The Challenges of State Junior High School Teachers in Distance Learning During The Covid-19 Pandemic

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Teacher challenges;
Covid-19;
Distance Learning

ABSTRACT

The outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic has resulted in teachers who are one of the stakeholders’ education having to quickly adapt to changes in the learning system, which were initially face-to-face and then turned into virtual faces. This sudden change also caused much anxiety experienced by the teacher. Therefore, this study aims to determine teachers’ challenges during distance learning. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. In this study, the informants were fourth teachers of state junior high school 8 Cilacap. Data was obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation using analytical techniques in reduction, classification, and conclusions. The results showed five challenges for teachers during distance learning: planning lessons, preparing students, motivating students, instilling character in students, and unstable internet networks. The teacher finally looks for the best way or solution to overcome it, namely by discussing with students using various learning technologies or applications, collaborating with parents, and participating in training to improve their competencies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, the world is being hit by a global disaster, namely, the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus, which has hampered many sectors in their implementation, one of which is the education sector. In March 2020, the Covid-19 virus began to enter Indonesia, and at that time, Indonesia began to implement the distance learning system. The application of the system is one of the government programs to break the chain of the spread of the Covid-19 virus among teachers and students by shifting learning that was initially face-to-face to virtual face (Eddy & Suryono, 2019). Learning remotely between teachers and students can be done from home using technology (Rahayu & Wirza, 2020). This technology is used as an alternative solution so that learning can continue as it should (Wulandari, Santoso, & Ardianti, 2021).
As a result, the transfer of the learning system causes teachers many challenges when conducting distance learning with students. This statement is aligned with the statement that face-to-face learning transfer causes many problems for teachers (Hazizah & Ismaniar, 2020). Even though learning is carried out remotely or from home, the teacher still supervises students’ learning activities by collaborating with parents to achieve learning objectives (Amalia & Sa’adah, 2020). Currently, the collaboration between teachers and parents is one solution that is highly emphasized by the school, so that teaching and learning activities can continue to run smoothly.

Teachers must apply and develop their professional competencies with the distance learning system because teachers can teach distance well. Here the teacher is required to think creatively and innovatively about the learning that will carry out during the distance learning, starting from the use of methods and the use of the media used to the use of technology during the learning process. Because learning is carried out remotely, this reduces the burden of lesson hours given to students. Thus, the teacher must cut or pass many essential competencies so that learning activities can run effectively and efficiently. As stated by Angriani and Sriyanti, the main factor that hinders teachers from teaching is time constraints (Marwa et al., 2020). Therefore, teachers must be innovative in sorting out essential learning materials to be urgently delivered to students. Another opinion also states that teachers must adjust the implementation of learning plans from planning to learning evaluation with the current Covid-19 pandemic conditions (Prijowuntato & Wardhani, 2021).

Teachers are important figures in education because teachers must transfer knowledge to students with limited resources. Some of the challenges experienced by junior high school teachers during distance learning include limited facilities such as an unstable internet network, inadequate tools used for learning, and teachers’ lack of ability and knowledge in designing and implementing distance learning (Hadriana, Mahdum, Isjoni, Futra, & Primahardani, 2021). In addition, other studies stated that the challenges for middle school teachers in distance learning were the lack of internet access and adequate tools for both teachers and students, difficulties in delivering learning materials, and teachers’ lack of knowledge of technology and pedagogical knowledge (Lie et al., 2020). From the previous statement, it can be concluded that the challenges most felt by teachers are regarding internet access, the tools/devices used, and the ability and knowledge of teachers in managing distance learning.

With a learning system carried out remotely, the role of the teacher is significant to be able to make students participate in learning activities (Dahlan & Rahayu, 2021). Teachers are also the main element in education whose job is to realize the desired learning goals (Zaenuri & Prastowo, 2021). So that interaction between teachers and students is needed, which can be virtual. He also added that he could establish this interaction by utilizing laptops and mobile phones (Amalia & Sa’adah, 2020).

