

Research article

Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic for the Education of Children of Indonesian Migrant Workers on the Sebatik Island Border

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Schools in border areas are threatened with closure due to the difficulty of organizing learning in the midst of a pandemic. This paper portrays this reality by describing the learning process of a border school (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Darul Furqon) on Sebatik Island (the Indonesia-Malaysia border) during the COVID-19 pandemic. School is the foundation for the children of Indonesian migrant workers who work in Malaysian oil palm plantations. Therefore, this research applied a case study approach using qualitative research with the unit of analysis being families of Indonesian migrant workers who send their children to border schools. The results showed that learning activities in border schools can be facilitated through both online and offline learning. However, students often cannot attend lessons because of the lack of guidance from parents who are busy working as palm oil workers. Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has also caused student interest to decline and has triggered an increase in school dropouts. Student education during the pandemic is viewed as free time to help parents earn extra income.

Keywords: school, COVID-19, Sebatik, borderland

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1. Introduction

The world has been facing a Covid-19 pandemic since it first appeared in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The spread of this virus was faster than the 1918 Spanish influenza pandemic. At that time it took months to spread from Europe to Australia or South America because ship travel required a longer time. Meanwhile, as transportation technology advances, Covid 19 spreads in a matter of days throughout the world [1][2]. This virus continues to spread throughout the world, including Indonesia. In response to this, President Jokowi instructed the handling of Covid-19 to be carried out at the micro level, by giving authority to the Covid-19 task force in each region. Although the government's policies were initially quite controversial and confusing, now the handling of Covid 19 is more organized and directed.

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In this position, the regional government on the Indonesia-Malaysia border seems to need to carry out an extra strategy [3]. In this case, the researcher photographed the condition of the Indonesia-Malaysia border on Sebatik Island. Sebatik Island has land and sea which are divided into Indonesia (south) and Malaysia (north). Sebatik Island in Indonesia is included in the sub-district of Nunukan Regency, North Kalimantan. Some people on Sebatik Island depend on the agricultural sector and work as migrant workers in Malaysia [4]. With the restrictions during the pandemic, the people on Sebatik Island experienced shocks over the policies issued by the government. For example, they do not understand and actually use masks in their daily lives. Other than that,

Regarding Covid 19, the Nunukan Regency Government has shown a proactive attitude by issuing Circular Letter Number 2 of 2021. The letter contains restrictions on community activities in order to stop the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The reason is of course because of the intense mobility between countries in the region. Based on survey data in the field to the Covid-19 cluster unit in Nunukan Regency (2021) positive cases have reached 1031 people, even Nunukan is in the red zone for the spread of Covid-19. This decision has an impact on the sub-districts to villages in Nunukan Regency, one of which is of course on Sebatik Island. Local people should limit activities that involve crowds. Moreover, Sebatik is a vulnerable zone because it has a land border with Malaysia.

Learning activities that were previously carried out in person during Covid-19 have now turned into distance learning (online). Online learning is learning that takes place in a network where teachers and those being taught do not meet face-to-face. Distance learning is a challenge for all parties, especially teachers, students, and parents. The challenge of implementing distance learning is the capability of the teaching staff who have difficulty adapting to distance learning methods. [5]. In general, Distance Learning requires a teacher to be literate in information technology such as how to use learning applications, make learning videos, and so on. Another obstacle that must be faced is the problem of internet access [6]. Based on Dapodik data from the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2020 there are 46,272 or 18% of Elementary and Secondary Education Units that do not have internet access and 8,281 Education Units or 3% have no electricity. Without a good internet connection, students find it difficult to access materials to assignments as a whole.

The policy of restrictions during Covid-19 turned out to have implications for the education aspect at Sebatik. One of the schools experiencing this problem is a border school (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Darul Furqon). This self-help school is located in Sungai Limau Village, Central Sebatik District, Nunukan Regency, North Kalimantan Province.

Border schools are places of learning for children of Indonesian migrant workers who do not have access to education in Malaysia due to the absence of valid citizenship documents [7]. Border schools have a few problems even though they were in normal conditions before the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of these problems include: First, the number of teachers is still limited [8]. Second, the life of the students as children of Indonesian migrant workers who have difficulty getting an education. They have to walk through oil palm plantations that are on the border between Indonesia and Malaysia [9]. The journey takes time and a considerable distance to arrive at the border school.

