

Quo Vadis Literacy Education in the Post-Pandemic Era: A Reflection on an Elementary School in Slump Community

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Abstract: This study evaluates the school's policies to implement literacy education at an elementary school during the disruptive moment of global pandemic of covid-19 and social disparity of underprivileged community. Since the global pandemic has hit Indonesia in 2020, it had major impacts on the teaching and learning process across the country, causing some disruption of the educational strategies by the school principals. The purpose of this study is to analyze the policies implemented by the school management in implementing the culture of literacy and numeracy especially during the pandemic. This ethnographic study included one private community-based elementary school in a slump area. The results of this study are that the school had specific policies in order to accommodate the literacy and numeracy practice during the pandemic according to the condition of the community but with least community participation. The policies at the elementary schools dominantly focus on numeracy in the learning process instead of encouraging the literacy practice. The implementation of literacy education at an elementary school in the slump area should have required community participation in order to revitalize its social position to empower the community.

Keywords: literacy education, post-pandemic era, elementary school, slump community

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to reflect the shift in the implementation of literacy education in primary education level during the pandemic as a result of policy directions related to literacy education that are not well-

accommodated by the relevant stakeholders at the school. This phenomenon becomes more complicated in the context of a primary school in urban area but located in densely populated and slum communities hit by the global pandemic of covid-19 in 2020-2022, where complex social problems include social inequality, partial and full restriction social mobility, access to technology, and motivation to learn.

Since the pandemic took effect in early 2020s, the Indonesian Government had imposed some policies of social restriction in academic activities and services that students and teachers were advised to study and work from home (MOEC, 2020). In the substance of the policy, it did not regulate detailed technical matters for its alternative implementation, which in turn affected to the teaching and learning activities, including the co-curricular and extracurricular activities. Several educational units have not been able to fully carry out the online and distance learning process during the pandemic – even until the pandemic is considered to be normalized in mid-2022, due to various factors. Some studies have shown these issues such as those which focus on the lack of supporting facilities and costly internet service for online learning (Padli, F., & Rusdi, R., 2020).

In addition to the facilities, distance thematic learning in Indonesia are problematic due to educator's readiness, substandard internet connections in different areas, mentoring, and students's learning persistence (Auladi, 2020). In terms of comparison between classical classroom, online learning is hindered by issues such as lack of face-to-face interaction, response time, and absence of traditional classroom socialization (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). Such trends are mostly experienced by teachers in developing countries, including the issues experienced by teachers related to parental involvement and children's participation in remote instruction during the pandemic. (Pattnaik, Nath, & Nath, 2022).

As the consequence of the shifted learning modes, students are believed to experience learning loss during the pandemic. It is reported that elementary school teachers in Indonesia experience problems in online learning during the pandemic that lead to learning loss up to 2 semesters (Erawati, G.A., Widiana, I.W., & Japa, I.G. (2021). Similar phenomena occurred even in more advancing countries like the Netherlands, that school closures during the covid-19 pandemic led to a learning loss for primary school students despite they underwent only a relatively short lockdown (for 8 weeks) and features an equitable system of school funding and has high rate of broadband access. The learning loss in the country was of about 3 percentile points or 0.08 standard deviations, equivalent to one-fifth of a school year, the same period that schools remained closed. Larger losses up to 60% were experienced by the students from less-educated homes, confirming worries about the uneven impact of the pandemic on children and families (Engzell, P., Frey, A., & Verhagen, M.D., 2021), while considerable losses in Germany were particularly among low-achieving students, especially for numeracy and reading (Schult, J., Mahler, N., Fauth, B., & Lindner, M. A., 2021). Besides infrastructure and facilities, the prominent factor to the learning loss during the pandemic, especially for early childhood students, is due to parental learning incapability (Ndeot, 2021).

