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How Rural Students Accomplish Online Learning During Pandemic: A Study from Elementary School in Indonesia

Medita Ayu Wulandari^{1✉}, Ahmad Sudi Pratikno², Anwar Senen³,

Faridillah Fahmi Nurfurqon⁴

IKIP Siliwangi, Indonesia¹

Universitas Trunojoyo, Indonesia²

Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia³

E-mail: medita@ikipsiliwangi.ac.id¹, ahmad.prationo@trunojoyo.ac.id², senen@uny.ac.id³, faridillah@ikipsiliwangi.ac.id⁴

Abstrak

Pandemi Covid-19 berdampak pada semua lapisan masyarakat. Berdasarkan pembatasan pemerintah, semua lembaga pendidikan telah menerapkan pembelajaran online. Penelitian ini menganalisis pengalaman belajar online siswa sekolah dasar di pedesaan. Hal ini mengacu pada data yang dikumpulkan tentang: motivasi belajar siswa, kebutuhan belajar siswa dan keterampilan sosial siswa. Data dikumpulkan melalui survei online. Data dianalisis melalui tiga tahapan Miles & Huberman, yaitu reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa selama pandemi Covid-19, pembelajaran online kurang efektif bagi siswa sekolah dasar di pedesaan. Nilai dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui faktor-faktor apa saja yang mendukung dan mengganggu kepuasan belajar siswa sekolah dasar di pedesaan terkait pembelajaran online di masa pandemi Covid-19.

Kata Kunci: pembelajaran online, siswa sekolah dasar, daerah pedesaan.

Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted all areas of life. Based on government restrictions, all educational institutions have implemented online learning. This study investigates elementary students' online learning experiences in rural areas. It refers to the data collected about: students learning motivation, students learning requirements, and students' social skills. Data was collected through an online survey. Data were analyzed through three stages of Miles & Huberman, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that during the Covid-19 pandemic, online learning was less effective for elementary students in rural areas. The value of this study is for comprehending what factors support and interfere with the learning satisfaction of elementary students in rural areas related to online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: online learning, primary students, rural areas.

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✉ Corresponding author :

Email : medita@ikipsiliwangi.ac.id

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INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus outbreaks have been taken a significant impact on the educational process. This situation caused the learning obstacle in the educational environment to impact teachers, students, and parents (Lassoued, Alhendawi, & Bashitialshaaer, 2020). These obstacles hit many aspects of education. Starting from the readiness of students to learn independently, the readiness of teachers to present learning materials that students easily understand, and the readiness of parents to accompany their children to learn from home.

The impact of coronavirus outbreaks also causes learning loss (Hughes & Anderson, 2020) and leads to declining students' cognitive abilities (Pedro, et al., 2021), especially in rural areas. Schools in rural areas have difficulty implementing online learning (Austin, 2010), whether in blended, hybrid, or synchronous-asynchronous. This is inseparable because schools in remote areas have minimal technological facilities (Ghavifekr & Rosdy, 2015), such as smartphones, laptops, signal coverage from local providers, decreased social skills, and the loss of student character.

This study explores the online learning experiences of elementary school students in rural areas. This refers to the data collected regarding the learning motivation of elementary school students in rural areas during the covid-19 pandemic. Several studies have shown that student learning motivation is one aspect affected during learning from home (Kim & Frick, 2011). Another aspect examined in this study is what students need during learning from home. We are careful about this, considering that meeting the needs of students during learning is one factor supporting the success of learning itself (Ruth, 2020). In addition, learning activities from home also reduce social interactions between students with teachers and students with students. This also needs to be investigated, considering that social skills are determinants for student success in the future (Sariyatun, Suryan, Sutimin, Abidin, & Akmal, 2021).

We developed a *Student Perception Survey* on Learning from Home and gave it to a sample of elementary school students in rural areas to find out what factors support and interfere with the learning satisfaction of elementary school students in rural areas related to online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. This survey was designed to answer three research questions:

1. What do elementary school students in rural areas feel regarding learning motivation during distance learning?
2. What things do elementary school students in rural areas need to support learning activities during distance learning?
3. What is the relationship between the implementation of distance learning and the social skills of elementary school students in rural areas?

METHOD

Participants

The sample in this study was 176 elementary school students. They all reportedly live in rural areas in the Dayeuhluhur sub-district at Cilacap. The students come from Cijeruk and Cilumping, the two remotest villages in the sub-district. The indicators for determining rural areas are 1) it is located in the border area; 2) it is the remotest village; 3) it has less than 1500 people. This follows international law, which says that an area is declared to be rural if the population in the area is not more than 2,500 people (OECD, 2007).

