Adaptive Learning for Early Childhood Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Aceh Jaya District: Online vs. Offline

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Abstrak

Kata Kunci: pembelajaran adaptif; pendidikan anak usia dini; pembelajaran online; pembelajaran offline.
Abstract

The issues of teacher facilities and abilities are still a learning obstacle in the pandemic era. Moreover, these issues lead to the non-uniformity of the learning process implementation in early childhood education in Aceh Jaya District. This study analyzes in-depth the reality of the learning process in early childhood education in the pandemic era. This study was conducted using a descriptive qualitative method. The site for the study is in Ceudah Mulia Kindergarten, Teunom District, and Al-Hidayah Kindergarten, Pasie Raya District. Data collection methods were through observation, interviews, and documentation. Analysis of research data was using Miles and Huberman model. The validity tests for the data we are using triangulation of sources and techniques. The results showed that there was a difference between Ceudah Mulia Kindergarten and Al-Hidayah Kindergarten. Ceudah Mulia Kindergarten conducts online learning via WhatsApp by giving assignments and exciting games with parental guidance. Meanwhile, Al-Hidayah Kindergarten does not use social media platforms or other online learning methods due to various limitations, such as common understanding of technology, the availability of inadequate technology facilities owned by schools and parents of students. Al-Hidayah Kindergarten conducts learning by inviting parents and assigning assignments to students, and the children’s work is returned to the school for assessment. However, the role of parents in synergizing with teachers during the learning process of early childhood students in the COVID-19 pandemic situation has become key. This study illustrates that not all regions have the same access to implementing early childhood education learning in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of this study have several important implications for future practice.

Keywords: adaptive learning; early childhood education; online learning; offline learning.

Introduction

The current coronavirus outbreak has hit various countries and has become a warm and phenomenal conversation. Indonesia is one of the countries that are currently facing the impact of the coronavirus outbreak. This virus is a new type that is very disturbing to everyone because so far, experts in this field have not found a suitable vaccine to ward it off. The initial appearance of this virus came from Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019 (Daroedono et al., 2020). In Indonesia, it first appeared on March 2, 2020, to identify the first two female patients in Depok, West Java (Churiyah, Madziatul, Sholikhan Sholikhan, Filianti, 2020). According to dr. Rizal Fadli, on June 11, 2020, stated that the coronavirus is part of a large family of viruses that cause mild to moderate upper respiratory tract infections, such as flu (Fadli, 2020). This virus can be transmitted quickly to anyone regardless of age, race, or gender. Recorded in a relatively short period, the virus has spread in various parts of the world. As a result, various multidimensional negative impacts arise. Therefore, the government as the authorized party responds through various policies to tackle the spread and negative impacts of this virus.

The new sets of policies also have an impact on the world of education (Nahdi et al., 2021; Nasir, Ishaq, Sumarni, Herlina, 2021), one of which is the distance learning policy based on the Circular issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture, 24 March 2020 No 4/2020 (Dewi, 2020). This policy has implications for the learning process directly at every level of education, i.e., changes in the pattern of learning activities (Agustin, Mubiar, Puspita, Nurinten, 2021). Face-to-face learning patterns, as in the era before the emergence of the pandemic, have now been replaced with online learning activities (Nurkolis & Muhdi, 2021). Online learning is a distance learning activity that uses the internet as its primary learning tool (Kim, 2020). This is done to comply with and support the government’s advice, which requires the public to stay at home (Satrianingrum & Prasetyo, 2021) and not to leave the house if they do not have a significant interest, and they must maintain physical and social distancing (Khasanah & Pramudibyanto, 2020). Of course, the policies taken have gone through an in-depth study of the dangers of global transmission from this epidemic virus (Amadasun, 2020). The policies issued also apply to the educational process in Early Childhood Education institutions. The education process for early childhood must adapt and make changes, as mentioned earlier, although it is felt that these changes are not appropriate to do (Supriadi, 2021).
Changes that occur, as mentioned above, certainly also bring their multidimensional problems (Karalis, 2020). For example, there are issues with the readiness of teachers and parents, and the children themselves (Qadafi, 2021). Early childhood requires teachers and parents to help guide them during the learning process (Iswidharmanjaya, 2008). At this time, the learning process in schools can no longer be carried out in the classroom, so the obstacles to learning or the instructional process between teachers and children are very prominent. When the teacher is constrained by various things in the learning process as an adaptation to the pandemic, learning will be challenging to carry out properly. For example, when there is no internet availability and supporting tools. Of course, it will be difficult for schools to provide an online learning process. Therefore, schools then deal with it in various ways, including designing offline learning and paying attention to various aspects. This includes optimizing the role of parents. The intensive role of parents is needed to accompany their children to improve children's learning outcomes amid this epidemic. However, parents are mentors at home who are expected to guide and teach do not always meet expectations (Wirasti, 2021).