In addition, teaching and learning activities also require technological assistance to do still learning from their respective homes. Therefore, teachers and students can take advantage of technology that supports learning, such as learning applications, namely Google Classroom and Google Forms, used to discuss, collect assignments, and conduct assessment evaluations. In addition, teachers can also take advantage of applications such as Zoom Meeting, Google Meet, Webex, and Microsoft Teams to conduct virtual face learning with students. Then, teachers can also use applications such as study houses, video conferencing, WhatsApp Groups, and telephones (Jamilah, 2020).

Today, technology plays an essential role in the world of education. By utilizing technology, students still learn from home, like the statement that technology today is very helpful in learning activities constrained by disasters that occur globally (Ferdig, Baumgartner, Hartshorne, Kaplan-Rakowski, & Mouza, 2020). However, the sudden changes that occur today by utilizing technology make teachers adapt quickly and operate the technology in learning. Therefore, teachers must develop...
their competencies by participating in various training that can facilitate the activities of the learning process carried out with the help of technology.

A changing learning system like this poses various challenges experienced by stakeholders of education, especially teachers who must transfer knowledge to students. As stated by Astuti and Harun, the learning conditions that have suddenly changed since the Covid-19 pandemic caused learning to be carried out are new things that are felt by teachers (Astuti & Harun, 2021). It can be seen that the learning conditions carried out remotely or from home resulted in the teacher experiencing challenges in its implementation. Starting from how the teacher prepares students to take part in learning, the method of delivering material to students, the use of learning media, to how the teacher achieves the desired learning goals during distance learning. In addition, learning carried out at a distance can also reduce student interest when learning (Sutarto, Sari, & Fathurrochman, 2020). Therefore, a creative and innovative solution is needed so that learning activities can run smoothly, both from the side of teachers and students.

Based on previous research conducted by Jamilah, the challenge in online learning is the ability of teachers to operate learning technology, human resources, and educational infrastructure that can support learning activities (Jamilah, 2020). Similar research has also been conducted regarding teachers’ challenges, namely the difficulty of teachers in preparing the learning implementation plan, using technology or learning applications, and then carrying out the learning itself (Diani & Dewi, 2020). In addition, network limitations, lack of training, awareness, and interest are challenges in distance learning (Wahyono, Husamah, & Budi, 2020). The research that has been done before does not reveal the solutions that the teacher does to face the challenges and experiences.

Therefore, this research aims to find out the challenges experienced by teachers when distance learning is implemented, which includes the challenge experienced by teachers during distance learning and ways or solutions taken by teachers to overcome these challenges. In addition, the novelty of this research lies in the difference in the background of the research place with research that has been done previously, namely in-state junior high school 8 Cilacap.

2. METHODS

Study Design

A qualitative approach with a descriptive method is the type of research. This type of research is used to explain in-depth, natural, and detail the phenomena that occur during the research, namely the challenges experienced by teachers during distance learning (Ummah & Sartika, 2021). Researchers conducted this study from March to July 2021.

Informants

This study used fourth teachers of state junior high school 8 Cilacap as research informants. The four teachers were chosen as research informants because they were considered to know the ins and outs of the researcher’s questions when conducting research, namely the challenges felt by the teacher during distance learning and the solutions the teacher made to overcome these challenges. The identities of the four teachers are teachers who teach biology, Indonesian, English, and civics.

Instruments

Observation, interviews, and documentation studies are data collection methods used in this study. It is hoped that using these three data collection methods can answer the research questions that the researchers have compiled entirely and clearly. The data in this study were collected for five months, starting from March to July.
Here, the researcher uses a passive participatory observation method in which the researcher acts as an observer and does not participate in the activity. This activity is used to see firsthand how the challenges experienced by teachers during distance learning take place and how teachers deal with the challenges they experience. For example, researchers enter the online learning space carried out by teachers and students to observe the online learning process.

The researcher also uses a structured interview method. The researcher has prepared a list of questions that the researcher will ask the informant during the interview session—conducting interviews to find out in-depth about the challenges experienced by teachers during distance learning and how teachers deal with them with the challenges they experience. Here the researcher asked 12 questions to the four informants, and each interview took an average of one hour.

