

Investigating The Polemic of Emergency Remote Teaching for Very Young Learners

An Inquiry Research on Kindergarten Teachers and Parents

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Abstract. Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) has been implemented in Indonesia at all levels of education since March 2020 to prevent the spread of coronavirus. Immediate changes and adjustments are required to transform face to face learning into online learning. In addition, challenges emerge during this process. To investigate the challenges during the implementation of Emergency Remote Teaching for very young learners, a narrative inquiry research was applied. In-depth interview was held to five respondents consisted of 2 teachers and 3 parents to collect the data. The researcher also observed the online teaching and learning process conducted via WhatsApp group. Then, the data were categorized into two sides, teachers' side and parents' side, since it is undeniable that online learning for very young learners intensively involved not only the teachers but also the parents. From the teachers' side, the challenges dealt with materials preparation, online class management, and learning achievement. From parents' side, the problems comprised the time management and learning environment. This paper recommends that teachers need to continuously develop their professional skills so that they can adapt to the rapid change of education system.

Keywords: Emergency Remote Teaching, Very Young Learners, Online Learning, Challenge

1 Introduction

The pandemic of Covid-19 has changed our whole lives, including education. The teaching and learning process inevitably takes place through remote teaching or online learning. This is not only applied in elementary, junior high, high school and college, but also in kindergarten and early childhood education (*PAUD*). For this reason, the Ministry of Education and Culture regulates distance learning through Circular Letter Number 4 of 2020 concerning on the Implementation of Education Policies in the emergency period of the spread of Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19).

As the follow up of that policy, the guideline of Learning from Home implementation during the emergency period of the spread of Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) is regulated on the Circular Letter Number 15 of 2020. Learning from Home aims to ensure the fulfilment of students' right to obtain educational services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the principle of implementing Learning from Home is

to provide a meaningful learning experience for students, without being burdened by the demands of completing all the curriculum learning outcomes. Learning from Home is a distance learning which is carried out through offline or online learning.

Online learning is a learning design in which the implementation uses internet and is carried out indirectly between teachers and students, asynchronous or synchronously, with the same learning materials. Meanwhile, offline learning here is a distance learning system in which the teaching and learning process conducted directly by applying home visit or students shifts. This learning system uses teaching media to help the students learn independently at home such as worksheet, modules, teaching aids or anything around the students that can be obtained easily and supports the learning materials (Harahap, Dimiyati, & Purwanta, 2021).

This research focused on very young learners since they need different approaches and methods than the other learners. Very young learners cannot learn independently. They need guidance from their parents. Young learners are students aged 3-12 years old (Bakhsh, 2016) and very young learners are at the very beginning of this stage which is about 3-6 years old. They are commonly kindergarten and early childhood education students.

The immediate shift from offline learning to online learning requires all parties to work together. Here, parents play a very crucial role in stimulating their children to learn. Thus, parents should have enough knowledge and skills to grow the children's developmental aspects, such as cognition, language, physical motor, social emotion, arts, religion and moral (Ndeot, Jaya, & Bali, 2020).

It is undeniable that this transformation needs adjustment and hard efforts. Some new problems emerge as the result of the rapid change in education without good preparation such as facilities, time management, and online learning application mastery (Harahap et al., 2021). Referring to previous research on the importance of parents' role during the online learning, it was stated that only 3 out of 10 parents could create good and conducive learning atmosphere at home (Oktaria & Putra, 2020).

Considering the fact that teachers and parents should struggle in guiding young learners to learn during this pandemic, this research aimed to investigate the challenges during the implementation of Emergency Remote Teaching for young learners which is known as Learning from Home. By employing a narrative inquiry, the researcher hope that this research can be a consideration for better improvement in TEYL practice.

2 Methodology

The central focus of this research is to engage a narrative inquiry in which a deep information in the form of narrative data were collected from participants who served as parents or teachers of young learners during the pandemic of COVID-19. In accordance with its purpose, a narrative inquiry approach seems to be the best match for this study as it gives prominence to human experience and captures "detailed stories of life experiences" of individuals (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Razavieh, 2010).

