HOW TO CREATE HIGH QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE DIGITAL ERA:
TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES

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Chapter II

Learning Strategies for Early Childhood Education During Covid-19 Pandemic

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A. Introduction

Since the end of 2019 people around the world, including Indonesia, have experienced abnormal conditions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, there were many changes in various aspects of social life (Fahlefi, 2012; Meutia, 2020; Wijoyo, 2012). One of the impacts felt by almost all levels of society is in education field (Saleh, 2020). Before the pandemic, education is generally carried out face-to-face, but during the pandemic it is changed to distance learning through online networks, which are carried out from different places. This policy is taken by the Government and the community to anticipate the transmission of the Covid-19 outbreak. The online learning policy is enforced at all levels of education, without exception, from preschool education to higher education (Almarzooq et al, 2020; Widyawati, 2020).

Teaching and learning process can be carried out using online network that rely on information technology (Alan, 2021; Ujiti et al, 2021). There are a number of online communication service providers offering and marketing their products to support virtual meetings in the context of teaching and learning. There are some services that have been used by the community or educational groups for the implementation of online learning, for example; Zoom Meeting, Google Meet, Google Classroom, Microsoft Team, Team Link, Whatsapp, and so on.

The application of online learning certainly causes changes and consequences, both positive and negative. However, the changes that occur in emergency situations can lead to valuable lessons for the development of civilization, especially in education. This also happened to early childhood education (Meutia, 2020; Ujiti et al, 2021, Widyawati, 2020).

In early childhood education, changes are felt and must be faced with adaptation as a result of these circumstances. The parties who feel the change are students, parents, and teachers (Pramling, 2020). Because of the emergency and limitations, many teachers find it is difficult to maintain their teaching and learning process (Dyal & Tiko, 2020; Ford et al, 2021; O'Keeffe & McNally, 2020). The teaching and learning process under normal circumstances is carried out directly (offline), so that learning aspects can be achieved, namely cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. However, the pandemic has forced learning to be turned into online learning, to connect teachers and students from far apart.

Learning strategies for early childhood are designed to enable students to interact and engage in activities with fellow students, individually and collectively (Ahdar, 2021; Hewi, & Asnawati, 2021; O'Keeffe & McNally, 2020). These designed activities can be in the form of playing. Playing as the main activity for children intended to lay the foundations for the development of attitudes, knowledge, and skills, as well as to foster creativity needed by students in order to adapt to their environment. Moreover, it is crucial to support the growth and development of children in the next phase. Learning for early childhood students is designed as a learning activity that is adapted to the children's age level. Therefore, it must be accompanied by the development of an appropriate curriculum. In this case, the curriculum is a set of learning plans prepared by educators by presenting learning experiences to children through playing. The intended teaching and learning strategy is more emphasized so that students take part in active learning, which is also accompanied by teachers (O'Keeffe & McNally, 2020; Widyawati, 2020). In this case, teachers as facilitators help students to achieve ease and smooth learning.

In early childhood education, playing is the dominant learning activities. Here the teacher prepares learning

materials and chooses the strategies used in the activities (Suyadi, 2020). Furthermore, Sujiono & Sujiono (2011) state that in early childhood learning, the efforts of curriculum development concretely contain children's learning experiences through play. The learning given to early childhood is based on the potential and developmental tasks achieved in the context of mastering children's competencies. According to Novan, Ardy, & Wiyani (2016), teaching and learning for early childhood students must be adjusted to their age, in other words the teaching and learning process must be in accordance with the students age. Moreover, it has to be attractive and can stimulate students to follow so that the competence of students can be achieved.

During the pandemic, the government as the party authorized to enforce online learning therefore teachers are required to use special strategies so that teaching and learning for early childhood students run effectively. This study was conducted to explore more deeply about the online learning strategies carried out during the pandemic. The objectives can be stated as follows: To describe teaching and learning strategies for early childhood students during the pandemic; and To describe the implementation of teaching and learning process for early childhood students during the pandemic.

B. Method

Qualitative approach is used in this study. Here, the researcher acts as the main instrument. In addition to collecting data and then analyzing the data obtained, the researcher is also directly involved in all stages of the research process. This study is set in a natural setting, so the data is presented as what is found in the field. The research results are presented descriptively using words and sentences to describe the state of the object. In this qualitative approach, the process becomes more important than the result. The formulation of the problem is determined as the focus of the research while inductive pattern is used in data analysis. Such methods and approaches were chosen by referring to Moleong (2002:48).

