Effective Leadership of Kindergarten Principals in Facing the Impact of Learning Loss in Kindergartner During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract— Online and home learning during the COVID-19 pandemic present several challenges and risks of learning loss that have a long-term impact on children. Because of this, kindergarten principals are encouraged to take practical and strategic steps in dealing with crises for the sake of the continuity and sustainability of education. Thus, this study aims at determining the effective leadership of kindergarten principals in dealing with the impact of learning loss in early childhood during the COVID-19 pandemic. The approach used is qualitative with a case study design and four research participants, namely three principals with different geographical backgrounds. Data were collected through interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The research findings show that all participants have had proactive leadership in the ability to choose responses to the pandemic to improve teaching quality, institutional resilience, and the development of further innovation. They took initiative and anticipatory steps to reduce the impact of learning loss, such as blended learning, visiting teacher programs, literacy movements, and parenting programs. Kindergarten principals with rural geographical conditions have not shown a win-win mindset, especially in the aspect of negotiating and finding alternative solutions together, as evidenced by the lack of school efforts to build agreements with school members in overcoming learning loss in children during online learning. Furthermore, kindergartens with suburban geographical conditions did not reflect selfhoning behavior in terms of physical dimensions because the pandemic has added a burden to the mind and reduced rest time, which hinders the kindergarten principal in ensuring his physical health.

Keywords: effective leadership, learning loss

I. INTRODUCTION

The pandemic has widened the education gap in Indonesia due to unequal access to learning facilities and infrastructure. One of the government's efforts to address the education gap is to create a home study program that can be accessed on national television of the Republic of Indonesia or TVRI (Asmuni, 2020). TVRI's home study program includes materials for Early Childhood Education, namely reading and writing, arithmetic, and character education. The education program on TVRI is aimed at the lower middle class who have difficulty obtaining various sources of education for parents and children. An assessment of the implementation of TVRI's home study program by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia found that the program's implementation was ineffective due to several problems, including different broadcast coverage, inconsistencies between the program schedules and parents' activities, uninteresting and unavailable material for children, and the presence of other resources (Rakhmah, 2021). Therefore, it can be inferred that this is related to the learning loss experienced by students due to suboptimal educational stimulation through home study programs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Learning loss is characterized by decreased academic scores and loss of understanding of learning material due to limited stimulation. In addition, a non-conducive learning atmosphere also results in difficulty concentrating and decreased learning motivation (Pier, 2021). The forms of learning loss that occur in children include: 1) Students feel they learn less online than when learning in the classroom and 2) Inadequate access to learning materials results in difficulty understanding the material so children do not learn at all. Azim (2021) found that students' learning loss in the subject of language (92%) and math (82%) will cause cumulative losses over the years until they are adults. To ensure that this does not happen, many strategies must be adopted and implemented rigorously to compensate for the overall learning loss.

Learning loss has a lifelong impact on children. It can occur when academic achievement has decreased from the previous year (Pier et al., 2021). Failure to learn online risks having a generation with learning loss that has a permanent impact on future generations, especially in early childhood education (Engzell, 2020). Kaffenberger (2021) states that even though schools are open and conducting learning as usual, the impact of learning loss will not stop. Third-grade elementary school students who miss six months of education may be 1.5 years behind in their developmental milestones for their age. In addition, for first-year students who do not study for six months, the delay can be up to 2.2 years. Learning loss will have long-term consequences and will cause economic and social problems in the future. Students who miss out on learning opportunities within 1.5 years will lose 15% of their adult income. In meaning that early-age children who do not study for six months can be left behind for three years in their developmental achievements.

