



#### **Conference Paper**

# **`Build Back Better': Building School-Community Partnerships for Vulnerable Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

#### Ila Rosmilawati<sup>1</sup>, Nurmila Handayani<sup>1</sup>, and Izzah Nur Salima<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Nonformal Education, Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa <sup>2</sup>Department of Guidance and Counselling, Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa

#### ORCID:

Ila Rosmilawati: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9532-5275

#### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected many students around the world. The Indonesian government responded with school closures and the transition into distance learning. However, the Ministry of Communication and Information announced that there were 12,548 villages which did not have internet access and that electronic devices were unavailable for students from less well-off families. This study aimed to employ a non-empirical research methodology to highlight the importance of carrying out non-technological educational strategies by forming partnerships between schools and communities in vulnerable communities. The model of school-community partnership was carried out by forming small study groups in a neighborhood. Learning was assisted by teachers and volunteer tutors. This learning innovation was formed to provide equal opportunities for vulnerable students who were unable to perform online learning. Through such approaches we can rebuild education for those who were left behind as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: community engagement, COVID-19, school partnership, vulnerable student

# **1. Introduction**

Before the COVID-19 pandemic existed, the education sector was still had some several problems. In 2018, the World Bank reported persuasively about the learning crisis that occurred in many countries. Starting from the low interest in reading to the high school dropouts, especially in the Asia-Africa region [1]. Coupled with the outbreak of COVID-19 which is referred to as a world pandemic, has an impact on various aspects, including education. Research published by UNESCO (in Aoyagi, 2020) states that a pandemic can push more than half a billion people into poverty which can hinder the achieving standard of living and human rights over the next 30 years. COVID-19 pandemic has affected 91% of students in the world, and made nearly 1.6 billion students drop out

Corresponding Author: Ila Rosmilawati irosmilawati@untirta.ac.id

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of school [2]. Some of these students will not be able to return to school, especially for developing countries. This has an impact on the vulnerability of gender inequality, sexual violence and child exploitation. So that serious efforts are needed to overcome the conditions facing the world today.

For many countries in the world, the concept of telecommuting, which is a modern concept of the putting out system due to the development and advancement of technology and information [3] or the concept of online learning is a new normal, which will apply in various forms after the recovery period. As with Indonesian, there were new policies during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesian issued a Circular Number 4 of 2020 concerning the Implementation of Education Policy in Emergency During the Distribution of the COVID. In the Circular, it was explained that the learning process would be carried out at each home through online/ distance learning to provide meaningful learning experience for students [4]. Suggestions from the government to stay at home and maintain physical and social distancing must be followed by changes in learning programs from face to face to via online [5]. Naidu [6], explained that online learning usually intentionally uses network information and communication technology in teaching and learning. Online learning is learning that uses internet networks with accessibility, connectivity, flexibility, and the ability to bring up various types of learning interactions [7].

Although the government responded responsively to school closures and the transition of learning into distance learning (ed-tech). However, there is a growing consensus that many are left behind by the COVID-19 pandemic [8]. The learning crisis and the challenge to realize the rights of every child to get access to education will be more serious. This is because online learning is not effective for those who live in disadvantaged areas and the lower middle class. Moreover, with the encouragement of this pandemic, poor people are becoming increasingly backward. Many of them have difficulty accessing the internet for online learning media. This is supported by data published by UNESCO in 2017 where only about 55% of people in Asia-Pacific can access the internet [2]. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Communication and Information said there were 12,548 villages in Indonesia that did not have internet access. This certainly makes the online learning process not possible in the area.

There are many obstacles experienced when online learning is chosen to be a form of substitute learning face to face. Starting from the limitations of the signal and the unavailability of devices in every student because not all students come from well-off families. Even the existence of online assignments is considered to be a burden on some students and parents [9]. As a result, anxiety also appears. Such anxiety arises because **KnE Social Sciences** 



students lack understanding of the material, have difficulty doing assignments well within the time limit, have limitations in accessing the internet, facing various technical obstacles, and feel worried about-facing material at the next level [10]. Especially for elementary school children who have not been able to fully operate a device. Therefore, the cooperation between teachers and parents in important [4]. This shows that non-technological solutions are needed to reach many students in areas that lack even no access to technology. School and community collaboration can be a solution so that the education gap does not widen.

Seeing the phenomena that exist in the Education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, many researchers are competing to make various innovations to alleviate these problems. In this context, the thought of 'build back better' seems to be a solution to this problem. This is a new concept in education sector, but it is used in post-disaster management. For example, in the handling of post-tsunami disasters that require the rebuilding of destroyed houses, buildings, and community economics. The concept of 'builds back better' consists of recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction. However, rebuilding education due to the COVID-19 pandemic did not only take place based on technology as many have been designed by international organizations, universities, civil society and the private sector. This is because many Indonesian people are included in the 'vulnerable group' category, meaning that not all school students can access technology for learning. By prioritizing the power of integration, the above community components should be able to build partnerships to ensure equitable and inclusive education.