Narrative inquiry was first introduced by Connelly and Clandinin in 1990 (Abrar, 2019). This research method uses qualitative approach and can be defined as a research that study the personal and human dimension of life experiences and presents them narratively (Abrar, 2019). In line with this definition, Moen states that a narrative research focuses on the meanings and values that individuals attach to their experiences through the stories they tell and share (Moen, 2006). A narrative inquiry collects participants' stories and retells the participants' views by combining the researcher's experience with those of the participants to produce a collaborative narrative (Creswell, 2007). Referring to those definitions, narrative inquiry is a research collecting stories as the data source and interpreting them by their values.

To be able to tell something, the participants or the story tellers should understand clearly what they are going to tell about (Listiyanto & Fauzi, 2016). In other word, the participants need to understand the core of the research and get involved to it as collaborator. Thus, the participants of this research were chosen randomly with the inclusion of experiencing the remote teaching and learning process for very young learners. Since this research focuses on comparing the stories from both sides, the teachers and parents, the participants were grouped into two. This research involved two kindergarten teachers to represent the teacher group, and two fulltime mothers and one working mother for the parent group.

There is a sense that stories are just something told to explain or make a point. It is easy to assume that the stories are subjective. However, narrative inquiry data source is not only the story tellers themselves, it may include: filed notes of shared experiences, journal records of participants, unstructured interviews, storytelling, letter writing, and autobiographical writing (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). For this research, the researcher used observation, questionnaire, and unstructured interviews to collect the data.

The key qualities of qualitative research are iterative, emergent, and interpretive. This list is meaningful for the purpose of situating narrative inquiry in a broader perspective of qualitative methodology (Jacobs, Barkhuizen, & Benson, n.d.). Therefore, after the data collected, they were transcribed carefully, read repeatedly, and connected in a meaningful way to find the similarities and differences, as well as relating them to answer the research questions. To ensure the trustworthiness and verification of the data interpretation and analysis, the participants were involved by returning the transcription and analysis to get their feedback and comments as well as their agreement for anonymity and any ethical issues.

3 Finding

This section presents the stories shared by participants regarding their experiences and concerns toward the implementation of remote teaching for very young learners.

Mrs. N's Story: Young learners have right to keep learning at home

Mrs. N is a kindergarten teacher in a private Islamic School. She has been working there for 4 years. She teaches Arts Center. The pandemic of covid-19 has written a history of change in the education system. Everything goes online. This raises a fidgetiness for very young learners' teachers. Mrs. S concerned on the very young learners' right to learn. As it is known that early childhood education is about developing all the students' learning domains including moral, religion, cognition, psychomotor, language, socio-emotion, and arts. The students must be freed to be creative and develop their imagination. Here, the teachers struggled to meet the students' need, to ensure that that they can still learn even at home.

Mrs. N feels lucky that the curriculum used in her school supports the policy of learning from home meaning that there is not a significant change on it. They apply loose part learning method which is a method using teaching materials derived from used materials that are easy to move, manipulate and how to use is determined by the children.

“*Alhamdulillah*, all the lesson plans can still be applied because our curriculum uses loose part method in which we use all things surround us to learn...”

The teachers quickly adapted to this situation. They built networks with the parents and collaborated with them for the learning activities. The teachers provided the learning guidelines every day, and the parents applied it at home. The succeed of the learning process indeed cannot be separated from the active participation of the parents in accompanying their children to learn. Thus, the teachers tried to design lessons that are simple and practical but still meet the learning objectives.

The biggest challenge faced by the teacher during the pandemic, especially Mrs. N, was transforming the learning materials into a video.

“Mmm...yeah, making the learning video is the biggest challenge. It must be interesting and detail, so the kids are interested to watch it...”

Making learning video for kids required teachers to be creative and innovative. As their target are children, the learning video must be simple and easily understood, yet interesting and motivating for children to learn. Hence, the process of preparing the learning materials including planning, taking video, and editing needed more effort and time than usual.

