

The effectiveness of online learning during social distancing

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate the causes of the online learning ineffectiveness at State Junior High School (SMPN) 3 Pendopo. The design of the study was a field research. The subjects of the study consisted of teachers, administrative staff, and students in grade 7 that were recruited using purposive sampling technique. The data were collected by conducting online interviews, observations, and data identification. Data were then analyzed using the inductive approach of Miles and Huberman, which included collecting data, reducing data, presenting data, and drawing conclusion. The results of the study showed that at SMPN 3 Pendopo, online learning system has not run well due to inefficient method, inadequate facilities and infrastructures, and students' lack of awareness of the importance of online learning.

Keywords: online learning; social distancing; the COVID-19 pandemic.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penyebab kegagalan pembelajaran sistem daring, khususnya di Sekolah Menengah Pertama Negeri (SMPN) 3 Pendopo. Jenis penelitian ini adalah *field reseach* (penelitian lapangan). Subjek penelitian terdiri guru, staff tata usaha, dan siswa kelas VII. Subjek penelitian ditentukan berdasarkan teknik purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara online, observasi, dan mengidentifikasi data. Data yang terkumpul dianalisis dengan teknik analisis data induktif interaktif model miles dan Huberman yang meliputi pengumpulan data, reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa di SMPN 3 Pendopo, pembelajaran dengan sistem daring belum bisa berjalan dengan baik, hal ini disebabkan; belum menemukan metode yang efisien, sarana dan prasarana kurang mendukung, karakteristik siswa yang belum menyadari arti penting pendidikan.

Kata kunci: social distancing; sistem daring; pandemi COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia has developed quite rapidly. It is becoming more convenient due to more advanced and up-to-date technology. Scientific advances have transformed practical things in various aspects of life to become more innovative and fully automatic (Rahmawati, 2018, p. 243). If such advances are supported by the readiness of creative and innovative educators, the goals of learning, including learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together, will be achievable (Fathurrohman, 2015, p. 27).

Since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Mona, 2020, p. 117) and the virus started to spread in Indonesia, the government issued social and physical distancing policies to restrict people's activities. This is because the COVID-19 virus can spread quickly and be transmitted through physical contact (Mahsun, 2020, p. 4). The policies are implemented with an aim to reduce people's physical contact with others and hence minimize the transmission of the COVID-19 virus. The government's efforts to slow down the corona virus cases include quarantine, lockdown, strict childcare, closures of schools, universities, and offices, as well as cancellation of mass gatherings or events (Dalton et al., 2020, p. 2). Learned from the 2009 H1N1 flu and Ebola, social and physical distancing was effective in reducing the disease transmission (Wellenius et al., 2020, p. 3).

On March 18, 2020, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimated that 107 countries, including Indonesia, have closed schools due to COVID-19, and about 862 million students (Viner et al., 2020, p. 397) have to study from home and join classes online. Studying from home is implemented as an effort to control and reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The school closures are implemented nationally, regionally, locally or reactively (Viner et al., 2020, p. 398). It is recommended that studying from home be regulated and done online or through learning activities based on the spirit of *merdeka belajar* (freedom to learn), such as project-based learning, humanitarian volunteers, or research relevant to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Education still needs to continue even though the pandemic has forced the government to take preventive steps, including social distancing. Fundamentally, online learning is a virtual learning process done using virtual applications. Nevertheless, it is deemed necessary to take account of learning competencies during online learning. However, not all schools can implement online learning properly.

Online learning has benefits for formal education. First, it encourages teachers to use interesting methods. Second, it promotes interactions discussions among students without depending on teachers. Third, it helps students, teachers, and parents interact with each other more easily. Fourth, it is a better way to do exams and quizzes. Fifth, it allows teachers to share pictures and videos that are relevant to the materials that students can download and access repeatedly. Sixth, it helps teachers make quizzes anytime and anywhere (Sobron, et al., 2019, pp. 1-2).

Virtual learning can provide ease of learning for students. Student can communicate directly and hence absorb the materials more easily. However, the implementation of online learning requires adequate facilities and infrastructure, such as internet connection, smartphone, laptop, and computer. Other important factors in learning process are parents' awareness, support, and assistance.

Indonesia is a developing country where its people have not been able to fully keep up with the advancement of technology. For example, teachers from schools in Pendopo Sub-district, Empat Lawang Regency said that online learning has not been effectively implemented in their schools. This is because the schools are still lacking adequate facilities and infrastructures that support online learning. No mobile phones, slow internet connection, lack of technology skills and parents' low-paying jobs as farmers and micro business owners are the factors contributing to the ineffectiveness of online learning. According to some teachers, online learning can only run properly if all students can access the internet. Additionally, online learning is more effective for theoretical subjects, but it is less effective for practical ones (Endang et al., 2020, p. 5).

During online learning, assignments are often given via applications. Students are given assignments to complete. Then, teachers grade

them and give feedback as evaluation for students. Online learning is not mostly about materials distributed through the internet and students completing the assignments and submitting them through applications and on social media platforms. Therefore, during online learning, educators should plan, implement, and evaluate learning the same way as during offline learning.

