was obtained from online questionnaires given to the teachers. The number of respondents in this study was 80 teachers who had different educational backgrounds.

Due to the pandemic, the travel restriction was also implemented by the government during this research. Besides, schools were also closed and the learning was conducted virtually. Therefore, the questionnaires were given to the teachers by sharing the link. All the data was collected from August to October 2020. So, the interpretation of the results of the research should also consider the time when the research was conducted.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

Our study finds that during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers have encountered many challenges. In the research, respondents were asked to write down the three most challenging situations they had encountered during distant learning. Based on the respondents' answers it is found that the three most challenging issues that teachers at the inclusive schools were facing are accessibility, mobile devices ownership, and parents' involvement respectively.

The respondents for this study were located in different areas in Indonesia from the city, district, and sub-district. However, the issue relates to e accessibility encountered by teachers in all areas. The accessibility refers to the poor Internet network, slow Internet connection, and the Internet quota. The shifting of learning to distance learning requires more expenses on the internet quota.

> *"Sometimes parents do not have a quota when using the Internet, so learning is inhibited."*

Students and teachers started to get the internet quota subsidized by the government from September 2020. Students at the early childhood level get 20 GB/month, students for primary and secondary education get 35 GB/month while teachers get 42 GB/month, and for students. Furthermore, university students and lecturers get 50 GB/month. Before September, the internet quota was fully covered by parents and teachers. Therefore, teachers and parents found it was difficult for them to adapt to online learning because of the cost they had to spend on the credits. However, some respondents in October also still showed that the quota issue was still happening regardless of the subsidized quota given by the government.

Additionally, mobile device ownership due to parents' financial condition is also a challenge. Parents only have 2G and 3G mobile phones so it is very difficult for both parents and students to access the learning materials. Besides, limited numbers of mobile phone ownership in each family while the family has more than one child who attends the school at the same timetable. Although the children can take turns using the mobile devices, however, when the online class is running it is difficult to implement as the classes happen at the same time. Furthermore, teachers also found that parents could not afford to buy one.

> *"There are some of my students who do not have an Android phone or mobile phone which can be used on the Internet because they are from economically disadvantaged families."*

One teacher added:

> *"I have students whose parents do not have any mobile devices. So, it is very difficult to reach out to the students."*

Having encountered this condition, 51% of the teachers decided to conduct a home visit to the students and have face-to-face learning regardless of the pandemic outbreak although it does not happen every day. 12% of the teachers modify the lessons, ask parents or caregivers to come to school to take the learning materials, and ask students to come to school following strict health protocol. 37% of the teachers do not visit the students because students have mobile devices and the rules do not allow teachers to do so.

Besides limited ownership of mobile devices, parents also have to work and parents take mobile phones with them. Students need a mobile phone to participate in the learning, however, the mobile phone belongs to their parents who work. Therefore,

it is very difficult for the student to join the class and do the assignments. Teachers send the lesson materials to parents' mobile phones which means a student can only learn when the parents come back home from work. As a result, students submit the assignment late and some lose their motivation to study. Also, parents cannot accompany and help their children study because they have to work and not to mention when parents work out of town. Consequently, students learn and work on the materials when the parents come back from work.

> *"Parents are busy, so they do not assist students in learning in the morning causing students to send the assignments late and not on the same day. This makes learning ineffective."*

One teacher mentioned that her challenge is the parents who are busy at work and when parents come back home, parents are too tired to help the child because it is late at night. And one teacher stated that one of her students has a single parent who has to work causing the student to not have tutoring or support from parents.

Teachers also change their ways of teaching by sending the learning materials via Google Classroom, WhatsApp (cross-platform messaging), and a few still conduct face-to-face meetings with strict policies to students who do not have mobile devices in their house, this mostly happens in the sub-district where the number of COVID-19 cases is low. Despite utilizing cross-platform messaging and other applications, however, it is found that teachers use the application only to share, send, and collect the learning materials and assignments. Most of the teachers' concern is on the punctuality of the collected assignments and students' submission of the assignments instead of the learning quality. Most teachers also feel more comfortable using WhatsApp for teaching and learning because it does not require much quota.

4. Discussion

This research aimed to find the challenges that teachers in Indonesia encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and how teachers overcome the learning process challenges. The school closure has forced teachers to move learning into distant learning and online learning. This condition has made teachers encounter some challenges in implementing learning remotely and virtually.

In this research, first of all, an issue with the internet network and connection is found. This finding means that when distant and online learning is implemented, it is difficult for the teacher to teach students as a restriction to face-to-face learning is regulated. At the beginning of the school closure, teachers found it was more challenging to give the lessons as the Internet connection and network inhibit the communication and the learning process. The accessibility which refers to the poor Internet network, slow Internet connection, and the Internet quota has become the main challenges. As mentioned earlier, the respondents live in different areas in Indonesia, therefore, the issue of the Internet network not only emerges in the sub-district but also the city. This finding aligns with the study conducted by Azhari & Fajri (2021) which found that the geographical

conditions in which students live as well as the economic capacity of students' families discourage the implementation of online learning.

Furthermore, regardless of having access to the Internet, the number of internet-enabled devices available in the family affects the learning quality as parents or siblings may also be at home (Frenette, Frank, & Deng, 2020). Also, students might lose out on learning opportunities and encounter a lot of trouble due to the lack of access to proper digital tools, no internet connections, or poor Wi-Fi connections (Dhawan, 2020). Our research finds that the unavailability of the learning tools has inhibited the students' learning and also caused difficulties to teachers in reaching out to the students.

