Online Learning Strategies amid New Normal Era in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Many aspects of life have to be reorganized as an impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The application of physical distancing for the world of education forced the learning activities to be conducted through online systems. In the beginning, online learning was a highly difficult challenge for most educators, because they were unfamiliar with online learning and some of them were doubtful about the effectiveness of online learning. Consequently, many teachers implemented whatever learning strategies they thought to be effective to improve students' learning achievement. This study explored effective learning strategies used by educators in Indonesia during the new normal era of Covid-19. This study used a mixed-method research design, and the data were collected by using a questionnaire and interviews. 216 respondents participated in this study consisting of university lecturers and schoolteachers. The collected data were then critically analysed, and the findings were described descriptively. This study revealed that educators mostly used online learning, blended learning, project-based learning, and limited face-to-face learning to continually enhance students' learning competence. This study implies that teachers should creatively develop the existing teaching strategies to suit students' learning conditions.

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic of Covid-19 had widely impacted the education system in Indonesia. All education institutions have to find another way of conducting the learning process. The learning processes which were commonly carried out through face-to-face learning suddenly changed into online learning. Of course, this caused a lot of problems for teachers and students as many teachers and students were not familiar with online learning systems and education technology (Anugrahana, 2020). However, with the advancement of technology, the learning activities could be carried out although some problems were still encountered by many teachers especially those who had poor technology ability and poor internet connection. This online learning system was conducted

mainly to reduce the spread of the Covid-19 by avoiding closed physical interaction (Gamage et al., 2020). However, educators were expected to have the capability in choosing and use appropriate learning strategies to create effective learning processes.

In a broad sense, learning is a process of delivering knowledge through the interaction of the teacher to students, is also a process of stimulating students to learn well and effectively. Learning activities can be characterized by the type of educational interaction that occurs, namely the teacher to students or students to teachers. In every learning activity, teachers must prepare innovative learning to stimulate students to have enthusiasm in carrying out learning activities (Mantra et al., 2018). Therefore, learning is an interactive activity carried out by teachers to the students to improve their students' students' knowledge. Learning is also a process that contains the provision of learning materials, knowledge information, activities to guide students, as well as giving stimulation so that students can be motivated in participating in the activities to achieve the established learning objectives (Leung & McGrath, 2010).

Learning strategy is an attempt to use a systematic strategy that is carried out effectively to get an achievement and also success in learning activities. Learning strategies are the implementational activity that is chosen and used by a teacher to deliver learning materials that aim to make it easier for students to receive and understand learning materials so that students achieve the learning objectives at the end of learning activities (Cursor, 2010). The strategy selected by the teachers is mainly to meet the students' needs in learning. Therefore, effective learning strategies should be implemented in every learning activity.

Learning strategies can also be interpreted as a pattern of learning activities that are selected and used by the teacher contextually, according to the characteristics of students, school conditions, the surrounding environment, and goals specifically formulated learning (Handayani & Widiastuti, 2019). Therefore, there needs to be a link between learning strategies and learning objectives, to create effective and efficient steps of learning activities. Learning strategies consist of procedures to ensure that students achieve the learning objectives (Gaytan & McEwen, 2007). Educators are required to have to be knowledgeable in choosing appropriate strategies and implementing them appropriately.

Learning activities can be conducted in various ways such as online, face-to-face, blended, and other forms of learning interaction. Recently online learning is very popular due to the phenomenon of the Covid-19 pandemic. Online learning is a program for organizing internal learning classes to reach a massive and broad target group (Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006). online provide effective learning methods, such as practising with the existence of related feedback, combining collaborative activities with self-study, personalized learning based on needs students, and using simulations and videos. Online learning is learning that utilizes technology by using the internet which is done remotely using electronic media that can make it easier for students to learn anytime and everywhere.

In a simpler term, online learning is a learning system that is not done face-to-face but is done remotely using online platforms to carry out the learning activities. In this new normal era, the purpose of online learning is to provide quality learning services in a massive and open network to reach more and wider study space for students (Abidah et al., 2020). In the world of education,

information technology can be used to support the process of learning activities to support online learning. Technology enables students to have interaction between students and teachers and also among students (Widiastuti, 2018).

There were many challenges encountered by educators in Indonesia occurred during online learning. This was due to a lack of technological knowledge in conducting online learning. Educators were expected to have sufficient ability in utilizing education technology to be able to support this on learning. Education technology is carried out to allow educators and students to communicate with each other without having to do face-to-face meetings in the classroom, educators and students can communicate with each other, can also help students in the learning process can be done at home or anywhere (Gaytan & McEwen, 2007). However, so that online learning runs smoothly, internet connection and technology are needed to have by all educators and students (Brata et al., 2021).