Seeing these conditions, the presence of border schools is very important for them. Frontier schools provide access to education and dormitories as a place to live so that they do not have to return home. The problem is that during the Covid-19 pandemic, learning is no longer running as it used to be. They no longer live in dormitories and are now learning from home. Conditions became even worse when Malaysia implemented a Lockdown policy. Living in a Malaysian palm oil camp makes them live under the rules of the Malaysian side. Conditions that make it difficult for students and teachers to meet. In addition, another obstacle that must be faced is the problem of inadequate internet access. This is because the Border School accommodates dozens of TKI children from Bernyoko and Bergosong Villages.

Based on this explanation, learning during the Covid-19 pandemic at border schools for TKI children became the focus of researchers. Similar studies on education in frontier schools have been conducted [9], [10], and [11]. However, previous research has taken the issue of education before the Covid-19 pandemic. While this research is present in a more actual condition, namely during the Covid-19 pandemic. Limited access to education at border schools plus the presence of the Covid-19 pandemic. Immediately demanded the school to find an effective learning strategy as a solution so that the children of TKI did not drop out of school.

2. Method

This research was conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Darul Furqon (also known as boundary school), located on Jl. Sinta RT.014 Qur'an Village, Berjoko Hamlet, Sungai Limau Village, Central Sebatik District, Nunukan Regency, North Kalimantan Province. The type of research used is qualitative with a case study approach. Case studies are chosen to explore real life, contemporary finite systems (cases) or various finite systems (various cases). The data collection technique used in the participant observation study was carried out by the researcher by being a teacher at the school. In addition, interviews

were conducted using a purposive technique. The unit of analysis and resource persons for this research are teachers and children of Indonesian migrant workers who are also students of border schools.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Boundary School Learning Activities (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Darul Furqon) during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on learning activities in border schools. Learning activities are carried out using online and offline systems. Distance learning (online) is learning that takes place through the internet network where the teacher and those being taught do not meet face-to-face. Meanwhile, offline learning is defined as learning that is not at all connected to the internet network (offline).

Initially, learning activities in grades 1 to 5 were carried out online. Whatsapp was chosen because it provides features that can help the learning process and its operation is easy. Features such as sending voice messages, sending messages in groups, sending videos and photos make it easier for teachers to send teaching materials. In addition, WhatsApp is much cheaper and easily accessible when compared to other applications. However, online learning is not effective. So far, online learning through WhatsApp is done by entering students into class groups. Submission of materials and collection of assignments is done through the group. The dominant online learning activity is done by sending photos. However, if you want to do learning through video calls, the teacher must notify the students the day before.

In addition to online, offline learning for students in grades 1 to 5 is also carried out despite the Covid-19 pandemic. Classes are held on Fridays and Saturdays. This policy is carried out to reduce falling behind in lessons. This effort was made because many students were ineffective in participating in online learning with various causes ranging from limited internet networks and data packages, not having adequate gadgets, to being busy helping their parents. The work of their parents as migrant workers to collect palm seeds causes them to get used to filling their free time by helping their parents. Moreover, when learning is no longer carried out at school, they have more free time that can be used to help their parents.

Offline learning on Fridays is for some grade 1 and 4 students who live in Bernyoko. There are two students in grade 1 and three in grade 4. Meanwhile, offline learning on Saturdays is carried out at border schools. This lesson is for grades 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5

whose homes are close to the border school. So far, offline learning has been held in two different places because it is adapted to the students' homes. This is to make it easier for them not to walk too far to reach the learning location.



Figure 1: Offline Learning in Border Schools.

Learning online for sixth graders is done in full, namely Monday to Saturday. They returned to study at school and settled in a border school dormitory. The reason is that the 6th graders are going to face the exam middle semester and final exams so offline learning is needed to improve understanding of the material. Moreover, they will do a 30 juice memorization test from the Head of the Central Sebatik KUA.