For children who do not get maximum educational stimulation, their developmental aspects will not develop according to their age and potential. Stimulation and sensory experiences received by children through play and learning will increase the formation of connections between brain cells (synapses), but this relationship is not permanent (Irmawati et al., 2012). Direct experience gained through the senses and good environmental conditions are needed to form synapses. Berk (2012) explains that well-stimulated brain cells (neurons) will continue to form new synapses, but neurons that are not stimulated will experience synaptic pruning. Learning loss results in cognitive abilities, such as reduced development of problem-solving skills and concentration due to a lot of distractions. Based on the assumptions of the interviewed teachers, the decrease in learning outcomes scores reached 50% when compared to normal learning. Learning loss has a long-term impact on the quality and income of a person in the future. In line with Bloom, about 50% of the variability of adult intelligence has existed since the age of 4, 30% at the age of 8, and 20% at the age of 18, meaning that the first four years of their life is the period when a child is very sensitive to the environment. During this period, the difference in intelligence between children from a stimulation-rich environment with children from a stimulation-poor environment is approximately 10 IQ units, and then six units at the age of 4-8 (Siswina, 2016).

Learning loss occurs when the achievement of development based on age differs from one child to another. To overcome learning loss, a learning recovery policy is needed within a certain period of time related to the implementation of the curriculum by the education unit. Implementation by education units can use a curriculum that is in accordance with the learning needs of students and must pay attention to the achievement of student competencies in education units in the context of learning recovery. Therefore, the education unit is given the option of implementing a curriculum that is in accordance with the learning needs of students. The three curriculum options are the 2013 Curriculum, the Darurat Curriculum (i.e., the 2013 Curriculum simplified by the Ministry of Education and Culture), and the Merdeka Curriculum.

The efforts of kindergarten principals in mitigating learning loss are curriculum restructuring and establishing good synergy between teachers and parents. Kindergarten principals can set a policy for parents to come to school once a week to receive homework for the present week and the following week (Kurniati et al., 2020). Divide the children into groups of five. The teacher visit program

includes parent-child literacy movement, in the form of reading, building a more harmonious parent-child relationship, teacher involvement in skill development activities, and blended learning (Angrist, 2020). Remedial programs or learning improvement programs can be offered to children who have not met the developmental aspects based on their age (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). So far, there have not been many studies examining learning loss mitigation strategies in early childhood education in Indonesia. Existing research emphasizes the impact of the pandemic on the development and health of early childhood during the pandemic and the home study period, where children are at risk of obesity due to lack of physical activity (Agustin et al., 2021; Wulandari & Purwanta, 2021). Therefore, based on the aforementioned references, this study aims at identifying strategies for mitigating potential learning loss and schools' efforts to overcome the long-term impact of learning loss.

II. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. The case study design was chosen to describe what happened and provide information about the effective leadership of kindergarten principals on learning loss in early childhood (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). The participants were three kindergarten principals with different kindergarten geographical backgrounds with consideration that, according to Pier (2021), geographical conditions can cause unequal access and services that can be provided. The first participant was a kindergarten principal located in a rural area with inadequate network access and infrastructure, the second participant was a kindergarten principal located in a suburban area with adequate network access and infrastructure, and the third participant was a kindergarten principal located in the city center with good network access and infrastructure.

This study is divided into four stages, namely instrument development, data collection, data analysis, and data presentation. An overview of the research progress is presented in the following chart.



The chart above depicts the research procedures.

1. Developing interview instrument

As the first step in the study, the instrument was compiled based on references from various sources as data collection material. The interview instrument on the Effective Leadership of Kindergarten Principals in Facing the Impact of Learning Loss During the COVID-19 Pandemic includes a blueprint and a list of interview questions.

2. Collecting the data

In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain saturated and complete data. The main instrument was the researchers, and the additional instrument was the interview guideline. The research instrument blueprint is shown in the following table:

Aspect	Indicator	Source	Data Collection Technique
Learning Loss 1) 2) 3)	overcoming learning loss Obstacles faced by kindergarten principals in implementing efforts to overcome learning loss	3 kindergarten principals	Interview

3. Analyzing the data

Data were analyzed using the thematic analysis technique. This technique is a way of analyzing data to identify patterns or to find themes through data that has been collected by researchers (Anderson et al., 2014). The researchers tried to understand the data by reading transcripts or listening to recorded interviews. Then, the researchers made notes to facilitate the data analysis process at the next stage. The notes were in the form of voice recordings, which was helpful to find the meaning of the data.