To monitor the students' learning progress, the teachers distributed worksheets and provided learning media weekly. Besides, the teachers also communicated directly with students via video call several times and invited the students to play and learn together in small groups once a week. Here, the teachers observed the students' learning progress. Mrs. N admitted that not all learning outcomes can be achieved optimally, especially on memorization of *hadits* and short *surah*.

“Indeed, the weakness of the online learning is memorization. The students used to repeat it at school. But now, they must memorize by themselves at home...”

Normally, it was memorized at school by repetition and guidance from the teachers. During the pandemic, the achievement depended on the commitment of the parents and the children to practice it at home. Therefore, Mrs. N advised the parents to keep becoming partner for teachers in accompanying the children's growth and development so that the basic and core competences of learning can be completed.

Mrs. E's Story: It's hard to keep the learning progress on target

Mrs. E is a kindergarten teacher. Besides, she is the headmaster of the school where she works. Currently, she teaches Liquid Natural Materials Center, which is learning that uses liquid natural materials as teaching materials, because one of the teachers is taking maternity leave. Here, she talked about her fidgetiness on the learning progress during the pandemic. Her main concern was about the learning target. It decreased up to 10% this year.

“Before the pandemic, our target was the students are able to read, write, calculate and memorize short *surah* and *hadits* for about 95%. But now, it decreases up to 10%...”

However, she tried the best to keep the students' learning progress on target. Mrs. E and the other teachers managed the learning activities in such a way that it was easy to be conducted at home. First, they made a WhatsApp group for every class to facilitate communication with the parents. Then, they also distributed worksheets to be done at home by the students during the week. Every Saturday, the parents were invited to school to submit the worksheets and take the new ones. Moreover, some of the learning media were provided by the school such as crayon, coloring markers, plasticine, food coloring, drawing books, and writing books.

Realizing that learning at home was not enough to make the students achieving the learning target optimally, on the second semester Mrs. E decided to have face to face learning with the students.

“In semester 2, we catch up and push the unattainable target by conducting face-to-face learning with health protocol...”

She split the students into small groups and then made a schedule for them to come to school so that it would not make any crowd. During the second semester, Mrs. E tried so hard to help the students achieving the learning target. She focused on reading, writing, calculating, and memorizing short *surah* and *hadits*. She said that the superiorities of her school were on religious aspect, politeness, and independence.

The biggest challenge faced by Mrs. E during the pandemic was lack of time. Her time to teach the students directly was very limited. She felt that the relationship between teacher and student was not as close as it used to be. She lost the moment of togetherness with the students. Moreover, she also lacked time in preparing the learning materials because preparing online learning was more complicated than face to face learning.

However, for the next academic year she plans to have more face-to-face activities with health protocol applied. By having more interaction with students, the teachers may have more time to guide the students in doing the worksheets and emphasize on the important point that must be improved. It is expected that next year the learning target can be achieved completely.

Mrs. S's Story: Learning at home is a mess

Mrs. S is a full mom with two children 7 and 3 years old. Her oldest son was a kindergarten student this year. His school was also applied learning from home. Mrs. S always tried to accompany her son to study at home although she also had to take care of her other child. Indeed, it was not easy. But she realized that it was because of pandemic of covid-19 and for the best for his son, he had to learn from home.

“I do understand the situation. We have no choice. The most important thing is this is the best for the kids...”

Generally, her son's school conducted the learning process quite well during this pandemic. The learning activities were organized well by communicating it in parents' WhatsApp group. The activities instructed were easy to do and the media could be found easily in our surrounding. Moreover, the teacher provided adequate learning sources such as video and worksheets.

“Actually, the learning process is quite good... But it just lacks control.”

However, Mrs. S was quite dissatisfied with the monitoring system because it burdened the parents too much. The parents were not involved in planning the learning activities, but it seemed that they were required to be able to make their children achieving the learning goals perfectly. Besides, the teacher rarely monitored the students progress and gave feedback. The only appreciation given were star symbols in which they are the same for all students. This made the parents did not know whether her son had done right or wrong and did not understand which part should be improved. The parents were informed about their children achievement through student report distributed in the middle and at the end of the semester.