The learning loss phenomena in Indonesia have been anticipated since the 2nd semester of the implementation of government's social restrictions in 2020. The Government through Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) has launched a school assistance program affected by the pandemic named "Campus Teaching" program (original program name in Indonesia: *Kampus Mengajar*). This program aims to assign the university students to assist schools affected by the pandemic, especially helping teachers at the primary and secondary education levels with C accreditation (mid-lower levels of accreditation) or those in the 3T areas (frontlines, remote and disadvantaged areas). In its implementation, this program is expected to be able to help schools in three ways, namely teaching assistance through literacy and numeracy approaches, adaptation of science and technology, and administration. Campus Teaching activities succeeded in providing learning motivation for elementary school students, providing insight and knowledge to teachers, especially in the use of Google Classroom and animated videos (Arifianto et al, 2021).

In practice, however, learning assistance with literacy and numeracy approaches have experienced various challenges, both structurally and socially. Structurally, opposition can be related to the direction of existing education policies, that government policies related to learning during the pandemic did not focus on the process of independent learning (as mandated in Emancipated Learning / "*Merdeka Belajar*" program) and literacy learning. The regulations failed to provide technical procedures of the literacy education during the pandemic. Even in areas where the literacy curriculum is required in schools, such as in the City of Surabaya, there is no specific policy to campaign for the literacy movement, both in schools and in community reading center, which have been the spearhead of the community-based literacy movement in Surabaya. The control system and regional policies have not mentioned the implementation of literacy in schools and communities during the pandemic. In addition to the introduction of literacy and numeracy approach, learning assistantship was supposed to be intended for technology transfer. The fact that 80.8% of the learning process that the reality of basic education in Indonesia has not yet been ready in terms of human resources, and technology, especially in the 3T areas (Muskania & Zulela, 2021). On the other hand, rapid development of Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT) especially the Internet opens opportunities for the development of better information services in educational institutions (Pujilestari, 2020).

This study aims to elaborate the direction of implementing literacy education by observing the school's strategies during the pandemic at the elementary school level, especially in urban areas located in slum areas. Through phenomenological studies, this research further reflects on different points of view in implementing the literacy education based on the experiences of relevant stakeholders in the education unit. It is expected that this research will be able to map out a real picture of the condition of the community and schools in relation to the implementation of literacy education and challenges that are faced in the implementation of literacy at schools. In a broader context, this research becomes an autocritic of education policies during the pandemic, especially in the aspect of accommodating literacy movements in schools and communities.

METHODS

Research Design

This research intends to reflect on the strategy of the school's principals and community based on the phenomena at the community. This is a phenomenological study through reflection of one private elementary school located in a slump community in the center of capital city of Surabaya. The study involved relevant stakeholders in regards with the implementation of literacy education at the school during the pandemic of covid-19, namely the school principals, teachers, students, parents, and senior citizens (community) to reflect on the implementation of the literacy and numeracy education as supported by the learning assistantship program Campus Teaching during the pandemic in 2021. The phenomenological approach in this study included educational experiences, processes, and means of learning and teaching of the relevant parties. The existing curriculum is linked to teaching and learning processes and experiences in certain situations to elicit students' perceptions and descriptions of their learning experiences (Selvi, 2008). The phenomenon of policy gaps causes differences in public perceptions, including education implementers and the fate of literacy education in the region.

Research Subject

This research involved stakeholders of one private elementary school in the city center of Surabaya and located in slum areas in central area. The participants included students, one teacher member of the curriculum and supervisory board, one teacher of sixth grade (higher grade class), school principals, and one member of community (a senior citizen). This private elementary school was initially founded by local residents independently as a concern for the fate of the children who grow up in the densely-populated area and surrounded by vulnerable community, such as areas for drug trafficking, crime-dealing areas, traditional markets and slums full of thuggery, and scavengers. Even though it is located in the middle of the city of Surabaya, the condition of the school is lowly-accredited.

