CHALLENGES OF ONLINE TEACHING IN RURAL AREA: WHAT HAVE THEY LEARNED FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT?

Andiany Retno Pratiwi, Nenden Sri Lengkanawati

*andiany.pratiwi@upi.edu

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study explored the perceived challenges of online learning encountered by teachers in rural areas. The students and teachers in rural areas often need more facilities and expertise to implement online education. This research's primary purpose is to examine the teacher's challenges and the impact of online learning on teachers' development in rural areas. Qualitative descriptive research is used as a research design to explore phenomena. Data were collected through interviews and participant observation and then analyzed using the data analysis thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The findings show that the teachers used technology to ensure the continuity of online learning. However, inadequate infrastructures, internet connections, and poor digital skills become the central problems in online learning. Thus, all stakeholders, such as teachers, students, parents, and the government, must adopt technology and improve their digital skills. Moreover, for the development of teachers, workshops, webinars, and so on are needed to facilitate, increase and enable teachers to make competent use of online learning as the teachers develop learning strategies in online education during Covid-19 and beyond.

Keywords: Teacher professional development, online learning, teacher development

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 2020, the world changed dramatically because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic's implications and effects on education are indeed more challenging for educators and learners (Flores & Swennen, 2020). During the Covid-19 pandemic, Indonesia's government has given the rule to close schools in the red and yellow zones and undertake online learning. All educational institutions, including schools, colleges, and universities, currently cannot use the usual system for the pandemic Covid-19 since March 16, 2020, until now. As an impact, in a webinar organized by the World Bank on November 18, 2020, Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Anwar Makarim said there is a decline in quality of learning due to the pandemic in Indonesia. Moreover, the move to online teaching and learning, instead of the traditional approach to education, was inevitable; many learners in rural contexts now find themselves excluded from schooling and unable to access online resources.

In the Indonesian context, most teachers are still grappling with the challenges of facilitating learning for their students at home (Lie et al., 2020). In dealing with the teaching-learning process in this pandemic era, it is essential to drive teachers' professional development since it is an essential factor in the teachers' classroom practices (Soe, 2018;

*Corresponding author
Andiany Retno Pratiwi
Email: andiany.pratiwi@upi.edu

Xue, 2014). Based on the results of a survey conducted by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud), as many as 60 percent of teachers experienced online learning problems. From face-to-face methods becoming online learning, the shifting classroom showed the need for capacity building of teachers. The positive value of the situation is teachers are motivated to learn new things and hone creativity to learn the technology following current requirements. Online learning encourages teachers to overcome these challenges and work Collaboratory to respond to the changes and achieve the highest standards of performance. Teachers' pressures of learning new teamwork skills, thinking on a higher level, and successfully using new information technologies have been a kind of appeal to new teaching styles (Bicaj & Treska, 2014; Hargreaves, 2000).

However, due to the pandemic situation, the need to rapidly adapt to new contexts of teaching and learning online is not easy, and it has revealed how teachers encountered and experienced the challenges to carry on with their job and their professional development in such unexpected circumstances (Flores & Gago, 2020; Nasri et al., 2020; Quezada et al., 2020 in Flores, 2020). Teachers' professional development (TPD) is a dynamic concept. Professional development of the individuals, i.e., teachers, refers to how teachers develop in their profession. Teachers will enrich their knowledge and improve their skills continuously. Besides, it usually takes in-service workshops, courses, summer institutes, pursuing higher education, and the like (Johnston, 2003). Similarly, Guskey (2000) in Cirocki & Farrell (2019) suggested that professional development is the process and activities designed to enhance educators' professional knowledge, skills, and attitude so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students. In terms of approaches to professional development, teachers can choose from two main options, labeled formal and informal (Farrell, 2004; Lohman, 2000; Smaller, 2012; Tarc, 2012; Wilden & Porsch, 2017 in Cirocki & Farrell, 2019). The formal approach involves teachers attending an education program that follows a set curriculum on a specific topic. Informal learning is usually self-initiated and self-directed (Cirocki & Farrell (2019).