Accompanying children learning at home was complicated. Mrs. S got several problems at home. First, having been very busy of housework and caring three children alone, Mrs. S had to spare her limited time and energy to help her son in doing his assignment. It quite messed up her routines. Second, making her son sitting quietly was not as easy as flipping hands. Her son was lack of motivation to learn and preferred to play all the time. There were many disruptions at home such as handphone, TV, siblings, neighborhood friends, etc. Thus, it was difficult for her to manage the learning time. Her son was willing to learn only if he was in a good mood. Third, although there were adequate learning facilities at home, Mrs. S said still the learning condition was different from school. It would be better if her son was taught by the teacher at school. All those obstacles led to the increase of stress on Mrs. S.

“Learning at home is not effective, the children are difficult to manage, the parents are busy with the housework... basically, the situation is different from at school.”

Mrs. S suggested to have more face-to-face learning activities at school. It may be conducted by making small group and scheduling their time to go to school to minimize the crowd at school. At least once a week, the students need to interact with their teacher and friends in order to develop their moral, socio-emotional and psychomotor skills.

Mrs. A's Story: I am an educator, but I cannot educate my own son

Mrs. A is a lecturer in a private university. She has been a lecturer for 10 years. She has two children, 7 years old son and 3 years old daughter. Her son just graduated from kindergarten. Here, Mrs. A told a story about her struggle in accompanying her son's online learning.

As a lecturer, Mrs. A was affected by the pandemic of Covid-19 so much. All her classes were turned to online. Her institution applied working from home several time. But it was another problem. Working from home brought another problem, it was role conflicts.

“When I have to work from home, I need to focus on my work... My children keep doing something annoying to get my attention... So, I have to work at night when they are sleeping”

Normally, she is a lecturer at college and a mom at home. Here, she was a lecturer and a mom at once. She could not avoid the disruption from her children who begged for her attention. It caused a chaos on her time management. She had to struggle with her work and children along the day and stay awake at night finishing her work when her children were sleeping. Indeed, it was tiring and stressful.

As a mom of a kindergarten student, she realized that she had a responsibility to be a teacher for her son at home since his school also applied learning from home during the pandemic. The situation was her children were very attached to her. They were willing to learn only with her. Here was the challenge. On the other side she was really busy with her work, she also had to take care of her children learning. As the result, she compiled all her son's assignment at the weekend in a very limited time. She realized that doing too many assignments at once was not effective. Moreover, the children's ability to concentrate is very limited. It required a hard effort to keep them focus and to create a conducive situation for learning since she had to take care of two children with different age in which both of them needed to be paid attention. Fortunately, the teacher could understand the situation, it was still accepted to compile the assignments at the weekend.

“As a lecturer, I do understand that doing all the assignment at the weekend is not effective. But I have no choice, I don't have time on weekdays.”

Honestly, Mrs. A admitted that there was a guilty feeling in her mind that she is an educator but she cannot educate her son better than the other mom.

“Honestly, I feel ashamed and guilty. I’m a lecturer but I’m too busy with my students and I don’t have time to teach my own son.”

She said that her main problem was time management. When it cannot be handled well, it will lead to role conflict, over workload, burnout and stress. She suggested very young learner’s teachers to have regular home visit or small playing group activities with health protocol to be alternative solutions.

Mrs. G’s Story: Good communication is really matter

Mrs. G is a full mom of three children, 6, 3, and 1 years old. She told many things about her disappointment to her son’s school. When the policy of learning from home was established, parents were offered a statement letter whether they agreed to have offline learning or preferred to have online learning.

“Actually, the content of the letter leads to offline learning. If we signed it, it meant that we agree to have online learning as normally.”

Then, Mrs. G decided not to sign it. She concerned on her children safety and health during the pandemic of Covid-19. However, most of parents, mostly working moms, signed the letter. And then, it was the beginning.

Those choosing offline learning went to school daily just like in normal situation. The parents dropped their children on the back door. During the lesson, there were some rules such as wearing casual outfit (no uniform), no photos, and no posting on social media. Indeed, emergency remote teaching is complicated, but having offline learning during the pandemic was a bold decision.