During the pandemic, learning at this school has been carried out online and in-person. For grades 1 and 6, they conducted in-person learning with a shift schedule system, that one day there were about 5-6 students who study at school. In terms of the provision of technology at this school is still limited, and the students (and the parents) are not familiar with technology, especially in the context of to support educational activities. Since the implementation of government's policy of learning from home in 2020, the online classes were employed through instant messenger application that could be accessed by residents, namely WhatsApp, which was used for asynchronous learning as well as providing subject matters and practice questions. There was not synchronous session as most of the students did not have access to the Smartphone, but their parents whose Smartphones were only available after returning from work (after 5 p.m.).

Data collection

This phenomenological research was carried out for 12 weeks or equivalent of three months, in March to June 2021. The researchers were assisted by university students/participants of Campus Teaching program for the site observation, reporting, and documenting throughout the period, observing

the implementation of learning in schools during the pandemic (during data collection, e.g. school's strategies to implement the government's policy of learning from home and social restrictions where the community can only operate in regional areas (*algonomation*). In addition to observations, data were also obtained through in-depth discussions and reflections involving relevant stakeholders regarding the phenomenon of literacy and numeracy education at the schools and its surroundings, such as homeroom teachers (T1 and T2) (representatives of upper and lower grade teachers who carried out limited face-to-face learning during the pandemic whose teaching experience is more than 20 years), civil servant teachers (T3) (teachers who specifically bridge and supervise the implementation of teaching and school assistance), school principals (T4 and T5) (as the policy-holders of the school), two parents (P1 and P2) (parents representatives whom were chosen at random basis during the learning mentoring process in schools), and school foundation administrators (C1 and C2) (members of community and party involved were domiciled in the school area and has direct links to the learning process in schools and the condition of the community around the school). Besides the aforementioned stakeholders, 13 students were also invited to share their experience for the learning experience during the pandemic, both for the school activities and co-curricular activities (S1-S13). The subjects were to provide comprehensive information regarding the phenomenon of literacy and numeracy learning at the elementary schools.

Data analysis

The collected data from site observation, reflective in-depth interview with relevant stakeholders, and document report were analyzed through social theory analysis. The analysis is believed to lead into the organization of the findings of the research based on data as well as their implications which largely depend on three factors, namely 1) the place and audience in which the author is writing, 2) the scope and types of research projects and their data, and 3) the perspective, or stance, that the author wants the reader to take on his findings (Dressman, 2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses three things, which include how the conditions and needs of schools are related to their readiness in implementing government policies to conduct learning from home during the pandemic as a response to social restrictions. In addition, this part elaborates the school's programs and strategies in integrating literacy and numeracy approaches to learning in schools during the pandemic. Lastly, relevant stakeholders were invited to reflect on literacy education at the school and how relate to the expected outcomes.

School's condition is far from ready for online learning

The reflective discussion with school's principals and teachers focused on mainly school's condition and issues related to the implementation of teaching and learning activities during the pandemic. A strong statement was from the senior teacher whose teaching experience is more than 20 years:

T1: “In fact, it’s as if we are forced to implement such education style (online learning) that should’ve been 10 years from now but to be implemented today. You can imagine how we are (struggling) to adapt.”

The elementary schools have never been prepared for online learning setting until the pandemic hit worldwide. The unpreparedness was obvious since the global pandemic of covid-19 since early 2020s, both in terms of teacher’s skills, online learning supporting system or facilities and infrastructure, as well as the adaptation process for online or hybrid learning curricula. When people were asked to suddenly switch from face-to-face activities to online activities, it was an emergency condition. During the transition, the schools were not ready for both human resource and infrastructure. The sudden policy released by the Government through the on the learning and working from home was without detailed alternative solutions which many believed to cause the education activities stranded.

T4: “Schools have predicted that online learning wouldn’t be effective because (the parties involved were) not ready. We never expect maximum results (from the learning activities), but clarity when the pandemic will stop or how to learn face-to-face traditionally while considering the risk to a minimum level.”