In addition, researchers also use documentation studies to complete the data from observations and interviews. This documentation study activity collects documents, photos, and notes related to the research questions that the researchers examined. Namely, the challenges experienced by teachers during distance learning took place and how teachers deal with the challenges they experience. Here the researchers document documents such as the lesson plan, lesson schedules, student assignments, and documentation of online learning activities.

Data Analysis

The Miles and Huberman model researchers analyzed the data carried out in three stages. This stage includes data reduction, data classification, and concluding. In the data reduction stage, the researcher collects the data that the researcher has obtained while in the field, then sorts the data and discards the data that is not used. The data is reduced to limitations regarding the challenges experienced by teachers during distance learning and the methods used by teachers to overcome the challenges they experience. Data classification is used to create the same patterns regarding research questions that have been obtained and sorted during data reduction. Meanwhile, verification or conclusion drawing is used to draw a conclusion based on research questions that the researcher has compiled previously obtained from data classification.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Teachers’ Challenges During Distance Learning

The results of this study are presented based on research questions prepared previously. The first research question describes the challenges experienced by teachers during distance learning can be seen in Table 1.

| Research Questions 1                                      | Answer                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| What are the challenges for teachers during distance learning? | 1. Planning lessons                           |
|                                                           | 2. Preparing students                        |
|                                                           | 3. Motivating students                       |
|                                                           | 4. Instilling good character in students     |
|                                                           | 5. Unstable internet network                 |

Table 1. Teachers’ Challenges During Distance Learning

Source: processed by researchers, 2021
The teacher who became an informant in this study explained the challenges he experienced during distance learning. Based on the interviews that have been conducted, found that teachers experience five challenges.

Planning Learning

Based on interviews conducted with four teachers, it was found that two teachers experienced challenges in preparing lesson plans that would be conveyed to students. In particular, selecting appropriate media and learning methods to be used when conducting distance learning so that students do not feel bored because the condition of learning carried out remotely is currently tricky for teachers to attract students' attention. As stated by the biology subject teacher during the interview:

“Planning lessons during a pandemic is a challenge for teachers. Starting from using methods and media that will be used, then selecting what materials will be delivered to students.”

Likewise, what was conveyed by the English subject teacher regarding the challenges experienced when teaching:

“In planning learning activities, teachers must be able to innovate and think creatively to deliver learning materials so that students are interested in and understand the material presented by the teacher.”

The challenges experienced by the two teachers above follow the statement that the experienced challenge teachers are that the teacher must be able to prepare for learning interestingly and be able to monitor students during learning (Astuti & Harun, 2021). This is in line with research that has been done previously, that the challenges experienced by teachers during online learning are preparing teaching materials, participating in application usage training, and implementing distance learning itself (Diani & Dewi, 2020). In preparing lesson plans, teachers should have several references that can assist in the success of online learning activities. This is because other research states that teachers’ challenges in online learning are that the lesson plans that have been prepared cannot be adequately implemented and the limitations of students’ internet and cellphone quotas (Rasidi, Hikmatullah, & Sobry, 2021). So, here the teacher must know the suitable media and learning methods to be used in learning activities. Based on the learning implementation plan that the previous teacher has prepared, it can be seen that the teacher has followed the development of methods and media used during learning.

Preparing Students

The informants explained that preparing students to take part in learning is a challenge that teachers must face. Three out of four informants said the same thing. This is due to many passive students who feel unprepared for changes in the learning system carried out by utilizing technology. As stated by the biology subject teacher:

“It is difficult to control students’ attendance because they are at home, so it is difficult to tell them.”

The Indonesian language teacher said the same thing:

“The challenge is when it comes to entering online classes. So how do you prepare students to always be present on time for online classes. Then, ensure that students are present in class, not just by name”.

From the statement above, it can be concluded that preparing students for distance learning is a challenge for teachers. Here it can be seen that students are not ready when they take distance learning,
so ensuring attendance and even timeliness in joining online classes is difficult for teachers to do. However, teachers have professional competencies that can be utilized in the current pandemic. Based on recommendations from Rosita et al., professional teachers are agents of change to face challenges in the world of education in the future (Rosita, Erihadiana, Rochman, & Mansyur, 2020). When viewed from the results of previous research, the professional competence of teachers is essential to be developed in current learning activities.

