

Research article

The Challenges of Online Thematic Learning in Elementary Schools During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract.

The purpose of this article was to investigate the problems that students and teachers encounter when using online thematic learning. This was a qualitative field study that used analytical descriptive methods and a qualitative approach. Observations, interviews, and documentation analysis were used to collect the data for this study. According to the findings, the main challenges faced by teachers in implementing online thematic learning were a lack of organization of materials and teacher confusion over how to use learning media.

Keywords: online learning, thematic

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1. Introduction

Thematic learning is learning that uses themes in linking several subjects so that it can provide meaningful experiences to students. Thematic learning is defined as learning that is designed based on certain themes, in the discussion the theme is reviewed from various subjects [1]. According to Piaget, the level of mental development of elementary school-aged children is in the concrete operational stage (6-10 years) and the formal operational stage (11-14 years). Elementary school students in grades III, IV and V are in the concrete operational stage with the following characteristics: (1) children begin to view the world objectively; (2) the child begins to think operationally; (3) using causal relationships and simple scientific principles; and (4) can understand the concept and substance of volume, length, width, area and weight. Meanwhile, grade VI students are in the formal operational stage with the following characteristics; (1) can use higher thinking; (2) can make hypotheses, conduct investigations, combine evidence and theory; (3) can work with ratios and probabilities; (4) can understand complex explanations including deductive circuits and logic Hidayah, (2015). Through the thematic approach, it is hoped that there will be integration between everyday experiences and the experiences learned by students.

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At the beginning of 2020, the world situation was very alarming with the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 is a disease with a very fast transmission. With the pandemic that has entered Indonesia, the government has made a policy for all work, school and other activities to be carried out from home. Learning is carried out by students and teachers in their respective homes, with online assignments and video call activities for students and teachers.

Online learning is considered to be the best solution for teaching and learning activities in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although agreed upon, this study caused controversy. Found several complaints from teachers, students and also parents of students. For teachers, online learning is only effective for assignments, while making students understand online learning materials is considered difficult. In addition, the technological and economic abilities of each student are different. Not all students have facilities that support online learning activities. Inadequate internet connection, unsupported devices, and expensive internet quotas make online learning difficult to implement. But learning must continue. Each education provider has their own policy in responding to this rule. Several higher education institutions provide internet quota subsidies to students for the sake of conducting online learning [2].

Studies on problems in online thematic learning have been carried out by many previous researchers such as [3], [4], [5], [6], and [7]. In previous studies, it was seen that the research subjects were very diverse, starting from students at the early childhood education level, elementary school, junior high school, high school, to the university level. The findings of previous researchers are also quite broad, such as [3]; [4]; [5]; [7] who found the same thing related to online learning, namely the lack of knowledge of technology and the operation of online learning applications by teachers, students and parents, thus making online learning difficult to implement.

In addition, another problem that is almost the same found by researchers is that schools / educational institutions still lack supporting facilities and infrastructure such as internet networks, PCs, and gadgets. However, in the research that has been carried out there has been no study of the implementation of online thematic learning, so the focus of the study in this research is to examine how the problems that arise in online thematic learning both from the aspect of teachers and students.

2. Research Method

The method used in this research is field research with a qualitative approach using analytical descriptive methods. The place of research is at SD Negeri 02 Kendari, with

the research sample being all 32 students of class IV A and teachers at the school. The data in this study were collected through observation, interviews and documentation. Data analysis was carried out through 4 stages, namely starting from data collection, data reduction, data presentation and finally drawing conclusions.

1. Result and Discussion

1. Research Results

a. Problems related to teacher

1) Teacher Competition

The findings of researchers in the field indicate several obstacles faced by teachers in online teaching and learning activities. One of these obstacles is teacher competence. The results of interviews conducted with informant 1 showed that teachers had difficulty in determining suitable material to be taught online.