Several previous studies highlight learning during this pandemic. Much research focuses on distance learning tips with technology and its impact on children's development only. However, research that highlights the reality of the learning process during the pandemic in areas with limited human and technological resources has not been widely studied. For example, the first research was conducted by Jinyoung Kim with the title "Learning and Teaching Online During COVID-19: Experiences of Student Teachers in an Early Childhood Education Practicum" (Kim, 2020). Their research focuses on online learning for students of early childhood education. The research was conducted in countries that are culturally familiar with the technology. This study, however, was about distance learning which was carried out in areas that were not evenly distributed in understanding technology. Therefore, this study can complete the range of distance learning that can be done with technology or without technology.

The second is a study conducted by Shirley Van Nuland et al., entitled "COVID-19 and Its Effects on Teacher Education in Ontario: A Complex Systems Perspective" (Van Nuland et al., 2020). Their research explains changes in adaptive learning methods during this pandemic so that some ideas are obtained to ensure online learning goes well. Their study emphasizes adequate access to connected online learning, professional development of teachers for online learning, and recognition of internet-based learning experiences. The whole idea still has ambiguity if applied to areas that are still lacking in technological infrastructure and the ability of teachers and students. Therefore, through this study, the authors propose to provide a more realistic picture of the reality of learning practices during this pandemic.

The third study was conducted by Chuanmei Dong, Simin Cao, and Hui Li with the title "Young Children's Online Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic: Chinese Parents' Beliefs and Attitudes" (Dong et al., 2020). Their research shows that parents have negative beliefs about the results and benefits of online learning. In the end, online learning poses its problems and challenges for families. Their research is in line with this current study which also touches on the realm of parents as learning guides for students at home.

Ismaniar and Utoyo conducted the fourth study, entitled "Mirror of Effect" in the Development of Early Childhood Behavior during the COVID-19 Pandemic Period" (Ismaniar, 2020). The study describes how the Mirror of Effect theory may hurt children from their parents during the online learning process from home. The research focuses on processes at home that examine the process of interaction between children and parents as a result of the pandemic.

Overall, the previous studies show a desire to change education by technological developments during this pandemic. However, in practice, the ideals described in each of these studies still need more adjustment and attention. These studies still leave an unexplored space, i.e., the reality of Early Childhood Education institutions in a society where human resource entities and technology are still considerably low. Therefore, this study examines how the distance learning process is online or offline in Early Childhood Education during the pandemic in Aceh Jaya District, Aceh Province.
Methods

This study used descriptive qualitative methodology. The research sites were Ceudah Mulia Kindergarten, Teunom District, and Al-Hidayah Kindergarten, Pasie Raya District. The research subjects consisted of principals, teachers, and parents of the two institutions. Data were obtained using observation, interviews, and documentation. The data analysis process was carried out by taking the views of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, i.e., data condensation, data presentation, then concluding/verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Then, the validity tests for the data we are using triangulation of sources and techniques.

Results

Based on the obtained research data, the adaptive learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic at Early Childhood Education institutions in Aceh Jaya Regency is divided into two. The first is the online learning process. The second is offline learning.

Online Learning Activities

Based on the interview results with several teachers and parents of students in one of the schools in Aceh Jaya Regency, the researcher found answers regarding the learning activities carried out during the pandemic at Ceudah Mulia Kindergarten online system and did not apply a face-to-face system during the pandemic. In Ceudah Mulia Kindergarten, teaching and learning activities were previously carried out by teachers and children by going to school every day except on holidays (face to face), but now the time and learning space are limited. Before the pandemic came, generally, schools were active from Monday to Saturday if there were no holidays. During one week, teaching and learning activities are carried out in full by teachers and children in the school. However, since the coronavirus outbreak, teaching and learning activities have turned into online learning activities in teachers’ and students’ respective homes. During the coronavirus outbreak, teaching and learning activities are only carried out three times a week, i.e., Monday, Wednesday, and Friday (Marlina, Interview, 2020). Reducing study time and changing the learning space from classroom to virtual classroom are logical implications for maintaining continuity of learning and the health of students and teachers.

