ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS’ COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT IN DEALING WITH THE COVID-19 CONDITIONS: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Sirajuddin Islam¹, Endang Sri Indrawati²

¹Human Resource Development, Postgraduate School, Universitas Airlangga
4-6 Airlangga Rd, Surabaya, Indonesia, 60115

²Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Diponegoro
Prof. Soedarto, SH. Street, Tembalang, Semarang, Indonesia, 50275
sirajuddin.islam-2019@pasca.unair.ac.id

Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on the education system, leading to school closures and switching to online learning with very short notice. In order to support the effectiveness of online learning, it is necessary to develop teachers’ competence in the utilization and use of online media. The study aimed to investigate educators’ teaching experience during online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. The three teachers who participated in this study were recruited from the Gubeng 1 Public Elementary School in Surabaya. Interview transcripts were analyzed qualitatively by using an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach. Data analysis raises three main themes: 1) an overview of online learning implementation in elementary schools, 2) challenges in the teacher competence development process, 3) support for teacher competence development. The results of this study indicate the importance of developing teacher digital competence to increase the effectiveness of online learning. Support from related parties is also needed to encourage the success of online learning.

Keywords: teacher competence; online learning; teacher competence development; interpretive phenomenological analysis

INTRODUCTION

The world has declared war against the coronavirus since it first surfaced in Wuhan, Hubei, China, in late 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) has announced the Covid-19 outbreak as a global pandemic (Sohrabi et al., 2020), and there have been tens of thousands of deaths so far. In an effort to handle the pandemic, the Indonesian government implemented Covid-19 health protocols, including physical distancing. The protocol advises people to limit visits to crowded places and avoid direct physical contact with others. Other forms of physical distancing have been previously implemented, such as work from home and home-based learning using online-based media.

Online learning was adopted as an alternative to distance learning to reduce the potential spread of the virus (Setiawan & Komalasari, 2020). It was also stated in a Circular Letter issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture regarding online learning during the Covid-19 emergency response period (Surat Edaran Menteri Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia Nomor 35952/MPK.A/HK/2020, 2020). Educators were required to teach using online-based media.

Due to health protocols, classroom learning was temporarily stopped and social interactions between educators and students were limited. These circumstances reduced the effectiveness of the academic process because many students had trouble understanding the materials due to the absence of hands-on learning.

The educational process requires a reciprocal relationship between educator and student, as in the classroom. Several subjects are closely related to social learning and social presence, thus requiring positive interaction between educators and students in order to build learning effectiveness (Setiawan & Komalasari, 2020). According to Edgar Dale
(in Sanjaya, 2006), learning by engaging in direct purposeful experiences, study trips or observations are concrete learning that can create perceptual learning experiences, as shown in the ‘Cone of Experience’. According to the Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura, observational learning can teach certain skills and behaviors (Abdullah, 2019). An individual who observes another individual may then imitate, adopting the other person as a role model (Kaparang, 2013).

The quality of teachers’ competence will influence the quality of education because one of the determinants of low-quality learning is the lack of teachers’ professional competence (Setiani et al., 2019). A professional teacher is not only required to master the learning material but also has to master all aspects of learning because meaningful learning needs to involve all students and covers all areas of learning, such as cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects (Asmarani, 2014). According to Slameto (in Lukita & Sudibjo, 2021), there are three factors that influence the learning process: internal, external, and fatigue factors. Internal factors include interest in learning, while external factors include the parental role and teachers’ creativity in teaching.

Kuswantoro explained that self-improvement with new innovations and updated development is very important to adapt with the recent situation (in Setiawan & Komalasari, 2020). Hardianto (as cited in Murniasih, 2021) described the eight competencies that teachers need to acquire for online learning, namely: 1) mastering and updating the current internet developments, 2) advance in basic science and other disciplines, 3) being creative and innovative in delivering material, 4) ability to motivate students, 5) skills in developing new material, 6) ability to manage learning, 7) accuracy in selecting appropriate teaching materials, and 8) the ability to control the academic process.

Online learning is closely related to the use of technology; hence, teachers’ experience in using technology is a requirement for successful online teaching. Teachers’ capacity to use technology is essential because technical challenges in online learning influence students’ learning motivation (Izzatunnisa et al., 2021). Based on the results of a study conducted by Huriyah (2019), teachers’ creativity has a positive impact on students learning motivation. The use of technology in education can also increase students’ enthusiasm and avoid boredom in learning.