In addition, informant 2 also explained that during online thematic learning, subject matter was always sent via whatsapp or other applications. Then for homework, with the guidance of parents, students can work on laptops and print out or handwritten, then photographed, then sent via WhatsApp. This situation requires the teacher to download all assignments sent by students, so that the teacher's cellphone memory becomes full. In addition, messages from students piled up making it difficult for teachers to check their assignments.

According to Informant 3, one of the teachers who teaches PJOK subjects, when online thematic learning was conducted, we had difficulty compiling learning materials. This is because PJOK learning requires practice and must be done in the field. According to informant 4, a teacher who teaches Mathematics, online learning for students to learn mathematics is considered less effective. Children at elementary school age are very easily distracted. In addition, Mathematics is a material that is quite difficult for students, so the full attention of students during learning is needed. In addition, the internet network connection is also another problem for students and teachers, especially when the weather in the student and teacher's home area is very bad.

2) Media

Another problem that has become a concern for teachers at SD Negeri 2 Baruga when learning online is the teacher's confusion in choosing and determining learning media that is in accordance with the material to be taught. This is because teachers do not know the characteristics of each available information technology-based learning

media and the principles that must be considered. There are various forms of media used by teachers in online learning, including Google Class, Zoom, Skype, Whatshaap and other applications. Informant 5 revealed that the media is the media we use most often in online learning, although not all of them run smoothly.

According to Informant 6, the reason that online learning does not run smoothly is because some parents are not very familiar with the use of learning technology. This makes it difficult for teachers themselves, therefore teachers have to work hard and do a lot of socialization to parents in order to understand the use of online learning applications.

2) **Study time**

With regard to study time, the problem faced by teachers in this school is the difficulty of teachers to make students join online classes on time, thus making teachers often also late to check student attendance. Often students are late for online learning due to several factors including difficulty in getting an internet network, students' internet packages do not exist, and students' ignorance in using smartphones, so students must ask someone who is more skilled to guide them.

In addition, according to Informant 7 online learning is very time consuming and hinders other activities. Teachers should set aside time during recess to check students' assignments and homework. As a result, teachers when teaching at regular hours are not optimal. This situation is exacerbated by frequent communication errors between parents and teachers, so it is found that many students do not collect assignments or take attendance at online class forums.

b. **Problems related to students**

1) **Media**

The results of interviews with students and their parents showed that almost all school assignments done by students were assisted by their parents. The role of teachers has been replaced by parents in the online learning model. However, this process did not go well because not all parents have educational backgrounds and coupled with the limited time that parents have to accompany their children while studying. In addition, another obstacle encountered in the field is that not all students at SD Negeri 2 Kendari have smartphones to study. Mobile ownership data in class IV A can be seen in Table 4.1.

Tabel 1.

TABLE 1: The data of student Mobile/Smartphone Ownership.

No	Smartphone users	Amount
1	Students with smartphone	25
2	Students with no smartphone	7
	Total	32

Source: SD Negeri 2 Kendari

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that of the 32 students in class IV A, there are 7 people who do not have a Smartphone. This shows that not all students have smartphones, as a result online learning cannot be carried out properly. The results of an interview with one of the parents revealed that the reason children were not given a smartphone was due to economic limitations. In addition, some parents feel that their children are not allowed to use smartphones because it can interfere with their learning focus.

2) Study time

For study time, the problems faced by students in this school are almost the same as those experienced by teachers. Students are sometimes late for learning in online classes due to several factors including difficulty getting an internet network, students' internet packages do not exist, and limitations in using smartphones to study.

2. Solutions for student problems in online learning

To overcome the obstacles that occur to students during online learning, the school has formulated several actions, namely (1) improving internet access in schools; (2) training for teachers in utilizing online learning applications; (3) more flexible or less rigid in managing the time of learning and (4) Improving the quality of communication and cooperation with parents.

c. Solutions for teachers' problems in online learning

Several efforts to overcome the problems faced by teachers have actually been carried out, namely (1) participating in trainings in certain forums. (2) learn from peer tutors/teachers; (3) conduct training on the use of teaching applications for teachers in schools; and (4) online learning patterns must be part of all learning even if only as a complement.