The reflection from the teachers means the parties, both schools and community, are not ready with the transition. Rasmitadila et al. (2020) stressed the importance of the readiness of technology in line with the national humanist curriculum in order to meet the success of online learning in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic. With least readiness shown by the teachers and the community, it can be concluded that the school is far from ready to conduct online learning. The condition might be worse for the implementation of the co-curricular activities, such as the implementation of literacy activities set by the City Government for all primary schools in Surabaya, because the schools only concerned with the implementation of either classical classes or online learning with limited resources.

The needs for a comprehensive learning of literacy and numeracy

As the technology and humanist curriculum play crucial roles in the success of learning during the pandemic –and post-pandemic era as part of the bandwagon effect of the pandemic, the success of the learning would be determined by the readiness of technology, the adjustment of the curriculum, support and collaboration from all stakeholders, including government, schools, teachers, parents and the community (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). The statements from the teachers and parent show the readiness of the technology along the ignorance from the parents has led to detrimental impact to students’ learning performance. Studies reveal that online learning during the covid-19 pandemic as ineffective and unpleasant learning activities because of the limitation of self-actualization in education.

There should create innovative and creative online learning strategies in order to increase students' enthusiasm for online learning.

T1: *"We gave some reading (via WhatsApp), but (their cellphone) was brought by the parents (to work and the parents) and only came home in the late evening. How can students receive the materials (we've sent them)? How do we control whether the student did learning? Let alone monitoring students' readings, they turn in assignments even close to midnight."*

P2: *"I don't understand about the materials. With all activities at the work place, we don't have time to guide my son. What do you expect from me? I sent my son to the school, it's supposed to be there (at schools to learn), not us. What's the school doing then?"*

Such condition based on the reflection by T1 and P2 implies the absence of collaboration and synergy between schools and community; the strategic investment by taken by the schools in terms of humanist curriculum did not occur. There were not major initiations taken by the school principals in response to sudden transition due to the pandemic. More than one year since the release of the policy for social restriction, schools had not conducted any revitalization of the curriculum into the online context or learn from home.

A study conducted by Suhendro (2020) asserted that the Covid-19 pandemic negatively impacted education in Indonesia, especially early childhood education, as teachers are required to adapt and implement several teaching strategies appropriate to children. Moreover, the teaching strategies should be accommodated through online applications which were completely different with the in-person learning which is believed to give more interaction and engagement between the teachers and students.

T1: *"We don't know how to apply synchronous or asynchronous (learning). I just sent the materials to their parents' WA (WhatsApp). Some responded, some were silent."*

Muskania, R.T., & Zulela, M. (2021) have concluded the general challenges of the education situation in Indonesia is not ready from a human resource and technology perspective. During the observation, as the reading materials had not been well-distributed and accommodated, the school activities for higher class only focused on mathematics instead of real-life activities through literacy and numeracy approach. (Green & Riddell, 2012) formal education which accommodates literacy and numeracy skills exerts a powerful causal influence on individual earnings as well as various non-pecuniary outcomes.

S2: *“When we come to the schools, every day’s mathematics to prepare for the test [...] we got the text (sent to our parents), but I don’t know (whether the teacher checked their reading activities at home).”*

Discussion on the Reflection toward the Direction of Literacy Education after the Pandemic

During the observations and interactions with the school administrators, there was a tendency that the school is still not considered as an integral part of social life; in other words, education still does not get the main attention in the community so that it becomes a complementary need instead of an essential need to improve a more decent standard of living in the community. Several studies emphasize the link between the academic condition of a person with economic status and even poverty levels. It was proven during the school’s strategy of prioritizing the test by outpouring students with mathematics lesson instead of providing comprehensive information through reading based on the current condition.