Motivating Students

The informant also mentioned that students’ motivation during distance learning decreased, which became one of the challenges for teachers in teaching. If this is not handled correctly, it will result in the desired achievement and learning objectives not being achieved. The following are the challenges experienced by Indonesian language subject teachers, namely:

“Another challenge is that students are not enthusiastic about participating in-class learning. So, to motivate students is a challenge for teachers during the current pandemic.”

Likewise, what was conveyed by Civics subject teachers, namely:

“To motivate and instill character in children is also quite difficult. Because it has usually done face-to-face, but because of the pandemic, we cannot meet face-to-face.”

One of the teacher’s roles is as a motivator, where the teacher plays a role in encouraging and encouraging students to learn (Marwa et al., 2020). This statement also follows the expression that teachers are role models for students, movers of change, and motivators (Usman, Sauri, & Fath, 2021). However, in the current pandemic, teachers have difficulty motivating students to learn in the classroom. If this continues, the desired goal will not be achieved.

Instilling Character in Students

Two out of four informants agreed that instilling character in students is complicated and challenging for teachers. As stated by the Indonesian language teacher, namely:

“To instill character in students is also difficult during the current pandemic, such as honesty, responsibility, and discipline, due to the lack of direct interaction between teachers and students.”

The Civics subject teacher also mentioned the same thing:

“To motivate and instill character in children is also quite difficult. Because it has usually done face-to-face, but because of the pandemic, we cannot meet face-to-face.”

It can be concluded from the statement above that when teachers and students do not meet and meet face to face, and it becomes challenging to provide understanding to students. In addition to transferring knowledge, the teacher is also tasked with instilling good character in each student. Based on documentation in the form of student attendance data during distance learning, it can be said that there are still some students who are not present. Then, based on observations, some students did not turn on the camera during the learning process.

The characteristics that the teacher wants to instill during distance learning are honesty, discipline, and responsibility. Honesty in question his honesty in answering test questions and quizzes used as student evaluation materials. The teacher cannot guarantee that 100% of students answer honestly the evaluation given by the teacher because it is not face-to-face. Then, discipline when doing
distance learning is a discipline in dressing, always being present in class, coming on time to online classes, and obeying all the rules that apply during the learning process. Meanwhile, the responsibility itself is in terms of doing and collecting assignments. Because there are still many students who are not on time for collecting, some do not collect assignments.

Less Stable Internet Network

The use of technology is also not free from the challenges experienced by teachers. As stated by the Civics subject teacher, namely:

“Most of the challenges lie in the internet signal. Not all students have a good internet signal when learning begins”.

The above is following the statement that a lousy signal is also a challenge for teachers in carrying out teaching and learning activities from home (Ummah & Sartika, 2021). The technology used to conduct distance learning requires a strong network or internet connection to run properly and smoothly at the time of its implementation. An unstable network or internet connection can result in non-smooth discussions between teachers and students, resulting in not optimal delivery of learning materials and not achieving the desired learning objectives.

In this day and age, we can do learning activities using mobile phones or laptops if a network supports it. As stated by Ningsih that in addition to using a computer or laptop, cell phones can also be used to study with the available network (Ningsih, 2019). A strong network is very much needed in learning because currently, learning is done with the help of technology to access learning applications, such as Zoom Meeting, Google Classroom, Google Forms, and other applications.

3.2. The Solution to Overcome Teacher Challenges During Distance Learning

Based on the second research question, the fourth informant explained four ways or solutions teachers have to overcome the challenges they experienced during distance learning. The method or solution can be seen in Table.

| Research Questions 2 | Answers |
|----------------------|---------|
| What are the ways or solutions teachers use to overcome the challenges they experience? | 1. Discuss with students |
|                       | 2. Using various learning technologies or application |
|                       | 3. Collaboration with parents |
|                       | 4. Participating in training |

Source: processed by researchers, 2021

Discussing with Students

Three of the four informants explained that they would discuss with students the use of learning methods and media that would be used during learning. A biology subject teacher conveyed the following statement.