The form of online learning activities carried out by students and teachers is through a platform as a tool to convey learning. The platforms used by teachers in Aceh Jaya are WhatsApp Group media and telephone media (Observation, 2020). Freely, teachers and students can choose any media as long as it is equally easy for both parties. The choice of WhatsApp Group media has become commonplace because the Indonesian people, in general, have mastered this media. The design of online learning during study at home is that the teacher first prepares various exciting activities that students can do at home with the guidance of their parents. After that, the teacher created a WhatsApp Group to communicate between teachers and parents regarding various learning and administrative activities that the teacher had prepared beforehand (Salwati, Interview, 2020). The most important thing is to use a platform that is as easy as possible to understand (Albashawi & Al Bataineh, 2020) and used so that the learning process can still run and be improved (Assunção Flores & Gago, 2020).

The learning process is carried out based on a predetermined schedule. For example, students are asked to draw and color the pictures they make. First, the teacher shares the shape of the image that must be made the child must make prepared and distributed by the teacher through the WhatsApp Group media. After that, the teacher gives directions to parents that students learn to draw and color according to the preparation instructions. As feedback from the learning process, after students have finished doing their work, the results of their work are sent by the students’ parents to their teachers through the WhatsApp Group media as a form of documentation which will then be assessed by the class teacher (Salwati, Interview, 2020). Online learning activities carried out by teachers and children are not only in coloring pictures but also in many other exciting and fun activities and games. Teachers have prepared these activities as tasks that children must do with each parent’s assistance during the coronavirus outbreak.
various activities such as crocheting, drawing lines following patterns, compiling puzzles, singing, guessing colors, even experimenting activities have been prepared by teachers for the sake of continuing education (Observation, 2020).

During the visit, the teacher conducted interviews with the parents of the students and asked the child to show the results of the works they had done while at home under the supervision of their parents. These works result from the teacher’s instructions that have been previously given to each parent to be carried out by the children at home. Through this visit process, the teacher will then be able to get an overview of how children's learning outcomes during online learning are carried out. The teacher then enters the results into a previously prepared rating scale (Marliana, Interview, 2020). Thus, the teacher can understand how the development of children's learning outcomes is developed and evaluate what is not suitable for improvement in the future.

Therefore, the distance learning design made by the teacher is to conduct online learning and visits to students’ homes. The initiation carried out by the teacher by continuing to do online learning accompanied by a home visit process indirectly guarantees the quality of the learning process. However, the tasks of teachers and parents will become more complex, i.e., if typically teachers only need to pay attention to children in the classroom, during a pandemic, teachers must pay attention to children both during online learning and by visiting each student’s home. The learning outcomes will still be of high quality. On the one hand, this kind of distance learning design takes up more time and focus on the side of teachers and parents.

Al-Hidayah Kindergarten is situated in a remote area. Meanwhile, for Al-Hidayah Kindergarten, learning activities are carried out differently compared with Ceudah Mulia Kindergarten. Al-Hidayah Kindergarten, during the pandemic period, conducted online activities using the face-to-face method and did not apply an online system due to various limitations faced by Al-Hidayah Kindergarten.

Offline Learning Activities

Based on the coordination carried out by teachers who became informants of this study with teachers of other institutions, the researcher received information that most Early Childhood Education institutions in Aceh province are located in remote rural areas. Therefore, online distance learning activities as announced by the government apparently could not be adequately implemented. This also occurs in Al-Hidayah Kindergarten (Husna, Interview, 2020). This is due to several factors: (1) The ability to access the internet is quite limited; (2) Coupled with the lifestyle of rural people, most of whom come from ordinary families or whose economic income is middle to lower. The implication is that the community prioritizes economic interests so that their basic needs can be met rather than the learning interests of their children. Therefore, parents cannot facilitate their children by buying android mobile phones or buying internet quota. Some parents of students already have an android mobile phone, but some others do not have it; (3) Most of the parents of students have a low educational background and are a little older. This makes them not understand how to access the internet and do not understand how to use an android mobile phone. Their minimal abilities and still very new to theology and internet use make it difficult for them to provide online distance learning at home (Maghfirah, Interview, 2020).