3. Discussion

a. Problems faced by teachers

The results of interviews conducted with teachers showed three main things that became obstacles to online learning, namely teacher competence, the media used and learning time. Teacher competence is one measure to determine whether the teacher is professional or not. In the Law on Teachers and Lecturers No. 14 of 2005 it is stated that teacher competencies consist of personality competencies, pedagogic competencies, social competencies, and professional competencies.

In relation to the problems that occurred to teachers in class IV A SDN 02 Kendari, the competence that is most closely related to the problem of teacher confusion in formulating materials and poor organizational management in online learning is pedagogic competence. Pedagogic competence is a set of teacher abilities in managing learning in the form of understanding students, designing and implementing learning, and evaluating learning. From this definition, it can be understood that a teacher must not only be skilled in teaching but also must be skilled in studying student characteristics, materials, classroom conditions, and also the availability of facilities and infrastructure in schools. [8] revealed that teachers must have creativity in teaching to motivate students in learning.

When learning takes place face-to-face, the teacher may already be used to these conditions, so there is no problem at all. However, things will be different when learning takes place online. As stated in [9] that the obstacles that often occur in online-based learning include poor network connections, inadequate quotas and also insufficient equipment needed in online learning. Therefore, it takes the desire and effort of teachers to always develop themselves to keep up with the times, so that the knowledge and skills of teachers will always go hand in hand with the latest innovations in education. [10] states that when there are obstacles in the learning process, it is the teacher who looks for efforts to solve all the problems encountered, and implements those efforts.

Another obstacle faced by teachers when learning online is the problem of the media/platform used in online learning. The results of the study show that teachers are still less skilled in using learning platforms, be it zoom, google classroom, or skype. The teacher's inability to operate the application is caused by the teacher himself who is reluctant to learn the application. This form of refusal is caused by several factors such as limited knowledge of English, especially in recognizing technical instructions from the application, the number of family matters that must be resolved so that it takes the teacher's time and attention, and the self-perception factor which assumes that the teacher is a generation that is not young anymore. and do not need to learn technology in learning.

The final problem that teachers face when learning online is time management. Online learning can indeed be done flexibly, anywhere and anytime. However, this situation makes the teacher's work more and more. Because learning is more often done by giving independent assignments, the teacher must also add special time to check the student's work. As a result, they are increasingly busy and cannot do other work.

b. Problems faced by students

There are still many students who have not been able to use online applications to participate in learning is one of the problems that occur to students. The student's ignorance is influenced by several factors including students who have never been given training in using the application. As a result, the learning carried out by the teacher is not optimal. Training on the use of the application also cannot be carried out considering that everyone is required to keep their distance and not create crowds.

In addition, some of the students also do not have mobile phones. Even if there are, parents have not allowed their children to hold cellphones because they are considered not old enough and can interfere with students' concentration in learning. [11] suggests that one of the factors that causes low student learning outcomes is an external factor, one of which is cellphones.

Then other complaints felt by students include boredom in students due to online learning. Some teachers teach with the model of giving assignments in each meeting without giving an explanation first. As a result of this, some students also experience emotional stress due to this learning method. The pressure or stress faced by students in online learning does not work effectively. According to [12] the level of stress faced by students will result in the learning process and student learning outcomes.

To overcome learning conditions during the pandemic, solutions that can be taken by teachers and students in carrying out the teaching and learning process face-to-face with the visiting teacher model. The goal is that students and teachers have the same understanding and motivation in the teaching and learning process. In addition, another solution is that communication between parents and teachers needs to be improved for the effectiveness of the online learning process. Finally, socialization of online learning needs to be done so that parents understand their role in assisting children to learn online and students are more familiar with online learning applications.

4. Conclusion

Online learning is a solution for the continuity of the learning process during a pandemic. However, this learning model raises other problems for both teachers and students. If teacher competence in online teaching, time management, and the use of learning media are aspects that need to be improved by teachers, students still have to work hard in mastering features in online learning platforms, and improve self-discipline in participating in learning both offline and online.

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