For example in Thailand government, in addition to providing distance learning television programs for remote rural communities that are expanded on a national scale, the government also provides reading devices that can be used offline by students [2]. Another example is Afghanistan, which draws up distance learning plans and small group learning. In this case, learning is not only done with the help of information technology and television, but also uses community power as an alternative to the learning process in schools with the help of parents, religious leaders, community leaders and middle school students as instructors for elementary school level. Seeing the problems above, and based on experiences from other countries, innovation in the form of learning programs for vulnerable students can be done through a partnership collaboration between schools and neighborhood groups. The article will elaborate schools-communities partnership for primary education during the COVID-19 Pandemic based on school principal, teachers, community leaders and parents' aspiration participate in this study. Followed by explaining the neighbor-based small group learning



strategies that can be a solution to the problem of access technology in learning that is mostly experienced by vulnerable groups.

# 2. Related Works/Literature Review

School-community partnerships is one of among many countries' effort to improve nation's education systems. In this initiatives and also during COVID-19 pandemic, school expand the traditional education mission, which is involving broader community surrounding school to provide learning for students in the neighborhood area. Literature explains school-community partnerships as intentional efforts 'to create long-standing relationships among schools or school districts and organization in the local community' [11]. The definition of school-community partnerships in this study as a "connecting together" of family, school, community with the interact as "allies in the education of the children" [12]. Families as a community member, in this regards, is an important stakeholders who will collaborate with school to help children succeed in school. School-community partnerships have been found to provide social services, support student learning, improve the academic mission of school, and assist families [11, 13]. Research conducted by Epstein & Van Voorhis [14] indicates that the education achievement gap decrease when school, family and community leader and members work together to provide learning environment for the children. Collaboration may happen with the support of community stakeholder, include in sharing skills, resources, network and programs to provide responsive services to meet the situation during COVID-19 pandemic. Successful partnerships are intentionally infused with the principles of democratic collaboration; student, family, and community empowerment; social justice, and strengths [15].

Key to partnership in school-community collaboration is sharing power and boundaries as well as responsibilities and goals to provide an education to children [16]. Based on Valli, Stefanski & Jacobson's study [16], there are four typology of school-community partnership, it is include family and interagency collaboration, full-service school, fullservice community school, and a community development model. Furthermore, Epstein [14, 17] proposes six different types of involvement in school-community collaboration: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Parent can be act as volunteer teachers to enhance students' learning activity at home. Research has found that there is a positive relationship between parent involvement and student's attitude toward learning and schooling [18]. During current difficult situation due to COVID-19 pandemic, where most students



are sent home to study with online mode, parent can play a vital role in encouraging their children to conduct meaningful learning activities. Epstein [17] provides suggestion to create a community profile, where the school leader identify learning resources within the neighborhood. It includes the area around the school, home neighborhoods, and other location where students and other community members spend time. To build this partnerships, trust and effective interpersonal communication among stakeholders are essential part. It is suggested that school leader, teacher, parents, and community leader can build the trust, readiness and get benefit from the partnership.

### 3. Material & Methodology

This study utilises both empirical and non-empirical research methodology. Empirical methods in this study refers to qualitative methods in which the researchers collected the data from interview with informants. Of twenty-five informants were participated in this study, include school principals, teachers, community leaders and parents in Serang City to hear their aspiration of education during COVID-19 pandemic situation. The research team also collected the information about the student learning boundaries and limitation during this pandemic situation, and with the research participants we discuss the solution. The research was conducted from Mei to July 2020. Beside empirical method, the researcher also use non-empirical research methods, which is a type of literature study that contains theories that are relevant to the research problem. Therefore, the research was conducted through collecting literature with the aim of the object of research being literature to problems solve in critical and in-depth study of relevant library materials. The several sources used are books, scientific journals, statistical references, research results in the form of undergraduate thesis, master thesis, dissertations, and the internet, as well as other relevant sources [19].

After all the data has been collected, the next step is analysing the data using content analysis and qualitative systematic review [20]. The strategic steps in this content analysis research are, firstly, determining the design or research model, secondly, looking for primary data, and thirdly, looking for contextual knowledge. The content analysis is followed by qualitative systematic review.