Then, how about those preferring online learning? At the beginning of the semester, the teacher sometimes sent voice note and monitored the students’ progress through video call. By the time, there was not communication anymore. Mrs. G asked for the learning materials or assignment to the teacher several time, but she rarely replied to her messages. Getting no learning activities at all, Mrs. G initiatively taught her son by herself. She taught basic learning skills such as reading, writing, and calculation in her spare time.

And the time passed, she thought that her son was dropped out from school since it seemed that her son did not get any lesson during the semester. She said that the teacher came for home visit only once in a year.

“...even I thought that my son was dropped out. ... That is the first and the only one time the teacher visit our home.”

The school almost ended, and the teacher sent a message. She reminded about the graduation ceremony and school tuition fee. Again, the parents were offered options to join or not join the ceremony. However, the school required all parents to deposit full payment with any reason.

“I’ve ever asked for fee waiver since my son would not join the graduation ceremony and take a photo, but the teacher said that my son photo will be put on the album so that there will be his photo on the graduation album.”

Mrs. G wishes that all teachers are more professional and care to all students. Especially during this pandemic in which people are suggested to learn from home, building good communication is very crucial. Besides the teachers must be innovative and creative in facing this disruptive era, they have to keep in touch with the parents since the succeed of learning from home is determined by collaboration of all parties including school, teachers, and parents. Here, Mrs. G suggested that the teachers should be able to manage the online class better such as by having zoom meeting or home visit once a week, having small playing group once a week, and giving the clear information about the learning target regularly.

4 Discussion

After the stories are being presented above, those data were interpreted by drawing the line of interrelated topics and sub-topics emerging from the stories, or it is called a cross case analysis (Abrar, 2019). From the data interpretation, there was a gap between ideal teaching and learning process for very young learners and the real practices due to the pandemic of Covid-19. Thus, in this section, first a comparison between ideal teaching and learning for very young learners and the real practice during the pandemic is presented, and then followed by the interpretation of the challenges faced by teachers and parents.

4.1. The Nature of Teaching and Learning for Very Young Learners

Children are those aged 3-12 years old. Young learners itself can be classified into pre-schooler (3-6 years old) and schooler (7-12 years old) (MASGANTI, 2012). Since pre-schoolers are at the early age of young learners, they can be called as very young learners. Commonly, they were early childhood education and kindergarten students.

Teaching a very young learners and adult is definitely different. Based on act of the Republic of Indonesia, Number 20, Year 2003, on National Education System, it is stated that Early Childhood Education Programs (*PAUD*) is an effort aimed at children from birth to with the age of six years carried out through educational simulation to help the children’s growth and development, both physical and spiritual, so that children have readiness to join further education (Septiani, Widyaningsih, & Igohm, 2016). This is in line with Mrs. N’s statement that teaching very young learners is about developing moral, religion, cognition, psychomotor, language, socio-emotion, and arts, and Mrs. G added politeness and independence skills as the important aspects to develop in teaching very young learners.

Moreover, Suyadi (2010) mentioned that the process of teaching and learning for very young learners should be conducted through playing activities managed by teachers (Alrasid, 2015). Some methods utilizing things surround us to learn such as *loose part* method used in Mrs. N’s school may be applied.

4.2. The Implementation of Learning from Home for Very Young Learners

As is well known, during the pandemic of Covid-19, the government instructed to apply Emergency Remote Teaching which is called Learning from Home on the Circular Letter Number 15 of 2020. This immediate shift on the education system was not easy. However, teachers and all the academic practitioners were required to quickly adapt to this situation. The main change was on the learning system in which the students had to learn from home through online media, including *Learning Management System*, *Web Apps*, and *social media*.

Based on Mrs. E and Mrs. N stories, they tried to facilitate their students' learning by preparing materials and activities which were applicable at home. Both, Mrs. E and Mrs. N utilized WhatsApp group as a media to communicate with the parents since they realized that the success of remote teaching were on the parents' active participation.

No matter how hard the effort, still learning guided by the parents are different from learning together at school. There are several things cannot be covered in remote teaching method such as social interaction and social emotion. As said by Mrs. E that she lost the togetherness with her students whereas she used to build independent and polite habit to them.