3.2. Learning Obstacles During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Border Schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Darul Furqon)

3.2.1. Teacher

The shortage of teaching staff is an obstacle for border schools, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. The teacher is an important aspect of the learning process. The teacher's task is not only to provide material, they also play a role in building interaction and communication with students both online and offline. Communication in learning is the process of delivering a message between the teacher to his students, both verbally and nonverbally which aims to make students able to understand the material and understanding of the teacher's message conveyed. Until 2020, border schools only have two active teachers, namely Suraidah who is also the head of the foundation and

a teacher. The other three teachers quit for various reasons. Starting from salary issues to personal matters such as wanting to get married. The shortage of teachers certainly has an impact on learning activities. They must provide planned and effective learning in the midst of a limited number of teachers. Furthermore, they must coordinate all border school students, totaling 43 students, such as giving assignments, grades, and tests in the midst of the current pandemic.

3.2.2. Student

Most of the students from the border schools live in Bernyoko and Bergusung. The two areas are settlement Indonesian citizens who work as laborers for Malaysian-owned oil palm plantations. Even though they are part of the territory of Malaysia, they do not have the right to education because they are not Malaysian citizens. The children had to walk along the road for approximately 3 hours to reach the Border School. While the other students came from Kampung Baru and Lourdes. However, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, as it is today, online learning is implemented as a solution to keep learning activities.

Online learning has its own obstacles for students in border schools, this is related to the condition of the internet. Most of them live in oil palm plantations located within the Indonesia-Malaysia border area. The location has a poor internet connection. In addition, another obstacle that must be faced is that not all border school students have devices with adequate facilities.

Constraints are not only experienced when doing online learning. Offline learning also has several problems, this is related to the difficulty of getting to the learning location. This condition is because students are not allowed to leave Malaysia, especially those who live in Bergusung village. Officers at the location are known to be stricter with regulations for the flow of residents in and out.

3.3. Strategies in Overcoming Learning Obstacles During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Border Schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Darul Furqon)

The obstacles faced by border schools are mediated by various strategies. This is done so that learning continues to run effectively despite experiencing many obstacles. The strategies used to overcome these obstacles are as follows.

First, related to the limited number of teachers. The action taken is to open the registration of teaching volunteers. As of April 2021, approximately ten volunteers have joined. The volunteers are students from the University of Borneo (Tarakan), Mulawarman University (Samarinda) and the Islamic University of Indonesia (Yogyakarta). Most of them register with the reason they want to find experience and busy. Especially in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic learning lectures take place online. They help with online and offline learning.



Figure 2: Haji Suraydah Meeting with Volunteers.

Second, related to data packet issues. The school provides data package assistance from the Ministry of Religion. Other obstacles, such as poor internet connection, were overcome by the tireless initiation of border school students. They are willing to walk from the house to the hill to get a good internet connection, the journey takes approximately one hour. Third, related to gadget ownership. Some students who do not have gadgets choose to live in border school dormitories so that they can send their assignments to volunteer teachers through Ms. Suraidah's gadget. Apart from that, other efforts are being made to borrow devices from other family members. This is often found during online learning.



Figure 3: Offline Learning in Bernyoko.

3.4. Analysis of Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Children of Indonesian Migrant Workers on the Border of Sebatik Island

PartMost border school students are TKI children. For them, the need for basic things such as education is very important. This is not without reason, a good education can change their understanding of many things including work. They are expected to no longer depend on work as migrant workers and education can change their fate in the future. In addition, a good education is expected to free them from slavery by Malaysia.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, TKI children in border schools experienced educational uncertainty. They are required to learn online and offline in the midst of the limitations that they are still experiencing. Various strategies have been implemented, but these strategies are still short-term solutions. As the presence of volunteers, they help only for a certain period of time. When the learning process is active on campus, they will return and no longer volunteer.

In addition, regarding internet quota assistance. Currently, the distribution of the quota has been stoppedMinistryReligion. This problem can be an obstacle later day. Especially in the middleuncertaintyWhen will the Covid-19 pandemic stop? Seeing this, it is possible that new problems will occur for the children of TKI. Based on the results of the study, there are several implications of learning during the Covid-19 pandemic

for TKI children in border schools. If you look closely, these implications occur in stages from the usual to the more severe.

First, Learning during the Covid-19 pandemic causes students to miss learning. The condition occurs due to a lack of parental attention in supervising online learning. In fact, the role of parents is very central in the creation of learning effective online [12]. This is understandable because their parents work from morning until late at night. This condition has an impact on the online learning process. When the teacher gives assignments, many of the students are late in collecting and even not submitting assignments. The reason is that they have trouble connecting to the internet. In addition, the material presented is also not well understood. This condition makes teachers have to repeat the material presented when learning is carried out offline the day Friday and Saturday.