4. Presenting the data

Data from the interview transcripts were coded, and then the codes were evaluated for their relevance to the research questions. The researchers combined themes based on codes from each group that had similarities and differences. Groups that had similarities were then collected into one and re-grouped by themes. From there, the themes were then analyzed based on their similarities, differences, and relationships. Finally, the themes were rearranged based on the research questions.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants in this research were three kindergarten principals with initial names, namely Mrs. Ana, Mrs. Ani and Mr. Aan.

III.1 Proactive Leadership

The proactive behavior of kindergarten principals was established from three indicators, namely the freedom to choose responses, the ability to take the initiative, and the ability to be responsible. Mrs. Ani and Mr. Aan responded to the learning during the pandemic as a challenge to develop online-based children's education. They facilitated teachers with online teaching training, provided parenting forums for parents on tips for accompanying children's home study, and registered as driving kindergartens for the preparation of the Merdeka curriculum to overcome learning loss. The kindergartens also carried out a series of preparations and assistance for the implementation of independent learning, including the profile of Pancasila students and an in-depth understanding of the achievements of children's growth and development.

The results of the interview are in line with the study, which found that Mr. Aan planned a strategy based on the needs and potential that the institution can do by continuing to open in-person classes with strict protocols and permits and agreements with related parties considering the impact of learning loss that children can experience while learning online. Once schools can reopen, Mr. Aan prepared the needs and infrastructure for the driving school as a step to mitigate learning loss in children. Kindergarten principals must ensure quality and facilitate schools to improve the quality of

education (Crawford et al., 2021). The three kindergarten principals quickly adjusted to accommodate lesson plans based on the Merdeka curriculum. The first step taken by the kindergarten principals was a discussion with school members, which included teachers, parents, and the school district. Discussions such as this can build good communication between schools, students, and local officials (Indraswati & Sutisna, 2020).

In addition, the results of these interviews are in line with Pradana's research (2021) which found that people who have proactive behavior are aware that the plan they choose from the various existing plans is close to the reality that can be achieved, because the consequence of a plan is failure or outside the plan. In line with this research, it was found that Mr. Aan planned a strategy based on the needs and potential that the institution could carry out by continuing to open face-to-face classes through strict protocols and the existence of permits and agreements with related parties considering the impact of learning loss that children can experience while studying online. This statement was obtained from the results of a joint interview with the deputy principal of the school, Mrs. Ane, who stated that parents' obstacles could be overcome and resolved properly through Mr. Aan's leadership. Kindergarten principals who have a proactive attitude will take action according to their mood and analyze signs of problems wisely, while Kindergarten principals who are reactive will wait for information and opportunities to act or instead blame the circumstances and situations that befall them (Liao, 2015). Ms. Ana and Ms. Ani guarantee the maximum continuity of education through online and offline. However, Mr. Aan continued to run limited PTM without implementing online learning at all during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mrs. Ani and Mrs. Ana communicate and actively cooperate with parents to achieve their children's learning goals while at home. Kindergarten principals who behave proactively have the confidence to take full responsibility for the actions and policies they take. Kindergarten principals who have a proactive behavior seek opportunities, information and resources that can be used for the survival and innovation of kindergarten development (Bateman & Crant in Chen, 2018). Making Kindergarten an example and model of achievement and being able to keep innovating during the COVID-19 pandemic.

III.2 Visionary Leadership and Setting Priorities

Mrs. Ana and Mrs. Ani assigned teachers to provide online learning guidance and assistance and carry out a coordinated visiting teacher program. The programs were well-structured, and they went well, for instance by prioritizing assistance and tutoring for children with limited network access and infrastructure rather than attending meetings about field trips that the institution wanted to do. Mrs. Ani held a home visit and Mr. Aan maximized students' progress monitoring through teachers based on the at-school and at-home learning processes. The schedules were determined based on the distance of the children's houses. If there are three children whose houses are close together, then a home visit would be done in one of the children's homes. Students who got a home visit schedule would get the opportunity to study directly with the teachers, so it was easier for parents to accompany their children.