The majority of educators claimed that remote learning is a new thing that they have not accustomed to. Remote learning has become challenges for educators. Today educators need to learn how to use the available devices to support virtual classes.

A study by Jamaluddin et al., (2020) found that online learning can be implemented properly if the conditions of teachers and students are considered. If teachers and students can adapt to online learning, learning activities can take place effectively. According to Hasanah et al., (2020) online learning activities during the COVID-19 pandemic are already good enough. In this force majeure situation, teachers and students are expected to learn from all the existing challenges and obstacles to evaluate online learning.

Hamdani & Priatna, (2020) revealed that the effectiveness level of online learning was 66.97%. This should be improved so that online learning can be more effective and hence the quality of learning and student learning outcomes will be better. Aji et al., (2020) said that online learning can take place effectively if teachers, students, and parents collaborate actively. Many obstacles occur during online learning, which was implemented to replace face-to-face learning. The obstacles include weak internet signal and non-ownership of mobile phones. Not all students come from a wealthy family. Learning media should also be incorporated by teachers in order to facilitate the ease of the implementation of online learning. Learning approaches and methods should be adjusted to the virtual needs. Not all conventional methods can be employed in online learning; thus, learning media should be modified. Based on the results of previous studies, it can be inferred that online learning can be implemented effectively if facilities and infrastructures as well as social environments are favorable to online learning.

On the bright side, however, online learning has given birth to innovations that

promote independence in students. This is because during online learning, students must focus on the screen to finish the task or participate in an on-going discussion. Therefore, it is hoped that through online learning, students can become more independent in the construction of knowledge.

Based on the aforementioned explanation, the researcher was interested in conducting a study at SMPN 3 Pendopo, a junior high school that experienced the challenges of online learning. The challenges are caused by inadequate facilities and infrastructures, weak internet signal, students' parents' poor economic status, and teachers' lack of technology skills. Therefore, teachers took the initiative to resolve online learning problems during the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHOD

This study adopted a field research study design because the data were collected directly in the field (Hermawan, 2018, p. 28). The study was conducted at SMPN 3 Pendopo. A qualitative approach was also chosen to obtain in-depth insights on the on-going phenomenon in its natural environment, not in controlled, laboratory, or experimental environments.

The subjects of the study were 62 seventh grade students at SMPN 3 Pendopo that were recruited using purposive sampling technique. The data were collected through interviews, observations, and archives. The data were then analyzed using the inductive approach of Miles and Huberman, which includes collecting data, reducing data, presenting data, and drawing conclusion.

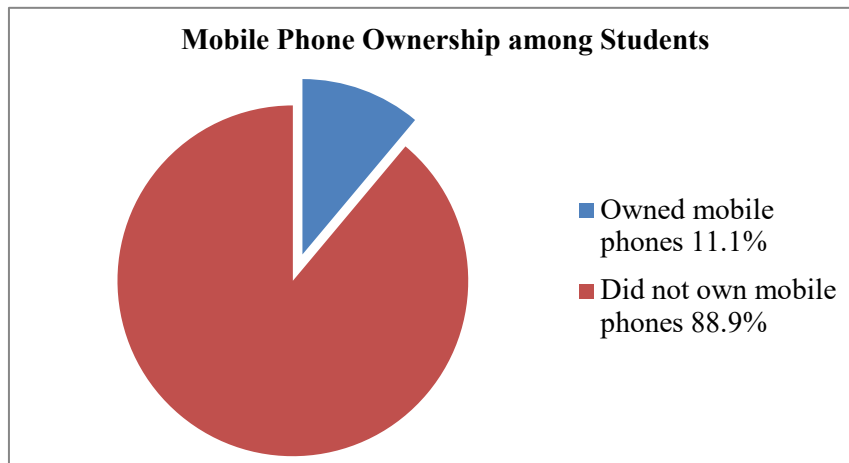
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed that online learning at SMP 3 Pendopo was still not effective. Online learning can be defined as a formal education organized by primary schools in which students and teachers are present in separate locations and hence interactive communication devices are necessary to connect them and other various resources. However, the use of technology at SMPN 3 Pendopo was still insufficient; some students did not have a smart phone or a laptop and good internet connection. In addition, students were more accustomed to

face-to-face learning or traditional classroom. During social distancing, however, learning activities must be conducted remotely. Consequently, students cannot make face-to-face interactions with teachers and classmates and

have to learn independently. Another factor is that teachers were still not familiar with online learning. Teachers still lacked skills to optimally integrate technology in online learning.