“We also discussed with students what applications could be used for learning activities. Because at this time students are more active in using cellphones.”
Likewise, what was conveyed by Civics subject teachers, namely:
“We are also diligent in asking students how they feel about participating in distance learning at this time. We always try to listen to what students feel, and maybe some students have ideas or input about the learning to be carried out. When students are open to the teacher, learning will run fun.”

The above efforts are made so that students can enjoy the delivery of learning materials delivered by the teacher. In addition, this discussion activity is also carried out to provide options so that students do not feel bored and burdened with the use of methods and media in learning.

Using Various Learning Technology or Applications
Teachers also look for information related to technology or other creative and innovative learning applications to ignite students’ enthusiasm in terms of learning. As stated by the Indonesian language teacher:
“I also use a variety of available applications, so they do not get bored with the same learning method.”

The above is in line with the statement conveyed by the Civics subject teacher, namely:
“Then, we also use various applications in learning, so we do not just stick to one application. The goal is to make children interested and enthusiastic in learning.”

Other research also states that to motivate students to learn from home, teachers must build persuasive communication, prepare innovative learning media, help students when experiencing difficulties, and facilitate a complete educational infrastructure (Fimala, Neviyarni, & Murni, 2021). The use of technology or various learning applications is one of the ways or solutions for teachers so that students do not feel bored. These efforts are also made to attract students’ attention because students will usually be curious about new applications that they have never seen. Therefore, current technological advances have resulted in the emergence of various creative learning applications and positively impacted the world of education.

Collaborating with Parents
All informants also collaborate with parents to achieve the desired goals to overcome other challenges. The English teacher said:
“Cooperation with parents is needed to observe the learning progress of students at home.”

Meanwhile, the Indonesian language teacher said:
“We, together with the parents of students, work together in guiding and accompanying students when they are about to enter online classes. So these students feel cared for.”

This collaboration is motivated by students’ passiveness when participating in distance learning and the difficulty of instilling good characters in students, such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility. In addition, collaboration with all education stakeholders is needed in today’s distance learning. Moreover, the most dominant is cooperation between teachers and parents (Zakariyah & Hamid, 2020). Therefore, cooperation with parents is expected to assist teachers in achieving the desired goals. This collaboration is also carried out so parents can accompany and see the development of students’ abilities (Cahyati & Kusumah, 2020). Teachers hope that students’ motivation will increase to achieve the desired goals by cooperating with parents. This aligns with the statement that learning objectives will be achieved if students have high learning motivation (Saumi, Murtono, & Ismaya, 2021).
Another opinion reveals that motivating, conducting home visits, and meeting with students’ parents are some strategies teachers can use (Dahlan & Rahayu, 2021). So, the collaboration between teachers and parents is essential given the current pandemic conditions.

Participating in Training

In addition, all informants are also actively participating in various training related to changes in the current education system to improve the knowledge and competence of teachers. The English subject teacher conveyed the following statement:

“We also attend training or seminars held by the school or from outside to add insight in teaching.”

In addition, the Indonesian language teacher said that:

“I have also attended various training provided by the school and from outside on teaching techniques or learning technology.”

From the statement above, it can be seen that by participating in the training, the teacher can find the best solution or way of solving the challenges they are experiencing. In addition, teachers can also exchange ideas with other fellow teachers during training. In addition, teachers can also improve their competence. This is in line with other research which states that teacher competence plays a vital role in distance learning, which results in increased student enthusiasm (Sutisna & Widodo, 2020). With increased teacher competence, it will be easier to control students while studying.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion from the results of the research above is that the challenges experienced by teachers during distance learning are planning lessons, preparing, motivating, and instilling character in students, as well as an unstable internet network. Teachers discuss with students, use various learning applications, collaborate with parents, and participate in training to overcome these challenges. This research can be used as information and input for other teachers with similar challenges. The advantage of this research is that the researcher succeeded in revealing the research objectives. Meanwhile, the drawback is that it does not disclose the evaluation of distance learning that can be used to find out whether the solutions made by the teacher to overcome the challenges they are experiencing have been successful or not. This deficiency is also a recommendation that the researcher wants to convey to the next researcher.

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