The respondents were 10 teachers and 10 student parents of TK ABA 4 Mangli Jember. Data was collected through interview. In connection with the policy of limiting direct interaction, interviews were conducted using phone and WhatsApp application. Secondary data was obtained from both printed and online sources, including journal, articles and books. The analysis was carried out using an interactive analysis model which included data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusions.

C. Discussion

Teaching and Learning Process during Pandemic

The data in this study was taken from the implementation of teaching and learning process during the pandemic at TK Aisyiyah 4 Mangli Jember, which was obtained using online communication methods, student home visits, and through limited face-to-face meetings. Face-to-face activities as occurs in normal times were replaced with learning through online networks in accordance with the Government's policy which prohibits face-to-face meetings. Teaching and learning process was carried out using application agreed by the educational institution and parents.

1) Online Teaching and Learning Strategy

a) WhatsApp

The implementation of online learning at TK Aisyiyah used WhatsApp application with the consideration that most of the parents had the application. The following are the steps in teaching and learning process using WhatsApp application; first, the teacher creates a WA group that was used for communication and learning facilities. Second, the teacher wrote messages in the form of learning materials and assignments that would be used by students and their parents to study. Third, parents uploaded assignments in the form of photos to report the results of the activity that have been done by students.

The teaching learning process carried out through WhatsApp turns out to be growing in variety. In the beginning, teachers and parents only communicated through writing, then it developed using voice notes. This development was certainly welcomed by the students, who previously could only listen when their parents read a message from their teacher, now they could hear directly the voice of the teacher who was greeting and giving information and giving instructions for the tasks to be done. The implementation of this strategy was increasingly diverse until then using video calls. By using video calls, students were more enthusiastic to study. However, it turned out that there was a problem where video calls can only facilitate 4-8 students even though in one group there were 12-15 students.

b) Zoom and Google Meet

Zoom and Google Meet applications had been used by teachers in the implementation of online learning but only for a few times. Teaching and Learning process using Zoom and Google Meet applications did make some students happier, this could be seen at the meeting, the students were more enthusiastic and happy because they could see their teacher and friends. However, for most students, this was not the case because parents did not have supporting devices, namely laptops, or phones that were completed with the application needed. It also caused by busy parents so that they could not accompany their children. In addition teachers also experienced problems with IT mastery, both in operating or preparing media in teaching and learning process. Teachers were not used to make videos or PPT with applications as a means of teaching materials. Apart from the obstacles mentioned above, there was an important factor that often hinders learning, it is the unstable signal.

Figure 1. Screenshot of virtual teaching and learning process

Communication using online networks for early childhood learning is not easy, due to several factors (Alan, 2021; Ford et al, 2021; O'Keeffe & McNally, 2021). There are several things that must be considered by educators or institutions before making a choice, both related to parental background, location where they live, and the condition of students. This must be considered because the learning process involves all parties, teachers, parents, and students. In teaching and learning process, teachers and parents are required to be able to operate applications on devices used in the activities. Along with the variety of alternatives used in learning activities, many media can be chosen. During the process media has an important function, so it must be suitable with students' needs and circumstances (Alan, 2021; Dayal & Tiko, 2021).

Teaching learning during pandemic is an unusual situation, because it is necessary to build good relationships and cooperation between all parties, namely teachers, parents, and students (Khadijah & Gusman, 2020). Each performs its role, such as a teacher as an activity planner and assessor of learning outcomes, while parents act as mentors at home must follow the development of the teaching learning process (Hewi & Asnawati, 2020). In these circumstances, teachers are required to work more creatively in preparing lesson plans, which include teaching materials, methods, making lesson plan, learning implementation, and the assessment system

used. Teachers' creativity is expected to generate interest and stimulate students' enthusiasm in learning process (Fahrina et al., 2020). In addition to the creativity required, teachers must also always pay attention to important things related to learning, including the students' family condition (Jalal, 2020).

In online learning, that is carried out remotely, the teacher must make preparations, including teaching and learning tools, media and applications. Other things that must also be prepared are schedules and learning strategies. The internet network is something that must get special attention, because a weak or less stable internet network can interfere the effectiveness of teaching and learning process so that students less interested in online learning (Ayuni et al, 2020; Dini, 2021; Wulandari & Purwanta, 2020).

2) Home Visit Strategy

Home visits or visiting students' homes is one of the learning strategies during the pandemic. It is attended by students individually or group of students who live close together in certain area. During the teaching and learning process teachers and students had to apply health protocols, including social distancing and no crowds, however the teaching learning process must be running well. This learning strategy for early childhood was more effective and suitable than learning through networks. By using this strategy, students were more enthusiastic about learning because they could meet their teacher directly; in addition, they were encouraged to have competition with their friends during the study. Here, the teacher of each class visited the students according to their class. However, the duration of learning time was not like learning at school, which means that the teacher limited the time so that all of students could be visited according to the schedule that had been made and agreed by the principal.

