

Bridging The Gap: Parental Involvement in Digital Classrooms in Elementary Schools

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Abstract: This case study explores the involvement of parents in accompanying their children in online learning activities at the elementary school level. The parents' demographics as participants in this research are very diverse. Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, elementary school learning has transformed from face-to-face to online. This has become a significant concern for parents because online learning is new. Participated by two hundred respondents and followed by twelve respondents in the interview stage, this research attempts to examine how parents perceive their roles and responsibilities in supporting their children's online learning activities at the elementary school level, then investigate the main challenges faced by parents in supporting their children's transition from face-to-face to online learning during the Covid-19 outbreak. The result shows that parents put hardly any effort into fulfilling their roles as learning companions for their children. This situation can still be managed well for parents whose fathers work and the mother is a housewife because the mother has much time. However, this situation is very difficult for working mothers as they have to juggle their time to provide sufficient support. Thus, it can be concluded that if online learning continues to be implemented in a hybrid format at the elementary school level, it is imperative to establish clear and intensive communication among teachers, students, and parents regarding the learning modes employed to ensure greater effectiveness and efficiency. Furthermore, it is essential to implement systems for regular monitoring and feedback to assess the effectiveness of parental involvement and identify the challenges they encounter.

Keywords: parental involvement, online learning, elementary school

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of online learning in Indonesia began to become more acquainted in 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic occurred. Face-to-face academic activities at schools to be eliminated to prevent the virus's massive spread. This situation is not easy for the teaching staff at schools and parents, especially when online learning is implemented for elementary school students. Parents' role is crucial and dominant, especially in assisting student learning. When instruction is conducted directly at school, parents are responsible for ensuring that their children have an enjoyable school experience by monitoring their assignments and tracking their academic progress. Nevertheless, in the context of online learning, parents are required to assume the responsibility of supporting their children learning due to the absence of in-person instruction from teachers. The need for parental assistance also varies according to the students' condition. Ribeiro et al., 2021 explained that student autonomy is correlated with parental involvement, with more autonomous students necessitating less parental engagement. Therefore, the significance of parental attention cannot be overstated.

Meanwhile, appropriate learning facilities must be both available and conducive for the effective implementation and support of online learning. As stated in Heni et al., 2021 the context of online learning, alongside traditional stationery, essential communication devices such as mobile phones, laptops, and personal computers (PCs) are also required. Then, of course, apart from adequate facilities, effective online engagement among schools, students, and parents necessitates a harmonious collaboration. Schools and parents must work together to

establish a conducive learning environment for children, especially when they rely on them for resources and a supportive educational atmosphere (Malik & Tyagi, 2020).

Epstein's typology is a prominent model for parental engagement, categorizing parental involvement into six distinct types: Parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with community (Epstein, 1995). According to the study in Qatar, the category labeled 'learning at home' received the highest rating for parental involvement, indicated by its highest mean score (Ihmeideh et al., 2020). As it is supported by (Singh et al., 1995), parents exert the most widespread influence on children's academic competence and performance in school-related activities. Without this influence, schools may encounter challenges in achieving their objectives.

Parents inevitably face various challenges and stressors in supporting and assisting with online learning. This is especially true when they must balance their own responsibilities as parents and their roles as employees. The mental burden and responsibilities present a significant challenge. According to Lazarus and Folkman's transactional theory of stress and coping (Folkman, 2017) individuals continually assess environmental stimuli, generating emotions. When stimuli are perceived as threatening, challenging, or harmful, this appraisal triggers coping strategies to manage emotions or address the stressor directly.

METHODS

This research employs a case study design to explore the phenomenon of parental assistance during online learning among elementary school students. The case study design is particularly well-suited for this investigation as it allows for an in-depth examination of the complexities and nuances of parental involvement in a specific context. By focusing on parents' real-life experiences and interactions, the case study approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of their roles, challenges, and contributions in the digital learning environment.

The study involved 200 parents from six Muhammadiyah elementary schools in Surabaya surveyed to collect data on their involvement in their children's online education. This comprehensive data serves as a basis for identifying prevalent patterns and trends. Then, 12 parents from this group are selected for in-depth qualitative interviews to explore personal experiences and perspectives.

Table 1. Participants of interview

No.	Initial	Gender	Elementary School
1.	L	Female	Elementary School B
2.	M	Female	Elementary School A
3.	N	Female	Elementary School B
4.	S	Female	Elementary School C
5.	Y	Female	Elementary School B
6.	D	Female	Elementary School F
7.	N	Female	Elementary School D
8.	M	Female	Elementary School C
9.	M	Female	Elementary School B
10.	A	Female	Elementary School A
11.	B	Female	Elementary School E
12.	M	Female	Elementary School B

The authors are concerned to the following ethical guidelines in this study: (1) Ensuring the confidentiality of informants, (2) Avoiding the use of deceptive practices, and (3) Providing informants with the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point.

The following are items of questions asked in the in-depth interview session which include:

1. How do students engage with the implementation of online learning?
2. How do parents provide support through the assistance mechanism?
3. How do the schools support online learning through a structured e-learning program?