Besides the Internet network, the ownership of the mobile device is also a challenge as not all parents and students own mobile phones due to the economic condition. The condition where students do not have mobile phones also have caused teachers to find a sufficient solution to the issue. Teachers have been modifying the lesson and using Google Classroom and cross-platform messaging. However, in certain cases, teachers ask students to come to school to have a face-to-face meeting regardless of the school closure by following the health protocol.

It is also found that WhatsApp has become an application that teachers mostly use as parents and students are using WhatsApp and are familiar with the application. It does not also require more Internet quota. Teachers send the lesson materials including the presentation, videos, assignments, and announcements related to the learning and also updated information from the school. Research towards high school teacher-student WhatsApp group interactions by Rosenberg and Asterhan (2018) shows WhatsApp is used for organizational purposes including updates, school-related activities, and after-school learning activities (homework activities). It can be said that WhatsApp has been supporting teachers and students in their learning. During the pandemic outbreak, teachers have found that WhatsApp could accommodate the needs of teachers and students to make learning successful. However, further study on the implication of WhatsApp in the teaching and learning process should be conducted as most teachers tend to just send the lesson materials and assignments for the sake of accomplishing the lesson materials.

In addition, a hypothesis on research on the absent lessons presumption towards children states that children's basic skills development might be put at risk and subjects which are more difficult to teach virtually or remotely might not be given (Kneale, O'Mara-Eves, Rees & Thomas, 2020). Therefore, since teachers merely send the assignments and recorded explanations on the lessons through WhatsApp, a similar presumption might also be considered although further study needs to be conducted.

Some limitations affect the interpretation of findings and the suggestions of our study. The participants of this study consist of teachers who teach and live in cities, districts, and sub-districts and teach in government-owned schools which are assigned and labelled as inclusive schools. Considering also that different factors are affecting the

teachers' school condition, local policies, evolving policies and regulations, and students' varied backgrounds. Thus, similar research can be conducted in different areas and levels so comparisons can be made to this study. Besides, the survey and interviews were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and teachers' condition and situation when responding to the questions were not fully observed by the researchers as it was conducted virtually. These should also be taken into consideration.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, researchers have scrutinized the challenges that teachers encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and how teachers overcome the learning process challenges in some areas in Indonesia. In summation, this research findings show the disturbance in the teaching and learning regarding accessibility, learning quality, school-home relationship, and technology awareness. Teachers also change their ways of teaching by sending the learning materials via Google Classroom, WhatsApp (cross-platform messaging), and a few still conduct face-to-face meetings with strict policies. However, the learning activities mostly teachers tend to just send out teaching materials and assignments in view of completing the teaching materials.

Funding

Bibliography

Azhari, B., & Fajri, I. (2021). Distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: School closure in Indonesia. *International Journal of Mathematical Education in Science and Technology*, 1-21. https://doi.org/10.1080/0020739X.2021.1875072

Dhawan, S. (2020). Online learning: A panacea in the time of the COVID-19 crisis. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, *49*(1), 5-22. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0047239520934018

Ferrer, R. (2020). COVID-19 Pandemic: the greatest challenge in the history of critical care. *Medicina intensive,* 44:323–324. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.medine.2020.04.005

Frenette, M., Frank, K., & Deng, Z. (2020). *School Closures and the Online Preparedness of Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Economic Insights. Issue 2020001 No. 103*.

Global Education Monitoring Report UNESCO, 2020Third edition Published in 2020 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Jin, Y., Yang, H., Ji, W., Wu, W., Chen, S., Zhang, W., & Duan, G. (2020). Virology, epidemiology, pathogenesis, and control of COVID-19. *Viruses*, *12*(4), 372. https://doi.org/10.3390/v12040372

Kneale, D., O'Mara-Eves, A., Rees, R., & Thomas, J. (2020). School closure in response to epidemic outbreaks: Systems-based logic model of downstream impacts. *F1000Research*, *9*, 352. https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.23631.1

Liu, Y. C., Kuo, R. L., & Shih, S. R. (2020). COVID-19: The first documented coronavirus pandemic in history. *Biomedical journal*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bj.2020.04.007

Poernomo, B. (2016). The implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia: current problems and challenges. *American International Journal of Social Science*, *5*(3), 144-150.

Rosenberg, H., & Asterhan, C. S. (2018). "WhatsApp, Teacher?"-Student Perspectives on Teacher-Student WhatsApp Interactions in Secondary Schools. *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research*, *17*, 205-226. https://doi.org/10.28945/4081

Setiati, S., & Azwar, M. K. (2020). COVID-19 and Indonesia. *Acta Medica Indonesiana*, *52*(1), 84-89.

Sparrow, R., Dartanto, T., & Hartwig, R. (2020). Indonesia under the new normal: Challenges and the way ahead. *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies*, *56*(3), 269-299. https://doi.org/10.1080/00074918.2020.1854079.

Sunardi, S., & Sunaryo, S. (2016). Manajemen Pendidikan Inklusif (Konsep, Kebijakan, dan Implementasinya). *Jassi Anakku*, *10*(2), 184-200.