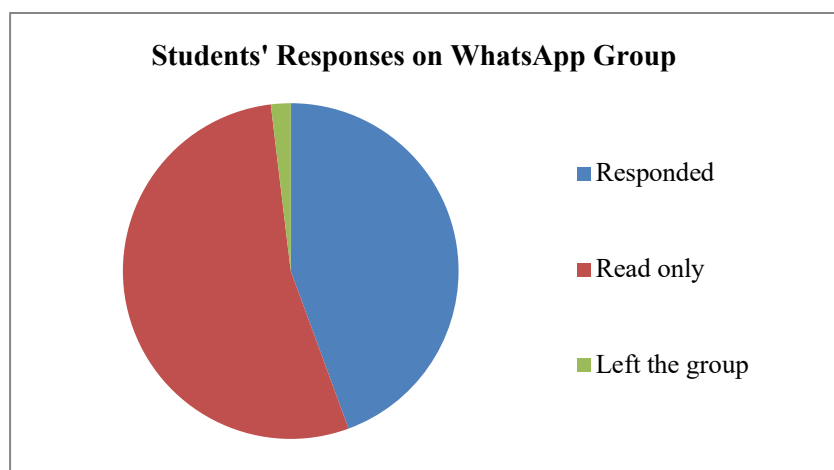
Diagram 1. Mobile Phone Ownership among Students



The diagram above illustrates the number of students who owned mobile phones and who did not. Of 62 students, 8 students (11.1%) had no mobile phones. The problem, however, is not

centered on the availability of communication devices among students. Some students who had mobile phones were also found to be reluctant to join online classes.

Diagram 2. Students' Responses to Online Learning



The data obtained from the homeroom teacher of the seventh grade suggest that students who owned mobile phones were not necessarily able to follow the lessons well. Of 53 students who were mobile phone owners, 44.4% showed good responses to learning activities conducted through WhatsApp Group. Meanwhile, 53.7%

only read the information shared by the teacher, and 1.9% left the WhatsApp Group. These results indicated that students' characteristics can hinder the effectiveness of online learning.

Nevertheless, the teacher remained to use WhatsApp Group to facilitate interactions with students during online learning. WhatsApp

and Messenger have so far been the easiest applications to use for teachers and students at SMPN 3 Pendopo. These two applications are easy to use among many different kinds of people, including students. Students who have no smartphones can use Messenger on a computer in an internet cafe. This is confirmed by H.W (an English teacher) who stated, "Our students are not ready yet for online learning due to the lack of facilities and infrastructures." A.N (an administrative staff) also said, "Looking at the data from each subject teacher, there were still a few students who could submit assignments based on teacher's directions." Besides, F.S stated, "no mobile phone and poor internet connection are the reasons online learning in this school doesn't work well." It therefore can be assumed that online learning at SMPN 3 Pendopo was still not effective due to inadequate technology as well as students' and teachers' characteristics.

These results seem to be consistent with the results of the study by (Fauziyah, 2020, p. 6) which found that technological advances, students' characteristics, and teaching methods affect the effectiveness of online learning. The implementation of successful online learning can be ensured by several factors: students' enthusiasm in learning, teachers' readiness for preparing lessons, and good learning outcomes. Nevertheless, these unfavorable circumstances do not paralyze the learning and teaching activities at SMPN 3 Pendopo. Teaching is a profession with a calling from the soul, so a teacher will be brokenhearted if his/her students cannot study well (Masitah, 2021, p. 19). The awareness of their students' lacking encourages teachers to implement blended learning, which is the combination of online learning and face-to-face learning.

Face-to-face learning requires students to come to school alternately to collect materials and assignments to be studied and done at home. Then, students come again to the school the following day to submit the assignments. The assignments are collected between 08.00 and 10.00 o'clock in the teacher's room/office and students must wear a face mask and follow the health protocols at school.

Internet connection is highly required for online learning. It can also enable students to access abundant information freely. This, however, can negatively impact their brain; their

ability to understand and think critically about the subject matter will weaken (Fauziyah, 2020, p. 2). Pangondian et al. (2019) argued that online learning is suitable for intelligent, disciplined, and confident students. In contrast, students with low intelligence and confidence will benefit more greatly from conventional learning (Fauziyah, 2020, p. 6).

In a study by Masitah (2021) entitled *The Effectiveness of the Use of WhatsApp among Teachers, Students, and Parents in Online and Offline Learning for Islamic Studies during the New Normal at SMPN 9 Tanjung Jabung Timur in 2020*, it is found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, learning is implemented online and face to face by strictly maintaining health protocols. These results accord with the results of the current study. However, in the previous study, the reasons of the implementation of blended learning were not observed. The current study, however, found that blended learning was implemented due to the limitations that the school members have encountered.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The results of observations showed that SMPN 3 Pendopo utilized Messenger and WhatsApp to conduct online learning. However, its implementation was found to be ineffective due to several factors, including the teachers' limitations in adjusting teaching materials, the students' low enthusiasm in following the lessons, the school's inadequate technology, and the students' and parents' inability to have a smart phone for online learning due to their poor conditions.

Nevertheless, the teachers were aware of these deficiencies and hence attempted to provide an alternative to continue online learning. Blended learning was then implemented.

However, blended learning was found to be less beneficial for students. Time constraints imposed by blended learning have limited students' opportunities to ask the teacher about the subject matter they do not understand yet.

It is recommended that the government support the remote schools by providing better facilities and infrastructures. The government should also give teachers some training to upgrade their teaching methods and technological capabilities.

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