For elementary school teachers who are accustomed to face-to-face learning, the current condition has caused a great deal of trepidation. As Rigianti (2020) stated, elementary school teachers were not ready to use online learning support applications. Abroto et al. (2021) revealed that 30 percent of teachers were not familiar with applications for online learning. In line with the study results conducted by Fitra et al. (2020), that found three teachers (18%) did not understand how to use online learning media such as Google Classroom. Based on the findings of Setiawan et al. (2021), elementary school teachers experienced difficulties in developing media for online learning; thus, online learning has not been conducted optimally. Lack of experience in online teaching as well as the inability to operate mobile phones and laptops were obstacles to adopting online learning methods (Muliyan & Supriadin, 2020).

There are interesting facts regarding teachers’ abilities in performing online teaching. Previous studies have shown that the ability of teachers in utilizing technology is one of the success keys of online learning. However, many elementary teachers in Surabaya were not familiar with the use of online media. On the other hand, many elementary students in Surabaya were accustomed to accessing online media (Coring & Nafiah, 2019). This was an alarming condition considering that Surabaya is a large city with good educational facilities. With the lack of ability to use technology in teaching to adapt with the pandemic situation, it has become a concern.
that problems will emerge in the future. The impact of rapid technological development requires teachers to adjust and improve digital competencies for teaching purposes (Ilomäki et al., 2016).

Based on the above description, the main question is, “How has your online teaching experience been during the Covid-19 pandemic?” The study aimed to investigate educators’ teaching experience during online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**METHOD**

This qualitative study uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to investigate the teaching experience during online learning in the Covid-19 pandemic. IPA is associated with a detailed examination of an individual’s experiences with the aim of understanding the experiences, which means that the subject is actively engaged in the interpretation of events, objects, and other people in his/her life (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Participants of this study were recruited purposively by considering the homogeneity of their shared experience. The recruitment process was helped by the principal of Sekolah Dasar Negeri Gubeng 1 Surabaya. Three participants were selected with an age range of 28 to 55 years and with some online teaching experience. This decision was made in an effort to fulfill the objectives of IPA, which prioritizes data depth rather than width (Smith, 2004).

Data or information regarding the teaching experiences were obtained through semi-structured interviews. The main question asked was, “How has your online teaching experience been during the Covid-19 pandemic?” Other questions were given in response to the first question answer. Participants were allowed to share their experiences as teachers before the pandemic as well as during online learning. At the end of the interview, the researcher checked whether the required information was obtained. The main purpose of the interview was to gain substantial information or data for analysis. This is consistent with the phenomenological view that a detailed analysis process related to the participant’s experience in an event is an important approach (La Kahija, 2017).

**Characteristics of participants**

Only initials were used in this study to maintain confidentiality. All participants had obtained approval from their school and agreed to participate by filling out an informed consent. The characteristics of the participants can be seen in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Char.</th>
<th>S1</th>
<th>S2</th>
<th>S3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>55 YO</td>
<td>36 YO</td>
<td>28 YO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>28 yrs.</td>
<td>9 yrs.</td>
<td>3 yrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Char. = Characteristics; S = Subject.*

**Procedure**

Interviews were conducted in the teacher’s room as instructed by the principal, and tight health protocols were implemented, such as wearing masks and putting glass barriers between tables. Before the interview, the researcher explained about the study and asked participants to sign an informed consent. The researcher recorded the interview process using a mobile phone, and interviews were conducted twice with each participant with an hour duration for each meeting.

**Data analysis**

Data or information obtained from the interviews was then transcribed into raw data for analysis based on IPA procedures. The main concern of the analysis was the interpretation of the subjective experience of each participant. Hence, the researcher needed to read carefully and repeatedly in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the
experience. Preliminary notes were made and presented as exploratory comments on the transcripts. These notes were then transformed into emergent themes. The next step was determining superordinate themes, which resulted from grouping emergent themes with similar contexts. The whole process was executed separately for each participant. After all superordinate themes were obtained, the researcher examined the interrelationships of these themes to formulate the main theme.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to answer the question, “How has your online teaching experience been during the Covid-19 pandemic?” The answers were obtained in personal experience reports during online learning in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. The analysis produced three main themes: 1) an overview of online learning implementation in elementary schools, 2) challenges in the teacher competence development process, and 3) support for teacher competence development.

An overview of online learning implementation in elementary schools

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with the three participants based on the main question of how the online teaching experience has been during the Covid-19 pandemic for them. The school had planned and implemented online-based learning following the Circular Letter issued by The Ministry of Education and Culture number 36962/MPK.A/HK/2020 regarding online learning during the Covid-19 emergency response period.

During the online learning period, S was still teaching from school. She was constantly anxious about being infected by the virus, considering her age and pre-existing medical condition.

“This virus is dangerous, many of my neighbors have died, people say, because they were positive. I am terrified too… I’m old and diabetic. I’m constantly anxious. I’m reluctant to chat with my colleagues in person.” (S, 24-27)

Subject S also stated that although she has been teaching for a long time, she has never taught without her students’ physical presence. However, given the current situation, she will do whatever it takes so that her students continue to learn.