The samples taken came from the same level, from the high class of the elementary school. The sample includes classes of fourth, fifth, and sixth-grade students. Table 1 shows the distribution data of the research sample.

Table 1
Sample Educational Level

Educational Level	Students' Ages	Frequency (n=176)	Percentage
Fourth Grade	9-10	52	29%
Fifth Grade	10-11	75	43%
Sixth Grade	11-12	49	28%

Instrument

An online survey was offered via Google Forms to help obtain data on three areas:

1. student learning motivation,
2. student learning needs,
3. students' social skills.

This instrument consists of closed and open questions. It begins with an approval section and ends with the opportunity to provide further comments. Using online instruments may seem contradictory to collecting responses from students in areas with narrow access to the Internet. However, that is the only option available during the lockdown.

Data Collection

Several strategies were deployed to recruit participants. First, the researcher contacted the teachers in each school. Then the teachers assigned the survey link to the WhatsApp group of their classes; the WhatsApp group was the only learning platform for teachers and students in rural areas during the covid-19 pandemic. The researcher also asked the teachers to remind students who live near their homes to fill out the survey and ask the students to remind other friends. Then, the researcher also asked for the parents' contact numbers from the teacher. This is very useful, as it allows researchers to contact students through their parents and ensure students can access the instrument. Data collection lasted for eleven weeks, from 5th April to 19th June 2021.

Data Analysis

The researchers triangulated quantitative and qualitative data to obtain a comprehensive picture of the learning experiences of rural students (Salkind, 2010). They obtained the frequency and percentage of closed questions. They also conducted an inductive analysis on open-ended questions. The researcher asked the students to write down their identities with X1, X2, X3, etc., to maintain their anonymity. Students can write comments in the local language (Sundanese) if they have difficulty with Indonesian.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Below we equip an overview of the findings for each of three main topics 1) students' learning motivation; 2) students' learning needs; 3) students' social skills.

Students' Learning Motivation

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, all students studied conventionally at school. All of them (100%) learn at school face-to-face. Three-quarters (78%) of students carry out learning in the classroom, while 22% often carry it out outside the classroom, such as in the school library and other areas. Most students (96%) stated that they prefer to carry out learning activities at school rather than at home. The thing that makes students more comfortable studying at school is that activities at school encourage students to learn. "I feel happier at school because I am more enthusiastic regarding learning" [X121]. "Meeting the teacher and friends makes me delighted to learn" [X87].

The participants reported that they learned through the WhatsApp group created by the teacher (100%). Learning activities like this make it difficult for students to learn (87%), and half of them (56%) forget to do the assignments given by the teacher. Some students stated that they often did not take their studies seriously

through WhatsApp. "I am often busy at home and forget to do the learning activity through WhatsApp" [X55]. The students were slightly serious about studying and doing homework. "My teacher often called me because I forgot to collect my homework" [X19]; and "I am often distracted while studying because there is a television and toys at home so I can not focus on doing the homework" [P58]; also "My mother often calls by my teacher to remind me that I should do my homework and collect it through the WhatsApp group" [P64].

A study from the home condition and only guided through WhatsApp groups by the teacher causes students to feel self-conscious, especially shy and less active students in class. This kind of learning activity makes students less close to the teacher, which causes a sense of shyness in students. Most of them feel regretful and do not dare to ask questions even though there is a subject that they do not understand. "I do not think I am good at studying. I am embarrassed to ask the teacher." [X58]. Although in every class there are students who dare to ask questions, there are only one or two students, most of the students feel hesitant to ask questions either to teachers or friends they said:

1. "I did not ask the teacher about the subject, I was embarrassed. I asked my brother." [X35].
2. "I rarely ask the teacher about the lesson because I am afraid. I read the book myself. [X117].
3. "I WhatsApp a friend if I do not understand the lesson, but my friend does not understand either. [X93].

Numerous students said that learning from home raised their learning load (87%). Besides reading and understanding the material, students also have to learn independently; students are also assigned more homework. This burdens them, and many students are not enthusiastic to carry out the assignments given by the teacher (91%). They said that ("I read the material from the teacher during class hours; after that, I worked on the questions. I continually had difficulty solving the problem and was not enthusiastic about finishing it" [X156]; 45%) and ("I often did not do my homework, because I can not, and no one teaches me" [X160]; 32%). I am not very satisfied with exercise questions; sometimes it makes me dizzy" [X6].