4. What is the most significant and challenging barrier when supporting children in online learning?
5. What communication methods do teachers use to interact with parents?
6. How does mentoring during online learning foster a closer relationship between parents and children?
7. How does the school's chosen online learning platform diversify learning experiences?
8. How does the implementation of online learning contribute to the development of spiritual competence, attitudes, knowledge, and skills?

FINDINGS

A comprehensive interview session was conducted to gather detailed insights into the implementation of online learning. NVivo software was utilized to code the interview transcripts, which were conducted via Zoom. Twelve parents, representing six Muhammadiyah schools included in the sample participated in the in-depth interviews. The prolonged COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted students and parents, necessitating the shift to online learning.

One key factor contributing to parents' positive perception of online learning is the schools' systematic provision of online learning facilities. Over 85% of parents reported accompanying their children during home study sessions facilitated by e-learning platforms such as Google Classroom, WhatsApp, Zoom, and Google Meet. According to the respondents, these platforms are essential for teacher-student communication and assignment submission. Video conferencing tools like Zoom and Google Meet are particularly beneficial for fostering interaction between teachers and students.

Regarding the first question about the implementation of online learning, most respondents (parents 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) agreed that online learning is an effective alternative to in-person education during the COVID-19 outbreak. However, parent 1 expressed concern that the lack of face-to-face interaction led to her son's boredom with online learning. Similarly, parent 2 noted that online learning was insufficient for her daughter, who thrives on direct social interaction.

The second question focused on the provision of parental support. Most respondents indicated that their children required assistance, highlighting the critical role of parents in ensuring their children follow the subject matter correctly. Nonetheless, some parents (3, 4, and 5) found it challenging to provide this support due to their work commitments coinciding with their children's study hours.

The third question addressed how schools can facilitate online learning through structured e-learning programs. Respondents reported that schools have primarily adopted systems like Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams, with Zoom and Google Meet used for synchronous learning. Communication between parents and teachers is often conducted via WhatsApp, simplifying the submission and collection of assignments. Parent 6 added that Google Forms are also used to complete tasks.

The fourth issue examined parents' most significant challenges while supporting their children's online learning. Many parents identified the lack of facilities, time, and availability as significant obstacles. Parent 3 mentioned the difficulty of balancing work and supporting their child's studies, relying on the child's grandmother for assistance. Parent 5 also struggled with the diverse material their children were studying, finding it hard to keep up.

The fifth question explored the communication between teachers and parents. Responses varied, with some parents (7 and 8) noting good interaction with teachers, while others (1, 5, and 6) reported limited communication, primarily regarding homework. These parents often had to seek information independently to ensure their children kept up with their studies.

The sixth question inquired whether the mentoring process during online learning strengthened the parent-child relationship. The seventh question addressed the teachers' preferences for online learning platforms, with Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, and WhatsApp being the most commonly used tools.

The eighth question pertained to the contribution of online learning to spiritual competencies, attitudes, knowledge, and abilities. Parents generally believed that following instructions and enjoying learning were essential. However, parent 2 observed that the implementation of online learning gave students more space and time to develop new skills, as children engaged in activities like coloring and sketching, alongside their usual extracurricular activities such as swimming.

DISCUSSION

Over 85% of parents appreciated the systematic provision of online learning facilities, facilitating the transition to online education. Platforms like Google Classroom, WhatsApp, Zoom, and Google Meet were essential in maintaining communication and interaction between teachers and students.

Most respondents (parents 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) agreed that online learning was an effective alternative to in-person education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Video conferencing tools like Zoom and Google Meet helped foster interaction and engagement.

Many parents recognized their critical role in supporting their children's online learning. They reported actively ensuring their children understood and followed the subject matter correctly.

Parent 1 and parent 2 highlighted the lack of face-to-face interaction as a significant drawback. Their children experienced boredom and missed the social interaction that in-person classes provided. Schools could explore hybrid models or more interactive online sessions to mitigate this issue. Some parents (3, 4, and 5) asserted that supporting their children's studies challenging due to their work commitments. Schools could offer flexible schedules or additional resources to help parents manage their dual responsibilities. While some parents (7 and 8) noted good communication, others (1, 5, and 6) reported limited teacher interaction. Schools should aim to establish more consistent and open communication channels to keep parents informed and engaged.

Parents noted that online learning provided more space and time for students to develop new skills. Children engaged in activities like colouring, sketching, and extracurricular activities, contributing to their holistic development.

CONCLUSION

The shift to online learning during the pandemic brought about a mixed bag of experiences for parents and students. While the systematic provision of online learning facilities and the use of various platforms facilitated continuity in education, challenges such as lack of face-to-face interaction, engagement issues, and balancing parental responsibilities were significant. Moving forward, addressing these challenges by enhancing communication, providing additional support for parents, and leveraging technology to create a more engaging and effective online learning environment is crucial.

There are some recommendations for schools if they want to optimize the use of digital classrooms in the post-pandemic era.

The schools need to Incorporate more interactive and engaging elements in online lessons to maintain student interest and reduce boredom. Then, improving communication between teachers and parents by providing regular updates, feedback, and opportunities for virtual meetings is necessary. Last but not least, it is necessary to Improve communication between teachers and parents by providing regular updates, feedback, and opportunities for virtual meetings.

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