“I was not sure. Of course, Covid scares me considering my age but to see that the children can’t go to school, that makes me even sadder. I was waiting for instructions from the minister and relieved when he decided on online-based learning. I was not familiar with it, but I was ready when our principal ordered us to prepare for online learning, even though I had no idea how to do it at first.” (S, 33-37)

Based on the statements above, S constantly worries about being infected by Covid-19, especially because she is old and with a comorbid condition. However, she is persistent in accomplishing her duties as a teacher and prepared for online teaching as instructed by the principal, even though she was not familiar with online-based learning.

Subjects I and M had the same concern even though they were younger than S. This was due to online learning having to be conducted from the school using school facilities, therefore, they still had physical interaction with their colleagues.

“This virus is real. Some of my friends the same age as I have died because of this virus. Of course, I am scared, it’s not all about age… I’m worried about catching the virus, and then spreading it to my colleagues especially the older ones. Thank God, we always implement health protocols, and we look after each other.” (I, 20-24)

Subject I face some challenges during online learning, especially in planning a lesson, because not all materials can be delivered online.
“So...for example sport teachers, they teach but the students are not physically present. Yes, we have received directions from our principal, but I believe there are times when we don’t know how to plan a lesson or deliver certain material. I can just teach...but the most important thing is for the students to understand.” (I, 35-38)

Subject M experienced the same challenge in selecting appropriate materials for online learning.

“This condition forces me to think harder. Okay, we can use an application for teaching, but how to utilize it so it is easy for children to understand the lesson? Moreover, I am still new to teaching and not experienced...so I need to figure things out quickly.” (M, 32-35)

Despite concerns about contracting Covid-19, teachers are required to be professional and continue teaching in accordance with the Circular Letter from The Ministry of Education and Culture. Given that these conditions are new to teachers, there were challenges in online learning, such as choosing appropriate materials as well as delivery methods that are easy to understand.

Challenges in the teacher competence development process

The global pandemic has forced educational institutions to switch classroom learning to online learning. This change raises many challenges in the teacher competence development process, including lesson planning competence. The participants confirmed that they faced difficulties in planning online lessons at the beginning due to the sudden change. Subject S mentioned difficulties in lesson planning.

“If it is a normal situation, I mean the students just come to school, I do not have to deal with such difficulties. But the children are not here, they learn from home, so I have to pick materials that are appropriate for this condition as well as figure out how to deliver the lesson. I am an old teacher accustomed to face-to-face teaching. It is very difficult.” (S, 52-54)

The same situation was also experienced by subject I, who consider this a challenge for teachers in the digital age. She believes that she is required to be more creative and innovative in her lesson planning.

“Yes, it is difficult and I believe that my colleagues face the same challenges. We have never taught like this before. When it comes to science or local language, we need to plan the lesson and figure out how to deliver it. However, as teachers, we need to keep teaching despite such conditions, it is our challenge as educators. We need to be more creative than before.” (I, 50-54)

Subject M experienced the same thing, planning a lesson and choosing appropriate materials. However, because she is relatively young and understands technology better, she can adapt quickly to current teaching conditions.

“They are elementary school students, not high school or college students who can understand quicker. We teach lessons that require their physical presence so they can understand better. Because it is now online learning, we need to make creative media to help them understand even though it is only displayed on screen” (M, 47-50)

Overall, the three participants experienced the same challenges in the competence development process, especially in online teaching competence. Teachers are required to be innovative and creative in making and delivering lessons, thus, self-improvement with new innovation and updated development is very important to adapt to current situations.

Support for teacher competence development

Support from related parties such as school, government, and parents are needed to
increase the online learning effectiveness. Subject S explained that before conducting online learning, the school had held a meeting with the teachers to discuss the implementation of online learning and younger teachers were instructed to share their knowledge on the use of online learning media with older teachers.

“Before the implementation of online learning, the principal held a meeting with the teachers. He encouraged younger teachers to teach us and share their knowledge of technology. I had no idea how to use online platforms for teaching. It certainly helped me.” (S, 80-84)

Support from school by encouraging younger teachers to transfer their knowledge to older teachers is expected to accelerate the improvement of digital competence for all teachers, especially the older ones. Subject I mentioned that the school and government had facilitated online learning by installing Wi-Fi at the school and providing devices that support online learning.

“Thank God, the response was fast. You can see the Wi-Fi from here, another one is over there in the corner. The school also provided some laptops for teachers. Usually when we teach using video or other media, we use the laptops. We also browse other online learning media.” (I, 83-86)

Subject M explained that the Surabaya City Government through the Education Office, had held trainings on using online media for online learning. The school had sent some teachers to join training to improve their digital competence.