Second, Learning during the Covid-19 pandemic has caused a decline in student interest in learning. Students feel bored because they don't meet their friends and teachers directly. This happens because the dominant learning during the pandemic uses monotonous online learning. Moreover, online learning only uses the Whatsapp application, causing them to end up bored.

Third, learning during the Covid-19 pandemic triggered school dropouts. This is related to their status as children of Indonesian migrant workers, where their parents work as oil palm workers. The limitations of learning during the Covid-19 period have resulted in them getting used to working and feeling the pleasures of earning money. If this continues, it is possible that they would prefer to work rather than go to school. This condition began to be reflected in some border school students. As of April 2021, approximately nine students are not active at all in the online and offline learning process. The majority of these students are in the Bergusung village area. Location with bad internet and hard to get permission to participate in offline learning. Living in an oil palm camp owned by Malaysia makes them have to follow the rules of the local party.

The phenomenon has been described as a portrait of how difficult it is for children of migrant workers to get out of the trap of marginalization. This shows that geographical factors have become the homework of social inequality that has not been resolved since the past until now in Indonesia. Even during the pandemic, they are increasingly marginalized with limited education. This phenomenon can be categorized as marginalization because the existing process shows that it is difficult for them to participate in various fields of life, especially education and the economy. Economic factors are the root of the problem that is difficult to break. Meanwhile, education as the only hope is

not easily achieved as long as the root of the problem is not resolved. This is the other side of marginalization, namely, they receive layered discrimination from the existing social system.

In this position, the researcher has doubts whether the existing theory is adequate to be used in analyzing unpredictable conditions such as a pandemic. This means that there needs to be criticism and refinement of the existing theory so that the analysis becomes relevant to explain this case. First, the researcher puts himself in a functionalist view, borrowing Durkheim's thinking about an interconnected system so that social balance becomes the expected final goal [13]. The balance in the economic system and education at the border seems to have never been resolved because it has escaped the attention of the government. So far, the border is seen as the backyard, not the front of the house which is the image of a country. This is reflected in the economic sector of the community which is very dependent on Malaysia [14]. Unfortunately, this condition is inversely proportional to the education sector. Religion-based private education is more fertile in Sebatik because it is more self-supporting by the community. Therefore, it is not uncommon for Indonesians on the Sebatik border to try to solve their own problems. In addition, the identity that is formed in the community experiences complex dynamics so that it is at risk of diminishing their sense of nationality towards Indonesia [15].

In fact, the existing structural problems are increasingly complex with unpredictable conditions, namely the Covid-19 pandemic. It seems that the system that is not taking sides is indeed the root of the problem that must be resolved first. Self-help education built by the community is in danger of being wasted because the pandemic is making the learning process more difficult. Obstacles across national borders, the number of educators, and limited infrastructure have caused education to be cut off. In the future, this condition can slowly kill people's hopes to take and provide adequate educational facilities. In this case, it can be concluded that a system built from the ground up (non-governmental organizations) cannot survive because there is no support from the big system that overshadows it (the government).

4. Conclusion

During the Covid-19 pandemic, children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (TKI) in border schools need a hard struggle to stay in school. They walk for about three hours to get to the border school, they have to be ready to go through a Malaysian officer check so that they can give permission to go to the learning location. They also have to walk towards the hills to get a smooth internet connection. This indicates that learning during the

Covid-19 pandemic has the potential to extinguish their learning opportunities. Based on the results of the study, It shows that learning during the Covid-19 pandemic has implications for TKI children, including falling behind in lessons, decreasing interest in learning, and increasing dropouts. If this continues, it is possible that they would prefer to work rather than go to school.

Suggestions are recommended to address this condition, among others: First, meet the needs of permanent teachers in border schools. This can be done by asking for help from the Ministry of Religion because border schools are located in the shade of the ministry. Currently, the border school only has two active teachers. The need for sufficient teachers can help the effectiveness of learning. Second, issuing special policies for TKI children who attend border schools so that they are given convenient permission to the learning location. This condition is necessary so that students can follow learning offline. This can be done if there is good coordination between the Government of Indonesia and the Malaysian Party.

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