The data analysis using qualitative systematic review includes several stages. The first stage is decontextualization, the researchers familiarize themselves with the data and read the transcript text to get an overall understanding. In the second stage of re-contextualization, the researcher examined whether all aspects of the literature data content were related to the research objectives. Literature data is reread



to mark sentences that fit the purpose of the study. Then, the researchers consider information from literature that is not in accordance with the purpose of the study. In the third stage of categorization, researchers explain specific and explicit areas based on theoretical assumptions from previous data. Categorization is fulfilled when a reasonable explanation has been reached. The fourth stage of compilation, after the analysis process category is set, then the writing begins. The researchers focus on exploring how the essence of information from the phenomenon under study. Researchers conducted analysis by considering a neutral perspective and objectivity. As a preliminary examination, the researcher consider how the new findings are consistent with the literature, whether the results make sense and are logical [20, 21].

### 4. Results and Discussion

In normal situations, children spend 80% of their time outside of school and 20% for learning in the classroom. The COVID-19 pandemic has suddenly changed 20% to 100% of children learning at home [23]. For children with conditions below the poverty line, the demands of online home-based learning will experience problems. This is because regions with limited resources in the form of technology access and internet connections are very difficult. Another problem arises because of the limitations of students who do not have a device and there are still many students and parents who do not understand technology at this time. This is compounded by the situation of parents who cannot buy internet packages for their children's learning process due to economic limitations that are compounded by the existence of the COVID-19 pandemic [24].

All of the above obstacles also impact on teachers who teach in rural areas. Where many teachers have to create learning strategies are suitable and appropriate to be used outside school. Considering that online learning is very difficult to implement, it is necessary to have a non-technological strategy as an alternative solution so that learning for those who live in communities that lack technology access. This is done to ensure that all Indonesian children receive the proper education. The non-technology strategy can be carried out by forming partnerships between schools and communities in the vulnerable community.

#### 4.1. School-community Partnership

In Indonesia, one factor that causes the quality of education is uneven, namely stakeholder involvement that is still minimal [25]. Parents and the community are stakeholders **KnE Social Sciences** 



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who have been neglected in the management of education [26]. The management of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic can take advantage of partnership relationships between formal institutions, namely schools, with communities, whether parents (family), religious leaders, students, or volunteers. Valli, Stefanski & Jacobson (2014) call this partnership a model as a 'full-service community schools'. This collaboration model, besides involving parents and the surrounding community, is also open to communities who are willing to participate in it. Even though the services provided to students remain school-based, the main key lies in the involvement of these parents and community. According to Gold, Simon, & Brown (in Valli et al., 2014), the school-community partnership is a place for parents and community members to contribute to changes in school and children's learning.

Partnership collaboration school is a concept of learning by involving educational centers, namely schools, families and communities in order to build an educational ecosystem conducive to developing the potential and character of students [27]. Aside from being an important and useful tool, schools, homes and communities are also the main context in children's learning. The collaboration will be very beneficial for the development and learning of children. Furthermore, Brigdes, et al. (2011) defines that the practice of collaborative education involving various aspects and small communities is considered effective for people who are vulnerable to disparities in access to learning, as well as allowing education to occur. Myende (2011) in his research stated that the effect of implementing partnership and collaboration schools by integrating various elements of society to support the learning process of students showed the good results. Mutual support has led students in rural areas with limited access to improve student performance by organizing weekend classes and forming small groups in each village. Through collaboration between schools, communities and religious leaders.

In addition, the concept of partnership collaborative learning has a positive impact on children's development, especially in academics and attitudes [11]. Learning is done using four models, namely the family/interagency collaboration model, the full-service school model, the complete community school model, and the community development model. A similar concept also has been applied by CASA De Maryland in the United States in collaboration with various elementary schools in Langley Park by involving the role of parents and community and partnering with public high schools and youth groups to support 1,760 families with children under 18 years [30]. Learning is done by practicing neighborhood-based education, placing parents-as-teachers, and organizing activities in small family groups. The application of this strategy, in addition to overcoming



obstacles to learning in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and gaps in access to online learning, can also strengthen families.

A similar concept with a different model has also been applied by Reynolds & Clements (2005) through the "Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project" is a partnership between the Sacramento City Teachers Association consisting of religious groups, youth groups, and civil society. Work together to provide educational services for children who do not have access to education. Through the Chicago Parent Center Model, parental participation has a major impact on children's academic success and social development. This model is also considered as one of the strategies to reduce dropout rates.

#### 4.2. Neighborhood Learning Group

The partnership school-community model during the COVID-19 pandemic was carried out by forming small study groups in a neighbourhood. The use of the concept of "neighbourhood learning group" with the formation of small learning groups that involve surrounding communities such as neighbours can be done instead of distance learning. Learning is conducted by involving 4-7 students per cluster who are peers. Group size can also affect the way small groups share and study together, for example group sizes above 7 tend to break into smaller groups and may require students to act as leaders to help facilitate learning. The SCALE-UP process recommends groups that are no larger than three students, and arranges them around a nine-student round table for broader discussion [32]. But one study found the best measure was five students [33].