Even though the learning process was conducted through online learning systems, it is most important to understand that learning activities should be conducted effectively to ensure that students continually improve their learning competence and skills (Mantra et al., 2019). All those competencies and skills are needed to survive nowadays, where the era requires students to have various skills to compete with modernization and globalization. It is known that nowadays the era where students should have critical thinking skills and creativity (Mahanal et al., 2019). Without having those skills, students may find it hard to compete in the industrial era. Therefore, educators are required to carry out various and meaningful learning activities to be able to meet the students' needs. Moreover, teachers need to utilize various learning strategies.

It is although considered as a new normal era, with the new variants of Covid-19, Indonesia education is currently experiencing a little awkwardness, this is because the new variants of the covid-19 in Indonesia continue to spread, so many schools are closed to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus in Indonesia (Abidah et al., 2020). Even though schools are closed, and schools are temporarily closed, learning activities must be continually conducted by teachers. Learning and teaching activities carried out during the spread of the Covid-19 virus were carried out remotely, where people or the Indonesian community often refer to it by the word 'learning from home using Internet network. Learning with a network system is the same as learning as usual, where there are teachers who teach and there are students or students who learn, it's just that the distance that is not, as usual, is the difference.

Online learning is something new for both teachers and for students in Indonesia where they were more familiar with face-to-face learning. The online learning and assessment activities became a challenge for most educators and also the students (Timmis et al., 2016). However, the situation of Covid-19 forced education to implement online learning. Learning and teaching using networks during a pandemic like today is a very appropriate thing, because if teaching and learning activities are carried out offline. Through online learning, the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic can be minimized, and people affected by the virus could be eventually decreased (Wargadinata et al., 2020). Therefore, as teachers, of course, they are expected to be innovative in conducting online learning, so that students or students do not feel bored when teaching and learning activities take place.

This online learning is considered a new way of teaching for most teachers, consequently, teachers experienced a lot of difficulties especially to make the learning activities effective and meaningful (Kebritchi et al., 2017). Some of them even were very sceptical about the success of the online learning system, consequently, many educators made variations towards the learning activities they conducted. The learning strategies that were utilized during the new normal era were online learning, blended learning, project-based learning, and limited face-to-face learning. Some teachers might also variation of all those strategies or other strategies to ensure their students learn actively and keep their motivation in learning.

Some studies have been conducted concerning online learning and the learning processes during the Covid-19 pandemic which mainly discussed the intensity and the urgency of online learning implementation during the Covid-19 pandemic (Fitriani et al., 2020; Child et al., 2005; Putra et al., 2020), it is, however, hardly any study conducted to reveal the preferable strategies utilized by the educators in Indonesia during the new normal era. Therefore, this study mainly focused on investigating the learning strategies that were mostly employed by educators including university lecturers, teachers, tutors, and instructors in Indonesia. This is considered to be an important thing to be conducted because the findings can be used as a guide for educators in conducting the learning activities if the pandemic continues or if a similar disaster occurs in the future. Therefore, by having this knowledge, educators may feel at ease in confronting the future challenges occurred in the education sector.

METHODS

This study used a mixed-method research design with descriptive analysis to describe the real phenomena of the learning strategies employed by educators in Indonesia. The study was conducted for one year period of time during the pandemic of Covid-19. 216 respondents were answering the questionnaire consisting of university lecturers and schoolteachers. All respondents who participated in this study were asked to answer the questionnaire and several teachers were selected to be interviewed. The selected teachers to be interviewed were purposively selected to represent the whole respondents. They were interviewed through google meet and conducted in a very relaxed situation to ensure that teachers provided the appropriate information according to the real existing phenomena.

The quantitative data were collected through an online survey using Google form and qualitative data were collected through interviews with the selected teachers by utilizing interview guidelines to obtain verbal information directly from the teachers about the learning methods that have been carried out during the time of new normal to establish to support the data collected through an online survey. The data analysis was done descriptively and carried out interactively and continuously until complete clear data were established.

Data analyses were started by doing a reduction process which means summarizing, choosing the main data, focusing on the important things, looking for themes and patterns, and discarding unnecessary ones. The presentation of data was done in the form of brief descriptions to make it easier to understand the phenomenon. Data verification is carried out where the researcher tried to find patterns, themes, relationships, similarities, things that often arise, and the data obtained to conclude the findings. The data that have been concluded were verified during the research.