“I was instructed by the principal to join training from the City Education Office, I received a lot of new information. We were trained to teach using Google Classroom, Zoom and even WhatsApp. We were asked to teach our colleagues so that everyone would gain the same knowledge. If we had questions, we could contact the trainers at anytime.” (M, 87-90)

Support that is no less important is the parents support in optimizing online learning. To achieve the effectiveness of online learning, parents are required to prepare their home, creating a conducive and comfortable environment for learning. The three participants agreed that parents play an important role in supporting the effectiveness of home-based online learning.

Subject S When children learn at home, parental involvement is necessary. If the parents are not present, children will find something else to do and won’t focus. (S, 96-100)

Subject I Actually, with online learning, the role of control is placed upon parents. If their houses are crowded or noisy, the students can’t focus and you can see it in their eyes, it’s such a pity. (I, 97-101)

Subject M Mm… when we learn in the classroom, we can just call them, come to them, warn them, tell them. Now with online learning, some students are not seen on screen, I have called them many times and still no answer. Once I found a student was hiding under the table asleep. That is why parental role is very important. (M, 91-94)

Overall, support from related parties is very much needed by teachers to improve their competence. Competence development can certainly help teachers to plan lessons, choose appropriate materials, and deliver the lesson effectively during online learning.

As long as Covid-19 is still with us and The Ministry of Education and Culture has not issued a new policy, online learning is still the best solution to continue the academic process. The almost overnight switch from face-to-face to online learning due to the virus has required all educators to be technology
literate (Hofer et al., 2021). Teachers are expected to be innovative and creative in composing lessons as well as delivering them in the most engaging way; hence, self-improvement with new innovation and current development is very important in dealing with the current crisis (Setiawan & Komalasari, 2020).

Changes to the education system from classroom learning to online learning created many challenges, such as the online teaching competence development process, lesson planning competence, and digital technology competence. Planning plays an important role in every activity, including learning (Djumingin & Syamsudduha, 2016). In addition, another challenge is that the internet coverage is not good in some areas of Surabaya and can cause delays during live lessons (Rahmasari et al., 2020). These conditions hinder students from understanding the lessons because learning materials are not delivered optimally.

Educators need to choose the correct media for interesting learning. They are expected to create and utilize engaging learning media to help students understand better (Gudmundsdottir & Hatlevik, 2017). The media chosen should be able to improve the students’ experience as well. Edgar Dale described it in the Cone of Experience from the most concrete (bottom) to the most abstract (top), as follows: 1) Direct Purposeful Experiences, 2) Contrived Experiences, 3) Dramatized Experiences, 4) Demonstrations, 5) Study Trips, 6) Exhibits, 7) Educational Television, 8) Motion Pictures, 9) Recording, Radio, Still Pictures, 10) Visual Symbols, and 11) Verbal Symbols (Sari, 2019). The Cone of Experience provides models of various media that can be adopted from the most abstract to the most concrete. The more concrete the learning media adopted, the more the learning experience gained. On the contrary, the more abstract the learning media adopted, the less the learning experience gained (Ismail & Alexandro, 2021). Additionally, educators are expected to be creative, able to negotiate, as well as to integrate pedagogical and digital resources into meaningful teaching practices (Dамșa et al., 2021).

Discussions, presentations, and assignments are activities that can be carried out during online learning. Online learning trains independent learning, which requires greater involvement of students to improve observational learning behavior (Firman & Rahman, 2020). Therefore, parents are required to create conducive conditions at home to help their children focus, as well as to manage their own time between doing domestic work and accompanying their children during learning.

The effectiveness of learning can be improved with support from related parties, such as the school and the government. Government support is needed to overcome problems such as improving the quality of the internet in Surabaya and providing free internet service for families with elementary school children. The government, through relevant institutions, is also expected to perform ongoing evaluations to identify problems as well as to monitor all schools and give immediate response to schools that encounter difficulties with online learning. The Surabaya City Government has yet to authorize face-to-face learning because the Ministry of Education and Culture has not issued a new policy regarding learning guidelines during the pandemic. Future research can use the findings in this study as a reference for conducting research related to the effectiveness of the government’s role in the implementation of online learning.

CONCLUSION

The present study revealed teachers’ experiences during online learning in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. The results of the study raised three main themes: 1) an overview of online learning implementation in elementary schools, 2) challenges in the teacher competence development process, and 3) support for teacher competence development. The findings of this study indicate the importance of developing teacher
digital competence in order to improve online learning effectiveness. Support from related parties is also required to encourage the success of online learning.

REFERENCES


Elementary School Teachers’ Competence Development in Dealing with The Covid-19 Conditions (An Interpretative Phenomenological Study)


Pengabdian dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat, 1(1), 46–57. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31331/manggali.v1i1.1547