Small group can be made for each neighbourhood around two to three groups depending on the number of students and grade levels. Groups are made based on grade and age level. This is to simplify the learning process and to adjust learning material. Small group learning can be in the form of classroom-based training through experiential learning activities, such as case study analysis, role play, games, simulations, and brainstorming [34]. These activities require students to work together and achieve learning goals. Learning strategies in small groups show greater achievement [35] and it may achieved in the context of the Pandemic COVID-19 situation. This strategy is appropriate given the limited accessibility of school the children. Small group learning enables students to develop problem solving, interpersonal, presentation and communication skills, all of which are beneficial for life outside the classroom [36]. The special advantage of the small group learning model is that it can compare learning



performance with peers and develop a sense of responsibility for the progress of their learning [37].

Learning can be assisted and guided by a peer tutor who is a brother or an adult who can be a facilitator and motivator in learning small units. According to Francine Armenth-Brothers (2009), one thing to keep in mind when implementing this practice is not to start without direction which will help reduce confusion within a group. Learning materials already have been provided through large classes or home visits by the teacher on the scheduled day. This school-community partnership learning strategy is explained through the figure below.



Figure 1: School-community collaboration design

In this learning design, every stakeholder is asked to take a role. School will provide a learning service through managing a learning schedule and identifying a learning space for every group of learners. Teachers from school may provide a lesson plans and learning materials. The teachers also can teach in a certain group and maintain coordination with other volunteer teachers. Parents may assist their children learning as well as being a teacher volunteer. Other volunteer may come from university student who live in the same area, high school student, pensioners, and community learners.



#### 4.3. Playful Learning in Everyday Places

In the 'new normal' era of the COVID-19 pandemic, educators still have to continue the process of learning. If students cannot come to school, and online learning are not a solution for vulnerable students, then collaborative partnerships with families and communities can become a major force. The neighbourhood can become a 'playful learning landscape' [39] that provide public space as a learning space and resource during learning from home. The learning process in the small group of neighbour refers to the health protocol, which is by keeping a distance, using a mask and washing hands regularly. The teaching and learning process in small groups uses games and provides ways to encourage the involvement of the community environment [40]. A study shows that the best experience of children is when they can learn in an interactive, active, meaningful, and socially involved context [41]. This learning can be done by the method of free games, guided games, which involve the activeness of students. The concept of learning landscape can be done in small communities or families [41].

The playful learning landscape strategy can be implemented by collaborating with the community and local government. Public spaces such as libraries or community reading parks may be restricted from access to new normal conditions. Including public places such as shops and supermarkets that may be limited. This can be overcome by using "public speak" where public spaces provide a variety of simple signboards containing information that can be read and conversation between parents and children. Furthermore, parents or adults who accompany children to learn can trigger children to do literacy by looking for opportunities so that children can ask questions that trigger conversations, about what students see, hear and observe. Parents can ask children questions such as "where does milk come from?" or "is this fruit green or yellow?" and similar questions that will make a child's cognitive honed through daily activities. Although in the home the parent can ask the child to tell how the child's daily life or retell about an incident that has been seen by the child. Building interactive communication patterns can help children feel happy when learning.

For parents in the village, can take advantage of daily activities as part of the child's learning process. Children can be involved in various small activities that can encourage cognitive abilities such as inviting children to count the number of fruits that have been harvested from the garden, separating different types of fruit and similar activities. In addition, activities at home can be done by teaching children to garden around the house, tucking in a variety of science learning such as the difference between leaves that are photosynthetic and those that are not. Explain the function of farming and



other things that can trigger children's curiosity. This is certainly done by involving the role of the teacher and the school which has already provided socialization about what parents can do to help students' learning process. Learning materials do not have to be specialized but can be directed according to the psychological development of children.

Making every activity as a playground both the family environment and the community environment is a strategy that will facilitate children to experience good development. The limitations and disparities in education between rural communities and urban communities, especially those that cannot be resolved with technological solutions, do not necessarily become obstacles to the learning process that every Indonesian child should experience. Collaboration between schools, families, communities and service communities is an alternative practice for dealing with the changing dynamics of learning.

# **5.** Conclusion

Education is not a panacea, but the most powerful tool for vulnerable groups to get out of their difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic. Quality learning must be done fairly for all girls and boys to achieve a peaceful and sustainable future. Therefore, we make an innovation in the form of a learning program for students who are less able to get access to education properly by collaborating partnerships between schools and surrounding communities. So both the community, literate parents, religious leaders, and students, they will contribute to being a tutor in the surrounding environment for students who need learning. As for areas that are difficult to reach, the community can form small groups of five to eight students with one teacher to conduct learning directly while still observing physical distance in accordance with the health protocol from the Government. Innovations in this learning program are formed to provide equal opportunities for every student who has an inequality in receiving online learning information in the community, including digital divide and technology. So, we can rebuild education for those who are left behind and underdeveloped as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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