Verification is an examination of the veracity of a report, to ensure its validity. In this study, the data validation technique used was triangulation with sources. Triangulation with sources means comparing and double-checking the degree of trustworthiness of information obtained through an online survey and interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The sudden Covid-19 pandemic made the education institutions switch their learning activities from face to face into online systems. Teachers were forced to be able to conduct effective online learning without proper training. Fortunately, the technology for online learning was available, therefore it was easier for those educators to adapt. However, it was a big challenge for most educators as they were unfamiliar with online learning strategies to use to enhance students' competence. In this section, the results of the study were briefly elaborated as follows and the data were discussed to provide a clearer understanding concerning the findings of the study. The present study made use of a questionnaire and interviews to collect the data. Based on the analysis of the data, the data can be summarized and can be presented as follows.
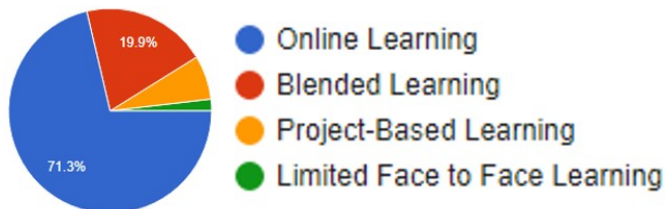

Chart 1: Summary of questionnaire result

The summary of data from the questionnaire showed that 154 educators or 71.3% of the educators conducted online learning, this was understandable that the spread of Covid-19 was still very high in certain areas in Bali. There were only 43 educators or 19.9% of educators who conducted blended learning and 15 educators or 6.9% of educators conducted project-based learning and 4 educators or 1.9 % conducted face-to-face learning. The percentage showed that the majority of respondents were implemented online learning to deliver the learning activities.

The interview results were also supported the data from the questionnaire in which most teachers described that face-to-face learning was very difficult to be conducted to the worry of being infected by Covid-19.

"*in the new normal, I still implemented online learning all the times because the new variants of Covid-19 were spreading wildly*"

"*I often used blended learning by varying online learning and limited face to face. Sometimes the face to face meeting I used google meet or zoom instead of direct face face*"

"*well, most of my students had a limited internet connection, so I used project-based learning. I send the tasks using WhatsApp to my students or their parents and then they sent the answers through WhatsApp. The discussion was done in a small group through WhatsApp*"

"*Because in my area is a green zone and nobody infected by Covid-19 so I conducted face to face learning with a very limited number of students in one class. They should obey very strict health protocols*"

"*well, we have to try hard to accommodate students' needs in learning even in this hard situation. I vary my teaching activities, mainly I conducted online learning, and sometimes blended learning*"

> "*it is a hard thing for me to change from face-to-face learning to online learning. My students sometimes said that they want to be in the class so I used blended learning, project-based learning, and limited face-to-face learning*"
> "*I mainly implemented online learning because I am also scared of getting infected by Covid-19. However, I also used project-based learning. This is to make my students have some variation in learning because they often get bored learning through the online system*"

The excerpts of interviews indicated that educators in Indonesia implemented online learning and blended learning, and then a small number of educators conducted project-based learning. The face-to-face learning was only conducted in a green zoon area where the spread of Covid-19 was declared to be zero by the authority.

The data analysis showed that the number of educators who conducted online learning was 154 educators or 71.3% of the 216 educators who participated in this study. This number showed that online learning was still dominated the teaching-learning activities in education institutions in Indonesia. This can be understood because the new variants of Covid-19 were still spreading highly and significantly impacted the education systems and daily life activities. Students were still able to attend the class physically due to the enforcement of health protocols and limited mobility allowed by the authority. Therefore, they had to attend the class through online systems. There are several platforms commonly used by educators in conducting online learning such as Zoom, Google meets, Google classroom, YouTube, WhatsApp, and many others.

There were only 43 educators or 19.9% of educators who conducted blended learning in the new normal era. The blended learning conducted by my educators was done by integrating online learning and face-to-face learning in a limited number of the students, and the face-to-face learning was conducted in very strict health protocols. Since the new variants of covid-19 were starting to spread, face-to-face learning was replaced by online face-to-face interaction by utilizing video calls, google meet, or zoom. It can be said that blended learning is being implemented in a modified version to suit the learning condition during the spread of the variants of covid-19. It indicates that educators were still trying hard to create an effective learning situation to ensure that students gain sufficient competencies and skills although it is in a very hard situation.

Furthermore, from 216 educators who participated in this study, there are15 educators or 6.9% of educators who conducted project-based learning. This indicated that some teachers find difficulty in doing interaction with their students due to limited internet connection. This is because of some factors such as poor internet connection, expensive internet connection, and limited mobile accessibility. The demography area of Indonesian was varied and in some areas is hard to get a strong internet connection. Moreover, in some areas, the cost for an internet connection is still very expensive, so it is hard for the students to pay for the connection especially now the income of their parents was very low due to limited employment availability. In addition, some of the students had no access to mobile phones. Some of them still have to borrow from their parents or their richer neighbours.