This research has devoted the challenges the teacher faces to online teaching and learning from the home system. It also includes the contributions from numbers of research presented by authors who stated the consequences of the pandemic and serve the finding and discussions concerning how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the work of teacher educators and students. Hammond and Hyler (2020) discuss what needs to be done by policymakers to support educators in meeting the social-emotional and academic needs of students in challenging circumstances, which are the result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Those are issued learning loss and unpredictable combinations of distance learning, blended learning, and in-classroom learning. They conclude that they consider it is important to navigate teaching and to learn with several strategies during the pandemic and beyond. However, Swennen & Flores (2020) provide a literature review of online teaching and learning practices in teacher education. The findings highlighted the need for a comprehensive view of online education pedagogy that integrates technology to support teaching and learning. The study shows that practical learning areas such as learning design need more attention. The authors identified areas for further research to evaluate the impact of an integrated pedagogy of online teaching and learning.

This research is devoted to the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on teacher education. It also includes the contributions from several types of research presented by authors who stated the consequences of the pandemic and serve the finding and discussions about how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the work of teacher educators and students. Most of the research papers published mentioned the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on a global scale that has shocked teachers at all levels and at the same time inspired them to find solutions to problems they have not encountered before. Thus, by understanding that research, the concern of this research would be the ways the learning from the home system can be studied and how these studies could support and solve the problem of the digital divide in rural areas concerning learning from the home system.

To initiate the study, this paper seeks to address the following research questions:
1. What are the challenges faced by the teacher as an impact on online learning system?

2. How do the teachers deal/cope with the challenges that hinder continued/online learning?

From the issue, we learn that the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic on a global scale has shocked teachers at all levels and at the same time inspired teachers to find solutions to problems they have not faced before. Hopefully, this research could help understand the challenges and how the teachers deal/cope with the challenges that hinder continued/online learning. Moreover, this research studies include a wide range of improvements and innovations for teachers to use in changing the educational landscape.

METHODS

This section covered about the research design, the data collection, sample of the subject, instrumentations and materials, data collection procedures and the data analysis. As stated in the thesis statement, this research was conducted to examine the challenges faced by the teacher as an impact on online learning and how the teachers deal/cope with the challenges that hinder continued/online learning in rural area. Thus, in this study, the researcher used qualitative descriptive research. Moreover, descriptive research is used to explore the phenomena by conducting the interview, focus group, and participant observation, shortly this study is more flexible (Mack, 2005). Thus, descriptive research is suitable with the phenomenon will analyzeds as mentioned in the research questions.

Data collection was conducted in two stages. The first step was carried out using a classroom observation. However the researcher did not observe directly in the classroom, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The teacher sent the screenshot of the online class using the WhatsApp group. The second stage of the data collection has conducted the interview to get more meaningful data. The interview was conducted online for 1 hour via the Zoom meeting application. The technique used to collect the data and construct the case study was semi-structured interviews, and notes collected during the interview. The data collected was analyzed through classical content analysis, which is based on content analysis. The data collected by the Zoom meeting was based on a protocol using both structured and unstructured questions.

In this research, the researcher chose the subject by implementing the selection. For selecting the subject, the researcher has contacted several teachers in rural areas near Bandung. Due to the time limitation, the researcher only analyzed one teacher who teaches English at Junior High School with one-year of experience located in Nanjung, Soreang, West java, Indonesia. The considerations that make the subject chosen are the subject teaches near Bandung area as the center of West Java government with greater access to education, and higher quality education. However, after having the experiences teaching at Soreang, the subject found that there are several cases that make distance learning difficult, such as internet connection and the socio-economic level from each parent to own cellular phone or laptop.

As mentioned in the procedure, there are two data to be analyzed, the data from semi-structured interview and classroom observation. The researcher used qualitative descriptive research. The aim of descriptive research is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. This research is more concerned with what rather than how or why something has happened. Therefore, observation and survey tools are often used to gather data (Gall & Borg, 2007). Moreover, descriptive research is used to explore the phenomena by conducting the interview, focus group, and participant observation, shortly this study is more flexible (Mack, 2005). The interview comprised several main topics; the level of technology used by teachers before Covid-19, method of lesson implementation in the classroom before Covid-19, method of online learning implementation, assessment of online learning, the difficulties, and how the teacher solve the problems. Therefore, the theory of data analysis in this research adopted from Watling and James (2012) who describe a typical qualitative analytical approach by following several aspects such as; theory defining and identifying data, collecting and sorting data, data reduction and sampling, structuring and coding data, theory building and testing, reporting and writing up research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the government in Indonesia has given the rule to close schools in the red and yellow zones and undertake distance learning at home. All educational institutions including schools, colleges, and universities currently cannot use the usual system for pandemic Covid-19 since 16 March 2020 until now. The impact of the changes in the teaching and learning process brought about by the learning from the home system has affected teacher performance and the quality of education, especially in Indonesia. These include impacts on instructional strategies, technology to support learning from the home system, the motivation of the teachers, and also the involvement of parents and government. Also from the factor analysis, it was found that poor digital skills, digital divide, poor electricity unavailability and accessibility, network issues, are the major barriers for online education during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This research was conducted with the purpose to answer the research questions; 1. What are the challenges faced by the teacher as an impact on online learning? 2. How the teachers deal/cope with the challenges that hinder continued/online learning? From the interview, the researcher found out several problems faced by the subjects and also the benefits of online learning.