Apart from the reality factor of parents, other factors come from the teachers who teach at the Early Childhood Education institution concerned. For example, teachers also do not understand the systematics of online learning activities because they are not familiar with using technology for learning. Another factor is the educational background and age of the teacher. On average, teachers who are high school graduates also affect changes in these learning activities. Meanwhile, the teacher’s age factor in the 50s, categorized as senior age group, confused the teachers with the online learning activities. Some of these factors ultimately make teachers unable to implement distance learning activities online correctly. The reality is that teachers and parents have to find other solutions so that distance learning activities can still occur even though they are not carried out online or are not carried out as usual in the classroom (Husna, Interview, 2020).
One of the solutions chosen is to redesign the distance learning process with an offline system that is mutually agreed upon by asking parents to come in turns to school to pick up books or learning materials that have been prepared by the teachers so that their students can still study at home with the help and assistance of their parents (Husna, Interview, 2020). When learning materials, the teacher also provides direction to parents regarding the learning process at home (Observation, 2020). The teacher guides and directs parents about how learning can be done at home and provides direction regarding the form of the task given. Through this guidance process, children will still achieve appropriate development (Wulandari & Purwanta, 2021). The forms of assignments given by the teacher to children are simple things, such as writing their names, coloring, free drawing, making collages of their s, animal names, fruit names, plant names, vegetable names, and fun activities burdensome for children. Then the children’s work is stored by their parents; then, later, when the teacher visits the house to see their students’ progress, the parents will submit their children’s work stored for one week. In addition to checking students’ work, teachers also provide academic guidance and direction to students to maintain their enthusiasm and motivation to learn. According to a predetermined schedule, these things are done in turn by each teacher in each school (Maghfirah, Interview, 2020).

Like the online distance learning process that the researcher explained earlier, both teachers and parents have different roles in this learning design. Teachers and parents work together to create a quality learning process even though various things limit it. The learning outcomes are also maintained; this can be seen from visits to students’ homes conducted by the teacher. The spirit of learning and teaching that is continuously fostered gives a good impression even though it is still being carried out during a prolonged pandemic.

The learning process that cannot be done online can be circumvented by a face-to-face coordination process with parents taking turns to school. The built coordination is the coordination related to the technical learning that must be students must take a doe. After the learning process is carried out at home by students and their parents, the teacher will make home visits to explain the child’s development process. This process emphasizes parents’ readiness because when parents are not ready or do not understand the learning process they should do at home to their children, the results will fall far from the learning objectives. In addition, teacher visits to students’ homes will also run more extra because teachers do not yet know the learning process results that students do at home. In the end, the teacher will explain back to the child whose learning process is possibly not carried out with their parents according to the teacher’s instructions.

**Discussion**

The current condition requires the government to issue a new policy to urge people not to leave their houses if it is not urgently necessary. The supporting policy is by recommending physical and social distancing or keeping a distance to prevent the spread of the coronavirus outbreak not to spread widely. This policy impacts changes in learning activities carried out so far, i.e., face-to-face learning in classrooms or school buildings. Currently, the learning process must be replaced with distance learning activities (Kim, 2020). Teachers, students, and even parents must be able to adapt to these distance learning activities. Distance learning activities are the government’s way of preventing transmission from the coronavirus outbreak so that it does not spread, one form of which is learning via the internet or, in general terms, known as online learning. This learning activity is interpreted as a learning activity carried out through the internet (Dong et al., 2020).

Online learning activities can be said to the organization of learning classes with a network and can reach widely and massively without being limited by space (Ayuni et al., 2021). This learning model uses sophisticated technology, which is expected to improve children’s abilities, but the most important thing is the improvement in the teacher’s perception, ethics, and readiness in carrying out this learning process. This learning model is the possible alternative to be implemented in a pandemic outbreak that continues to spread (Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020;
Radha et al., 2020). This alternative is adopted by almost every school in Indonesia at every level of education, including early childhood education in Aceh Jaya.

This online learning is carried out suddenly due to the change in the learning system from face-to-face methods to online learning or distance learning (Nisa', 2020). It turns out that this online learning requires improving the quality of educators (teachers). Several studies note that the information, communication, and technology (ICT) capabilities of Indonesian educators are not evenly distributed in every region of Indonesia (Widodo, 2013). Moreover, there are differences in education in Indonesia between Java and outside Java (Azzizah, 2015), and there are also socio-economic differences (Nuraini et al., 2020). On the other hand, access to the internet network and support from adequate infrastructure is needed for the distance education process via the internet or online learning (Van Nuland et al., 2020). This happens evenly at every level of education in this country, including affecting the educational process in early childhood education institutions.