The questionnaire showed that from 216 educators, only 4 educators or 1.9 % conducted face-to-face learning. This is because the green zoon area which was free from the possibility of the spread of covid-19 was still very small areas. The current spread of the variants of covid-19 made the

areas which were already considered to be green zone areas become a red area where the mobility of people and closed physical contact were strictly prohibited. Therefore, the educational institution which already started conducting face-to-face learning with limited numbers of students had to close against for the sake of healthy reason.

Moreover, the interviews showed that educators in Indonesia implemented online learning and blended learning, and then a small number of educators conducted project-based learning. The face-to-face learning was only conducted in a green zoon area where the spread of Covid-19 was declared to be zero by the authority.

Educators in Indonesia mostly used online learning, this is because of the advantages of online learning where the learning activity can be conducted remotely using computers and networks. Educators and students can communicate with each other anytime and anywhere employing access to online systems available. An online system could increase the knowledge of all students and lighten the burden of teachers in the teaching and learning process, because of the hard possibility of doing direct interaction due to the spread of the variants of Covid-19 (Rahayu & Wirza, 2020). Moreover, through online learning, educators can also provide opportunities for students to access certain study materials and tasks that can be accessed by students in a certain period that suit the learning time of the students.

Based on the interview, blended learning was also conducted to provide variation in a learning activity for the students. This type of learning is very suitable to be conducted in the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic because blended learning can be done anywhere and anytime using the internet connection (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). Students could access materials freely and studied independently at their own time. The discussions and questions and answers between educators and students took any time without having to meet directly. In this study, face-to-face learning to complement the blended learning, educators replaced it through online face to face using zoom or google meet. Although there are limitations of this kind of face-to-face interaction, it was certainly beneficial for the students compared with no face-to-face interaction at all. Blended learning could be one of the effective strategies to teach as it enables some teaching variations to engage in various learning activities (Seage & Türegün, 2020). Using blended learning may improve students' motivation in learning and consequently, they are willing to participate in every learning activity may improve considerably.

For some educators who found it hard to communicate with their students because there was no internet connection or poor internet connection, project-based learning was implemented. Learning materials and tasks were sent through WhatsApp to their students and the students' answers and reports were sent to their teacher or lecturers through WhatsApp. The discussion students' presentations were conducted through zoom, google meet, or video calls. Some educators also used google classroom to ensure that the learning materials, tasks, and assessments were easily accessible at any time. Students were also encouraged to submit their assignments through google classroom and other applications used to do their classroom interaction.

All those learning activities were very much based on internet connections conducted by the educators because they had to avoid physical contact to stop the spread of covid-19 including all its variants which frightened all people nowadays. Although face-to-face learning was conducted in green zone areas, strict health protocols should be obeyed to ensure there was no new cluster

of covid-19. Students and educators and all educational staff were thoroughly checked their health and the classroom setting was designed in such a way as to void closed physical contact. The sitting position was arranged to ensure that students have sufficient space among them and only half of the total class occupancy was allowed to be inside the classroom.

The Implementation of physical distancing as the main factor for the new normal is a challenge for the world of education, which forced educators and students to carry out learning activities through an online system. It is, however, online line learning could be a solution for the education system in Indonesia considering Indonesia's demographics and geography situation in which online learning easily provides more learning opportunities for those are located in remote areas or small islands. Having said that it is however obstacles in conducting the online learning process such as technological facilities, internet networks, educator readiness, and good learning content that must be immediately solved by the authorities.

Therefore, apart from the difficulties of online learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic, there were positive things that can be drawn and cannot be ignored for the world of education. This pandemic period is a good momentum for change where education institutions were forced to provide learning experiences through the online system. Online learning was considered to be beneficial for education in Indonesia because it may help educators to provide wider learning opportunities for the students. With the use of technology in learning, it was hoped that learning can be continually directed to the students and more effective and efficient for the students to gain knowledge and skills. Moreover, the use of technology may provide flexibility for schools to carry out various kinds of learning activities.

CONCLUSION

In the current new normal era, the world of education is forced by circumstances to adapt quickly. Each school was starting to prepare for the implementation of education in the new normal era. The learning transition period was still using online learning, blended learning, project-based learning, and limited face-to-face learning. The application of physical distancing as the main factor for the new normal was a challenge for the world of education, which usually brings together educators and students in the face-to-face teaching and learning process. Therefore, schools must find solutions related to how the teaching and learning process in the new normal era. Educators in Indonesia were still mostly carried out online learning and only a very small number of students conducted face-to-face learning because their area was declared to be a green zone. It is however since the spread of the new variants of Covid-19 most education institutions were back to online learning. This study suggests that online learning, blended learning, project-based learning, and limited face-to-face learning should be carefully and optimally implemented to ensure that students learn maximally.

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