The role of schools needs to play a more significant role in meeting the social demands, especially for students from the lower middle class of economy. In this case, it is to determine the strategy whether it is the importance of reforming education in schools or an overhaul of the social understanding of the community, whether these two things can work together or contradict each other because of the very heavy social structural impact. On his article entitled “Poverty and Literacy: An Introduction”, Wamba (2010) elaborates the idea of the mutual dependence between poverty and academic achievement, creative pedagogies for low-income students. In the context of this study, comprehensive literacy education is an essential component of any strategy focused on improving schools and closing the achievement gaps in several sectors, such as the economic disparity, sufficient infrastructure, healthy community, and juvenile delinquency in the community; without a strong foundation in literacy, children are all too often denied access to a rich and diverse curriculum.

Another issue that should be addressed in order to revitalize the literacy education curriculum after the pandemic is the presence of character education as part of the education activities through humanist curriculum. The character education management model in schools during the pandemic can be implemented by collaboration between schools and parents of students (Ni’kawati et al., 2020). The role of parents in accompanying children to learn during the pandemic increases by accompanying children (besides their main activities were spent outside their home for working).

The results of research on the role of parents in accompanying children during the pandemic show that parents are very bothered in dividing their time, energy, works, and smartphone. The reflection by the teachers and parents indicates ignorance between schools and parents for the supervision of the students’ learning activities at home become real example how the barrier exists between the educational institution and the community; the presence of school fails to answer the needs of the community, while the community perceive they are not responsible for education. The goal of education even during the crisis did not empower the community.

From the reflection results, it can be concluded that parents have a very important role in assisting children to learn during a pandemic. The majority of findings of the study show that the role of parents is supposedly involved in monitoring, providing ongoing encouragement and assisting in student learning activities at home through various applications or digital platforms such as Whatsapp, Google Classroom, Zoom, Webex and Youtube (Purnomo & Ningsih, 2020; Amirudin et al, 2021). On the other hand, school principals should embrace community for education reform and better living, especially in the context of the pandemic and the crisis emerged. The needs of school principals' leadership to sustain the connection between schools and parents are crucial, even after the pandemic. It is believed that urban school reforms that are connected to equitable community development efforts are more sustainable, and that principals play a pivot role in leading such efforts. A study by Green (2018) on examining the role of school principals' leaderships indicate that the principal's actions to support urban school reform and community improvement should encourage the school as a social leveler in the community, that school should link the social issue and culture to the community revitalization projects, so that the discussion takes place at the schools should be connected to community realities. In addition to that that the central role principals play in facilitating reforms and ensuring that adopted practices reach the intended parties, namely the teachers and students in the classrooms and the community (DeMatthews, 2018).

In addition to the collaboration between schools and community, leaders of the respective city government should pay attention and give support to parents beyond their social context, especially those who are from such slump community in the form of advocacy, access to education, and helping them cope with the stresses that often diffuse in working-class households (Green, 2018; Mordechay, 2021). As the community has adapted with the crisis after the pandemic, it is the job of the policy-makers like municipal government to provide guideline for the school curriculum reforms especially that promotes literacy education beyond classroom, such as hybrid and online reading materials that are more accessible for the teachers and students. The existing literacy education in Surabaya needs to be updated in order to accommodate the social situation after the pandemic that the community perceive the impact of education and their living. The provision of support to ICT in the region, especially community with lower-average income should be prioritized as the shifted educational trend from classical to online.

CONCLUSION

It is very possible the future of education will be shifted into online or hybrid learning. The pandemic has become the tipping point to a new learning paradigm, that educational institutions have to be ready to deal with the trend. In regards to the shifted trend, schools even at the slump area are expected to adjust to the condition by actively to meet the expected learning by providing strategic policies. The reflection indicates that there is still barrier between schools and community, leading to the void contribution of education to the social reform and empowerment. The presence of initiation to engage community in school activities is believed to sustain the impact of the education to increase the

quality of living in the community. In addition to collaboration between the two parties, the support and advocacy from municipal government is needed to foster the implementation of literacy education in post-pandemic era such as the provision of ICT support and revitalization of current curriculum into more humanist curriculum to meet the needs of the community.

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