Below are several stages in home visits teaching and learning strategy during the pandemic at TK Aisyiyah 4 Mangli.

1) By holding a zoom meeting teacher announced to student parents that the teaching and learning process would be carried out using home visit strategy; 2) in the meeting the teacher explained about the implementation of Home visit learning strategy and the duration (it took an hour of each); 3) recording students' home location. Because home visit learning strategy are divided into two type, namely individual and group therefore the teacher needed information about students' home location.; 4) The teacher arranged the time and place to do home visit ; 5) the teacher asked student parents who did not agree and who agreed with the strategy. Furthermore, if there was no objection, finally, the teacher made home visit schedules, included the activity that would be done during the visit.

Figure 2. Screenshot of students' activity video

As stated above that there were two types of home visit strategy at TK Aisyiyah 4 Mangli, namely individual home visits and group home visits. The first type was individual home visits. It was implemented when the student home was far from the others, so they could not gather in one house with other friends. There were some obstacles experienced by teachers during the individual home visits. When the teacher came to visit a student individually, the student felt uncomfortable and even afraid to meet the teacher in person, because the meetings before had been conducted online. Student also felt

unhappy when the teacher came because they could not play with their friends.

Figure 3. A teacher conducts a group home visit

The second type was a group home visit, it was carried out because the houses between students were close and some were side by side so that teaching learning process could be carried out in one house consisting of about 3-4 students. This type of home visits learning was more efficient since it was easier for the teacher to deliver the material in limited time. Students felt happier because they could gather with their friends and were more enthusiastic about learning.

Parents were also happy with the implementation of home visit teaching and learning strategy, because their children could do face-to-face learning even though they were not at school. It gave students the same experience as a face-to-face study in school, even though the time and place were different. Parents also conveyed to the teacher that it helped them a lot to deal with their children in studying. The teacher invited individual home visit participants who wish to join and participate in group home visits. By the policy the parents felt happy and calm, the students were also enthusiastic after knowing that they were allowed to take part in a group home visit at one of their friends' homes.

Below are the advantages and disadvantages of Home visit teaching learning strategy. The advantages of this strategy are: 1) students can interact directly with friends and teachers, besides they can train their social skills during the interaction with friends and teachers; 2) With this strategy parents no longer need internet access, but teachers still need it to deliver material from the internet.

The disadvantages of this strategy are; 1) teachers need more time and energy, because they have to visit students' homes, 2) students cannot take lessons every day, because the teacher carries out learning in rotation from one cluster to another cluster.

Limited Face-to-face Teaching and Learning Strategy

The implementation of the Limited Face-to-Face Teaching and Learning Strategy took place after Jember Regency was declared to be at level 1 of COVID-19 pandemic, it meant that the pandemic condition had subsided. Therefore, teaching and learning process can be carried out directly or face-to-face at TK Aisyiyah 4 Mangli with very strict health protocols. Students had to already wear masks when they entered the school gate, then the teacher told them not to shake hands, not to play, and directly entered the classroom after washing their hands. Students who attended school were divided into two groups in order to implement physical distancing. Learning materials could not be fully implemented due to the limited time. However the parents were still happy with this limited face-to-face teaching learning process. One of the parents stated "Alhamdulillah, we are relieved because the children are able to study at school, the children already miss the teacher and their friends, even though it is not completely normal as the condition before pandemic" (interview with Aftar's mother).

D. Conclusion

Based on the explanation and analysis above, the teaching and learning process carried out by TK Aisyiyah 4 Mangli during Covid-19 pandemic was using distance learning strategies; online and offline teaching and learning strategy. Online learning was carried out through social media, namely WhatsApp Groups (text messages, voice notes and video calls), Google Meet and Zoom applications. Meanwhile, offline learning were carried out through home visits and Limited Face-to-face Teaching and Learning Strategy. In home visit strategy, students were divided into groups of 4 or 5 students, each group was visited by the teacher once in a week. In limited face-to-face teaching and learning strategy, the process of teaching and learning was carried out in schools with a limited number of students in an hour or 60 minutes for each meeting. Among these strategies, the most favored by parents was limited face-to-face teaching and learning strategy. The following are the percentage of calculation; limited face-to-face teaching and learning strategy (70%), home visits strategy (20%) and online strategy (10%).

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