Similarly, Mr. Aan conducted teacher visitations to each student, though they were not intended to conduct learning processes but to communicate with parents regarding the students' development. The visitations or monitoring were done periodically about once a week. In addition to consultations on the students' development, the kindergarten also provided activities to develop their creativity and provided the media at the kindergarten. The media include origami papers, scissors, glue, cotton, cardboard, and the like.

The results of the interview are in line with research by Pradana (2021), which found that work priority is to prioritize responsibilities and complete tasks optimally. In accordance with the research, Mrs. Ana determined the children's developmental achievement targets while studying at home based on the agreed time and provided a workload according to the capacity and ability of teachers and

students. The effectiveness of the principals' leadership is seen in determining the priority scale by focusing on the process and doing it right. Mrs. Ana and Mrs. Ani firmly adhered to the principle of professionalism as leaders who can solve tasks and problems efficiently. Problems often come and go, and the best solutions are found through openness, discussion, coordination, and communication. Effective leaders are able to determine priorities in the form of selecting and utilizing appropriate resources (Sacco et al., 2021). In addition, they also maximize potential and run processes in a structured manner, doing the job correctly so that it is time efficient.

The priorities taken by the kindergarten principal in conducting online learning include the following considerations (Alan, 2021): 1) Parents have limited knowledge on how to teach children and create a good playing environment and media for children; 2) Parents are busy working and do not have enough time to accompany their children in fun activities guided by teachers while studying at home; and 3) Children's learning motivation to participate in online learning activities is lacking, children prefer to play with toys, and the playing environment around the house is not conducive (Sari, Mutiara, & Aldila, 2020). Previous research has shown that children experience emotional changes while studying at home. As stated by Sukardi (2014), needs assessment can be defined as a systematic process carried out with the aim of setting priorities and making decisions for program improvement.

III.3 Win-win Mindset

To maintain the continuity of education, Mrs. Ana distributed medical equipment in the form of masks, hand sanitizers, and thermometer guns to minimize the spread of COVID-19, while Mrs. Ani eased the school payment system. In addition, Mrs. Ana also educated the surrounding community to obey the health protocol and distributed medical devices, media and learning needs for students and teachers once a month to study at home while monitoring the mental condition of teachers and students so that there was no moral damage. To overcome the problem of teacher resources, Mrs. Ana held digital media training.

Mrs. Ani was faced with school payment problems, so she came up with a solution to implement the installment system depending on the parents' abilities. She also built good communication between school members to increase student motivation. When switching from offline to online, Mrs. Ana communicated that schools need to be disciplined and obey government regulations in running online education. Negotiations were also done about the learning style that the parents and teachers' desire. The teacher also provided a home visit option with time and group arrangements according to mutual agreement. On the win-win mindset indicator, the results of interviews with two participants are as follows.

Parents were faced with challenges in facilitating their children's health protocol. Research by Sudrajat et al. (2021) found that the aids for health protocol, such as masks and hand sanitizer, are inaccessible to some parents due to financial issues. Since the COVID-19 pandemic started, not only that people's health conditions decrease, but they also suffer from financial decrease, and schools need to help by distributing these aids like what had been done by Mrs. Ana. Additionally, the financial issues resulted in difficulties to pay school fees, such as parents in the kindergarten led by Mrs. Ani. That was why Mrs. Ani applied the installment system depending on the parents' abilities. Different from the traditional system applied by Mrs. Ani, research by Fatmaningtyas (2020) found that the school payment system has been done online using Android-based apps to make it easier for parents to make payments to the school.

During the home study period, early childhood education teachers encouraged parents to support their children at home according to the guidelines, but the parents did not have the proper capabilities to develop various activities that are also fun, so their children do not get bored and stressed (Dai & Lin, 2020). Even homeschooling can cause early behavioral changes in children from the psychosocial aspects, such as negativism, depression, egoism, and other psycho-emotional disorder like anxiety

and emotional hyperactivity (Fauziah, Ernita, Octavia, & Dwiyanti, 2020). The teacher explains that the children's cognitive development developed very well. Previously they could not recognize two-dimensional shapes (triangles, circles, rectangles, length), three-dimensional shapes (cube, pyramid, tube), size (small, light, short), numbers (units, tens), and texture (smooth, hard, soft).