The challenges faced by the teacher as an impact on online learning

The subject tried to optimize the use of technology in online learning; however, some technologies were still difficult to access. The subject found the difficulties and problems related to modern technology, among others, are related to errors in audio and video problems, internet connection, log in problems, installation, and so on. Moreover, several students also find online teaching boring and unattractive.

Excerpt 1
Student response, right? We have 20 students, thank God the most are those who collect assignments or are active, 15 people, the rest are a bit difficult. Sometimes they have personal problems, so 15 are active. The homeroom teacher will have a report from each subjects, later we will get warning for the students. If we get to SP3, we will give the child's choice, they will be given questions for a week, Monday they will be given questions for a week, they will be submitted later, so it is really an offline class, working on questions, I do not know where to get the material, because of the kids really do not want to go to school, so that's really the last alternative

The challenges that teachers face in online teaching during learning from home system include four sub-themes, namely technical obstacles, student conditioning, the participation of students, and online teaching experience. Teachers faced several challenges related to the emergencies of obstacles associated with technical issues. Not all parents have a gadget such as a cell phone or laptop, the poor of internet signals, especially in the rural areas. By having this problem, the student could not participate in learning optimally. As a result, some students could not follow lessons and experienced delays in completing an assignment that the teacher gives. These issues often occur for students with a low economic level. In the implementation of online learning, the availability of data packages or internet connections andthe possession of phones or laptop is a must. The subject found several students used their parents or family's cellular phone to join online learning, they often missed to submit the assignments because their family members did not tell them about the assignment.

Excerpt 2
We at school haven't provided our own wifi as long as we want to use it but because we're not here forever, so it doesn't support it, so we buy a modem for the teacher and we use Telkomsel, but because I'm the one holding the money, buying a few giga is only enough for a few hours, so it is very wasteful, and so I go back again for the quota to go back to the teachers. there are some students who do not have it, borrow it from siblings or parents and this becomes an obstacle in assignments, if we give questions sometimes they do not convey them to their children, with people who have cellphones, so sometimes we are confused whether he is giving assignments or not even though maybe there are no gadgets, so sometimes it is hard to connect to the internet when zooming, that's why I rarely use zoom because there are always a lot of problems, sometimes parents complain about running out of quota, the anticipation is that one folder has points, right

Teaching motivation during the learning from home system must be kept stable because of the current situation due to the pandemic. Teacher enthusiasm determines the high performance of the teachers; however, the subject said that she felt less enthusiastic about learning from home system. The subject could not interact with the students physically.

The difference is that the losses are from the students, and the teacher, students do not get full teaching, it is not optimal as much as possible, they get the material, it is different at school, right? For teachers, the problem is controlling our students, we can only be an indicator of students' understanding, only from their assignments, the rest is to hold our students in trouble.

The solutions of the challenges faced by the teachers in online learning

The use of instructional media aims to make it easier for students to understand the subject matter (Abdo & Semela, 2010) by providing different learning experiences that are expected to stimulate the interest of students and their motivation to learn. The instructional media that the subject most often used were learning videos from YouTube, and also the learning video that the subject made using several video editing applications. The subject said that instructional videos were one of the most accessible media to use because the teacher already had time, and students could easily understand the subject matters.

Excerpt 3
So the term is that we have just debuted, we are still hatching to become teachers, we are really new and are faced with an online learning situation, the improvement with this online we are required to be creative, if face to face we are not required to make videos and ppt, now we are making videos So it is like a beginner YouTuber, right, because we also make material through video, so yeah, it is double the work, summarizing material, making scripts, the video is like that.

Besides using video, the subject also used WhatsApp chat for doing the discussion, Google Forms, and Zoom meeting. Parents have a role in monitoring their children when the homework was given by the teacher. The use of the instructional time that changes in each meeting also affects the instructional steps, including the discipline of students while joining the learning process. In this regard, discipline involves turning in the assignments on time and not delaying the completion of the task at hand, so students must study the materials to not experience delays in instructional time. In this part, parents have a role in guiding their children to do the assignment based on the given deadline.