Students' Learning Needs

Most students' needs are related to supporting media that can be utilized for independent learning by students during the pandemic. Students like to use different media to implement learning (100%). Most students often forget to carry out learning through WhatsApp groups. Students' comments:

1. "Study from home, maybe sometimes do not use WhatsApp, it can be through different media." [X85]
2. "Learning using WhatsApp, I can only hear the teacher's voice. If I want to see the teacher's face and friends, I must use the telephone. Noticing the teacher's face pushes me to understand better." [X32]
3. "Perhaps learning from home can use other media like my sister also learns not only through WhatsApp." [X19]

Most students reported better when learning through videos (87%) than using the teacher's scans and voice notes. "I want the teacher to make a video for studying so that later I can watch the teacher like when I was in class" [X116]. Video is also one of the most popular platforms for elementary school-aged students. "I like watching videos. I learn to cook through videos. I also want teachers to teach through videos" [X146].

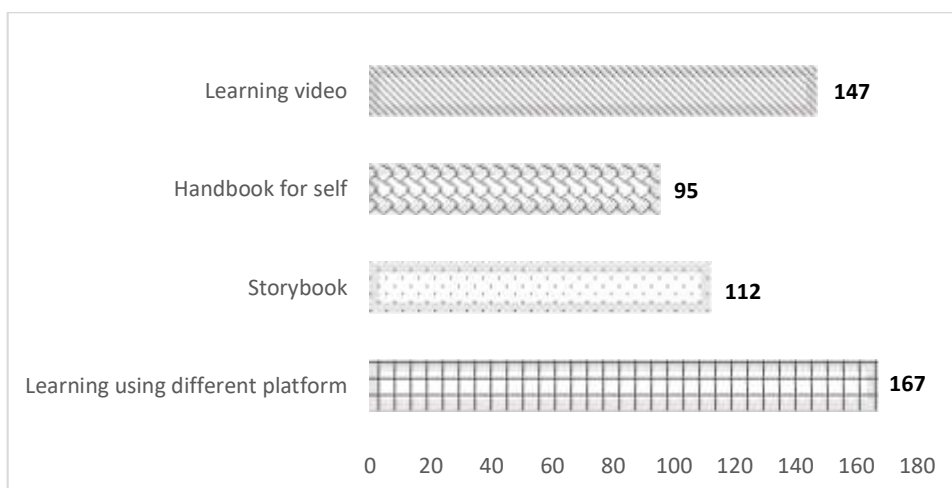


Figure 1. Students' Learning Needs During Online Learning

Since students' reading interest in textbooks is still low, research data shows that students want a storybook for learning. The students stated:

1. "The material given by the teacher has too many questions. I want to read stories while learning" [X138].
2. "I like to study with books with lots of stories" [X42].

Then, the handbook for self is also an option for students to study at home independently. They need a handbook that summarizes the subject concisely and clearly. "Material from the teacher should not be too much, just keep it brief, so it will make me easy to study" [X91]. It is intended that students can learn more efficiently. "I find it easier to learn using a handbook from the teacher, but the material should not be too much, just kept it brief so that it is easier for me to learn" [X141].

Students' Social Skills

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government recommended that 100% of learning be implemented through online schemes, including schools in rural areas. Although the number of COVID-19 cases in the Dayeuhluhur sub-district is small, every village has an active case of COVID-19. It causes a decrease in social interaction (79%), including among children. Besides, they do not meet at school because learning is carried out from home. Playing activities with other students at home are also reduced. Interaction between students at home only occurs with neighbors, even though interaction does not occur every day and does not happen to all students. Nearly 82% of students said they rarely interacted with classmates or playmates during the pandemic.

That is good news for parents and teachers because it indicates that students will avoid the possibility of contracting COVID-19. But on the other hand, we can see that student interaction has reduced drastically. This will affect the students' social skills. Data related to students' social abilities during the pandemic can be seen in the following chart:

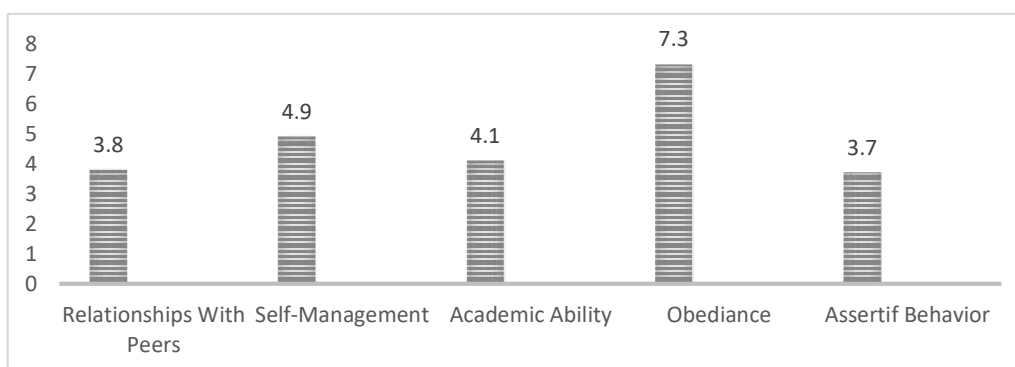


Figure 2. Students' Social Skills During Online Learning

The lack of immediate communication between students and teachers creates a low number of students' social skills. The data shows that only 38% of students communicate regularly with their classmates, "I communicate with my friend via WhatsApp several times, but not often" [X155]. In addition, 51% of students admitted that they had poor self-management, evidenced by "I often forget that today at seven o'clock I am studying online with the teacher through the WhatsApp group. I also often forget my homework until the teacher calls me" [X38]. The periodic tests showed that only 41% of students got grades according to the minimum standard set, "I remedial 3 times in mathematics, I do not understand when studying from home by myself" [X12]. The low student learning outcomes are in line with their low assertive behavior; only 37% of students want to read independently the subject taught by the teacher online regularly. The good news is that even though students study from home, they still maintain compliance with teachers, parents, and God (73%).

Discussion

This investigation delivers realities related to a remarkable case during the Covid-19 pandemic, which poses various challenges for education, including the students. This research touch on a very different context from most previous studies, which have not touched on the implementation of online learning in rural students (Fauzi & Sastra, 2020; Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Roudlotun & Muhammad, 2021; Tracy, et al., 2021). This study set out to analyze the learning experiences of elementary school students in rural areas that were carried out online learning during the pandemic. The thing that is examined is the learning motivation of elementary students in rural areas while studying from home. Then, what things do students need to support their learning activities from home? Likewise, is there a relationship between the undertaking of distance learning and elementary students' social skills in rural areas itself?

The most prominent finding that emerged from this study is that students were bored doing learning through WhatsApp groups. They wanted to try to use other platforms in learning. If schools and teachers can not facilitate learning with other platforms, at least students want to be provided with learning tools such as educational videos or simple hands out to make it easier for them to understand the lesson. Alternatively, there is a textbook in a more exciting form, such as a storybook. These circumstances again eventually lead to low student learning motivation and cause a reduction in students' social skills.

This research has provided a deeper insight into how important it is to vary in learning. Variation in learning is diverse in presenting the learning activities (Pratiwi & Ediyono, 2018). Changes in the learning process aim to increase students' learning motivation (Hidayatullah, 2021) and reduce their lethargy and blahs (Bunyamin, Juita, & Syalsiah, 2020). On the other hand, the need to use various learning media is also a highlight in this study. Learning media has an essential role in increasing the learning interest of elementary school students (Puspitarini & Hanif, 2019) because elementary school students are not yet able to think abstractly, so the material taught by teachers needs to be visualized in a more concrete form (Wulandari, Senen, Wardani, & Kelana, 2022) even during the online learning (Pujiasih, 2020).

One unexpected finding in this study was that although overall students' social skills were low, one indicator was still in the high category: obedience. Obedience reflects the character that needs to be accustomed to since elementary school (Lin, Chen, & Liu, 2017). Obedience is an attitude that will appear in someone and reacts to things in the rules and must be carried out (Harandi, 2015). This attitude appears when the individual is faced with a stimulus that requires an individual reaction (Gopalan, Bakar, Zulkifli, Alwi, & Mat, 2017).

The strength of this study is the location of the participants' domicile and methodology. Researchers selected groups of participants to explore the perception of students in rural areas about online learning and used it to define and describe the image of online learning in rural areas during the pandemic. The benefit of the subjects in this study is that they are elementary school students in rural areas, living on the outskirts of the sub-district and in the remotest village. It can describe the rural conditions, where technology is limited, and the distance between students' homes and schools is very far. However, that could also be a limitation of this research. Another limitation of this study is that it did not investigate what changes students handled during

online learning and what challenges they felt. Future research also needs to foster the development of teaching materials that students in rural areas can use during learning from home independently. Likewise, research subjects must be carried out more broadly, not only in one district.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the impact of changing conventional to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic on elementary school students in rural areas. The results showed a decrease in students' learning motivation which caused a decrease in student learning outcomes. Online learning activities for elementary students in rural areas also caused a decline in students' social skills compelled by the lack of meeting intensity between students with teachers and students with students. In addition, this research reveals what students need during online learning, such as learning videos and storybooks related to the subject matter. Further research would also include developing teaching materials that students can use independently while learning from home and need to research on a larger scale.

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