Similarly, Aceh’s factor of educators who are not familiar with the learning conditions they currently face and the lack of understanding of technology for some people in Aceh are serious obstacles. Meanwhile, children's demands for children must still be fulfilled, i.e., the learning process must run even with severe obstacles. In addition, the lack of supporting facilities both for teachers and for the families of students is also a serious obstacle.

The reasons above then make it difficult for some schools to carry out online learning. This obstacle then makes some of them choose to do distance learning, but it is offline. Distance learning with this offline system is also designed with a more secure system. Thus, practically there is a contradiction in the implementation of the educational process during this pandemic. For schools, or in this case, teachers and students who are ready and able to carry out distance learning with technology, they follow government directives to conduct online learning. This learning can be done using any platform as long as it is an easily accessible learning medium, for example, using the WhatsApp application with its features (Amal, 2019; Hutami & Nugraheni, 2020; Satrianingrum & Prasetyo, 2021). However, those who have difficulty accessing technology will conduct offline distance learning with a safe design, but the learning objectives can be achieved.

The educational process in which it is carried out through distance learning, whether using technology or not, still requires the participation and support of parents (Iswidharmanjaya, 2008). The synergy between teachers and parents is required to receive a quality learning process and learning outcomes (Palsdottir, 2020). During this pandemic period, the demands for synergy between teachers and parents run more extra than before the pandemic. This means that both online and offline learning still requires a more accurate and extra-role from parents so that their children can still learn well. For example, online learning that adapts technology also impacts the intensity of gadget use for children. Ideally, gadgets for early childhood should be limited in time (Setiawati et al., 2019). This time restriction must also be followed by providing understanding so that children can access positive things from the gadgets they hold, either for entertainment purposes (Pramudyani, 2021), such as games, watching videos, accessing various sites, and using social media in cyberspace or for educational matters. Giving these treatments to children will reduce the harmful impact of using gadgets for children (Sudrajat et al., 2021). However, it all depends on parents’ awareness to be wise, firm, and considerate of their children (Pratiwi, 2021).

When parents tend to neglect at a time like this, negative things are very likely to happen to the child because parents are important actors in shaping the child's personality (Kurniati et al., 2021; Rohita, 2021).

Based on the explanation above, it is clear that the role of parents in synergizing with teachers is for the continuity of the learning process of these early childhood students. Parents become liaisons between teachers and students to convey learning messages from teachers. However, the role of parents does not stop there. The role of parents not only guides children's attitudes but also now becomes a companion for academic education (Kurniati et al., 2020; Lilawati, 2021). Parents must explain the teacher's instructions and sometimes participate in teaching the material presented by the teacher. Parents are well aware of this because they still
want their children to get quality learning even though it is full of limitations. This kind of awareness is an essential point for the success of online distance learning which, according to a study by Dong et al., lacks a learning atmosphere (Dong et al., 2020). Distance learning requires technology, and these early age children are not yet able to be independent in using technology. Moreover, early childhood still needs verbal and direct guidance so that the learning process runs more smoothly.

For the quality of the distance learning process carried out by teachers and students, the teacher follows up on the learning process. As a follow-up to the learning process, the teacher occasionally visits students’ homes to check their learning outcomes during this pandemic. This process presents interactions that have been critical for online learning (Alqurashi, 2019). Moreover, this is necessary for the distance learning process that does not allow online learning due to existing limitations. The direct interactions presented in this activity will be vital in the learning process (Law & Shuang, 2019), although not as good as regular times. Through this interaction, the learning spirit of the child will be maintained even though they have to learn without face to face in class.

**Conclusion**

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that the era of the COVID-19 pandemic adaptive learning at early childhood education institutions in Aceh Jaya district is carried out in two ways, i.e., online and offline. This means that not all early childhood education institutions in the Aceh Jaya area have the same capacity to conduct online learning. For example, Ceudah Mulia Kindergarten conducts online learning via WhatsApp by giving assignments and exciting games with parental guidance. Meanwhile, Al-Hidayah Kindergarten does not use social media or other platforms due to various limitations. This means that learning is done offline. Al-Hidayah Kindergarten conducts learning by inviting parents and then assigning assignments to students and the children’s work is then returned to the school for assessment.

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