Furthermore, some learning targets cannot be achieved perfectly or in other word there is a decrease on the students' achievement. Mrs. E and Mrs. N agreed that the achievement of reading, writing, and memorization skills were slightly decreased. It is because the teachers' participation in guided the students learning is very limited, and the students are more accompanied by their parents in which they have different background from each other.

The other factor is that the learning condition at home is different from at school. There are many disruptions at home such as TV, gadget, siblings, etc. Moreover, emotional relationship between the students with their parents and with their teachers is different. The students tend to obey their teacher rather than their parents.

Actually, the decrease on the learning achievement during this pandemic was not unpredictable. It is stated on the Circular Letter number 15 of 2020 that the principle of implementing Learning from Home is to provide a meaningful learning experience for students, without being burdened by the demands of completing all the curriculum learning outcomes.

Thus, it can be concluded that there is a gap between the nature of teaching and learning for very young learners and real practice during this pandemic. Learning activities for very young learners should be fun, in the form of playing activities and involved social interaction since it is the golden age to optimize their growth and development to be independent and noble individuals (Alrasid, 2015). This point cannot be accomplished through isolated learning at home.

4.3. The Teachers' Challenge during the Pandemic

Talking about the teachers' challenges during the pandemic, every teacher has their own problem to be faced. Mrs. N said that there was not a significant different on the

curriculum during the pandemic, and as well as the working system. She went to school to work as normally. So, for Mrs. N, the biggest problem was in preparing the teaching materials itself. She had to design the lesson plan in such a way so that it could be done at home. Moreover, she had to convert her explanation to a video. Since the students are children, the video must be fun, interesting, and detail, yet understandable. This is the common problem faced by many teachers who are not used to make video presentation (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). In a conventional teaching, they used to explain the materials directly to the students. But in online learning, the process is more complicated. The teachers need to prepare the video outline, the script, the picture, or animation, take the video, edit the video, and finally publish it on social media so it can be accessed by the students. As the result, the teachers spend more time in preparing the lesson, and it is exhausting. Indeed, teachers need more training in handling the online learning (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020).

On the other side, Mrs. E concerned about the students' learning outcome that tent to decrease during the pandemic. This in line with the research conducted by Adedoyin et.al that one of the challenges of digital learning was the anxiety about the academic performance (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). In addition, Mrs. E regretted the limited opportunities to in still the moral values in children in which it was really important for them. It was dilemmatic for young learners' teachers. Moral value is one of the main competences that must be completed by the students. However, without intense interaction, it is so hard to be implemented.

Therefore, the teachers' challenges during the pandemic are preparing the learning materials, keeping the students' achievement on target, and how to insert the moral value on the online learning activities.

4.4. The Parents' Challenges during the Pandemic

Parents have an important role during the implementation of learning from home as the teachers' partners in guiding the students learning (Harahap et al., 2021). Each parent has different life background. For those who are full mom, the problems are how to make the conducive learning environment at home, how to build discipline on the learning schedule, and how to explain the learning value of each activity. For working mom, the main challenge is time management, how to separate their time to work and their time to guide their children to learn, as well as how to manage their own stress.

From the story from Mrs. G, it was obtained different point of view that not all schools are ready for this change and not all of them facilitate their students' learning well. Thus, the challenge faced by Mrs. G was more complicated since she had to be a real independent teacher at home. Besides all the problems commonly faced by the parents, she must facilitate her son's learning by herself.

Considering the challenges, most of the parents agreed to have small learning group as the alternatives. They expect that their children still interact with the teacher and their friends at least once a week.

5 Conclusions

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that teaching very young learners during the emergency remote teaching implementation is more complicated than that of teenagers or adult. It is dilemmatic that the government policy must be obeyed, yet the implementation, honestly saying, is not really effective for facilitating all the dimensions of very young learners' growth and development. There are many aspects need to be improved. Thus, it is recommended to the teachers to keep developing their professional performance, especially in ICT mastery and online classroom management.

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