III.4 Empathetic Leadership and Building Synergy

The three kindergarten principals took an emotional approach to establish synergy between school members. Mrs. Ana tried to understand the problems experienced by parents, Mrs. Ani contributed to various training, and Mr. Aan was always ready to help those who needed help. Mrs. Ana listened to every problem experienced by parents, such as financial, family, and internet connection problems. That way, Mrs. Ana could identify any parental problems that could hinder learning. On another note, Mrs. Ani contributed to various training that were beneficial for herself and those around her, such as training or seminars on the socio-emotional development of children that need to be developed by parents and teachers. Mrs. Ani provided methods for developing children's social and emotional aspects such as queuing culture to train children's patience, asking for help when they need help, being grateful when given something, etc. According to Mrs. Ani, basic skills and self-help for children need to be taught both at school and at home involving parents and teachers. Finally, Mr. Aan communicated at the beginning of the new school year to parents not to hesitate to tell the problems they are facing. For instance, when parents and children tested positive for COVID-19, Mr. Aan had social funds set aside from school fees to be donated to the family. These data were obtained from the interview as quoted below.

The results of the interview are in line with Covey (2013) who states that the benefit of improving oneself socially is to establish closeness and concern for others. Kindergarten principals need to find ways to get involved, make contributions, and benefit others. The three participants have already done this. For instance, Mrs. Ana tried to understand other people by listening to every problem, Mrs. Ani contributed to training that was beneficial for those around her, and Mr. Aan was ready for school members who needed help. Research Ritonga et al. (2022) found that to increase the socio-emotional dimension, kindergarten principals can make consistent habits both at school and at home. Thus, the parents role while at home is needed in guiding and being a role model for children. Data had been obtained on the achievement of children's development based on their age during the learning process at school and at home. The data then became a reference in efforts to mitigate and provide stimulation to aspects of their development.

III.5 Self-Honing

Mrs. Ana honed herself by reading various literature while Mrs. Ani did so through webinar training. Mrs. Ana read various literature on leadership such as books and mass media to increase her understanding. This was done because Mrs. Ana felt the need to be responsible for her duties as a leader, share her passion for educating, work hard, and care for others. Mrs. Ani stated that self-development efforts were needed during the pandemic in order to be able to go through and deal with it well. Therefore, she attended online webinars on storytelling and parenting skills about children's learning styles while at home to increase her knowledge. The use of technology was carried out to improve meaningful and fun teaching for children.

Covey (2013) states that self-honing can be done by reading positive literature; keeping a journal of thoughts, experiences, and insights; and limiting television time only to programs that increase knowledge. Mrs. Ana had done one of the three, which was reading positive literature related to leadership to increase her knowledge. Not only through books, journals, and television, honing skills can also be done through seminars or webinars. Research by Made et al. (2021) found that leaders appear more confident in their leadership competencies (caring leadership) after attending webinars. This indicates that leaders are increasingly optimal in applying leadership styles through the positive activities they do (Hajiali et al., 2022). This is in line with Mrs. Ani who honed her abilities through seminars and webinars to be more optimal because, in addition to getting explanations, she was also able to discuss with other speakers and participants.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that all participants already have proactive leadership in the form of the ability to choose the pandemic response to improve the quality of teaching and the resilience of the institution to continue making innovation. They also took initiative and anticipatory steps to reduce the impact of learning loss, such as implementing the Merdeka curriculum and visiting teacher, literacy movement, and parenting programs. However, the kindergarten with the rural geographical condition has not shown a win-win mindset, especially in the aspect of negotiating and finding alternative solutions together, as evidenced by the lack of kindergarten's efforts to build agreements with school members in overcoming learning loss in children during online learning. Furthermore, the kindergarten in suburban geographical conditions has not reflected self-honing behavior in terms of physical dimensions because, during the pandemic, the mental burden and lack of rest time have hindered the kindergarten principal in ensuring their physical health.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the Principal who has contributed to this research and the Editorial Board of the SEA-CECCEP Journal for the suggestions and improvements given so that this journal can be published.

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