Excerpt 4
For supervision it involves parents, so like this we study until 12 o'clock, so later we will give

the task deadline until 5 o'clock in the afternoon and there will be until the next day, then every day there will be a report. those who have been assigned to register in the child's or parent's watsap group later every Sunday the homeroom teacher provides a list of the grades of assignments that have been done so that parents can check the completed and unfinished children's assignments later. If there is a student's name in the red column, it means that the child has not completed the assignment.

For the assessment, the subject used the Q&A method in the way for teachers to measure students' understanding of the subject matter being taught, and the discussion method allows for two-way interaction between teachers and students. Due to the lack of internet connection from most of the students and the condition of the virtual classroom that was less conducive to learning, the subject used WhatsApp groups to monitor the student's activities and understanding. More than that, a teacher cannot fairly conduct assessments that include cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in an online environment (Rasmitadila, 2020). Indeed, teachers often felt that proper evaluation of the cognitive aspect was challenging to do fairly because of the parents' interventions (Rasmitadila, 2020).

So there are two to three lessons a day, each one has absences, so the absences do not just show up, we hold a morning test, the children are given one or two questions as marming up, continue the intermezzo through the WhatsApp group, we are asked whether they understand the material presented, then we introduce the material today's discussion, we will give a video that we have made a YouTube video as a summary of the material, after that the discussion via whatsapp group will hold a quiz so that the students understand better, the quiz is in the form of the material discussed, they send it to my number, and ends with an assignment.

Besides, the subject also took several ways to get around online classes to find the solution of learning from home system. One of them is by conducting peer coaching with fellow teachers, which is usually done every day, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. The subject indirectly holds discussions with other teachers.

For fellow teachers, especially the junior high school team, they like to vent every day, so right during the speaking session, we like to give input on the obstacles they feel, which students really have problems, so we can give good advice on how to behave. The discussion about it (peer coaching) hmm, it is a coincidence that now if we improve the quality of online teaching, let's just keep going, at first it was making videos with other teachers, but now the concern isn't there, now the daily meetings are another matter. Peer ocahing ma is already automatic, right, because we do not have a team anymore so that's just it. It is really helpful, because we can't carry the burden ourselves, so let's just forget about it, because we're also on the same path so let's just forget about it.

From this research, the subject underlined that instructional strategy needed change and that all aspects, such as governments, schools, parents should discuss and formulate the learning from the home system in purpose to gain the quality of education in Indonesia. To do so requires time, effort, and focus from a teacher due to the changing education system in Indonesia from face-to-face learning to online learning. The teacher also could modify the instruction using a pedagogical approach that suits their interest and abilities, such as group discussion methods, peer assistance, and peer assessment.

Most importantly, student involvement and participation in online learning must be motivated because of the lack of interest shown by the students during the learning. The use of varied instructional methods will encourage more enthusiastic participation in online learning. To support this, the role of government is also important. The government should develop online educational resources that align with the national curriculum and help teachers to conduct it. From this research, the researcher found that the need for technology in education particularly in pandemic Covid-19 is a must. In line with the statement by Onyema (2019), the integration of emerging technologies in education is no longer a choice, but a need for all stakeholders. Concerning teacher development during the online learning, considering the changing learning environment, the need for creativity and innovation in

learning should be considered as one of the important aspects to increase the quality of education in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

The pandemic caused by the Covid-19 disease is leaving devastating consequences in society from a social, health, educational, and labor point of view. The impact of changes in the learning and teaching system during the Covid-19 pandemic has affected teacher performance and quality. Along with these changes, alterations have been necessary for instructional strategies, technology readiness to conduct online learning, and also to support all stakeholders such as students, teachers, and parents. Moreover, for the development of teachers, the needs of workshop, webinar, and so on is needed to facilitate, increase and enable teachers to make competent use of blended online and learning strategies in distance and online education in the time of Covid-19 and beyond. Lastly, there should be a collaborative effort among the government, teachers, parents, and schools to increase the efficacy of teaching and learning methods that have been adversely affected and ensure that students do not fall behind. The researcher is already working on a project to examine the difficulties faced by the teacher as an impact on the teaching and learning from the home system, and also the various challenges that hinder continued/online education during the Covid-19 pandemic. The implications of Covid-19 school closures on the education of persons with disabilities particularly in rural areas hopefully could be investigated.

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