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Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Optimism of Elementary School Teachers in Implementing Online Learning

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ABSTRACT

Changes in education sector due to the Covid-19 pandemic resulting in changes to teaching and learning activities making teachers have to adapt to online learning implementation. Optimism is an internal factor that is relevant to predict the teachers' readiness to face the future, given the meaning namely positive belief that individuals have in viewing their future. A qualitative method was carried out on seven elementary school teachers to find the overview of their optimism on teaching during Covid-19 pandemic. It was found that teachers did not feel optimistic at the beginning of the pandemic situation but begin to show optimism after one semester of teaching online. After conducting thematic analysis, we found that teachers show optimism in the form of three dimension of optimism with the most dominant behavior appeared in the form of personalization dimension. It is concluded that elementary school teachers have better chances to be optimist during teaching in the Covid-19 pandemic time, which implies that they will be motivated to try to overcome the difficulties they encounter.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has spread to various parts of the world including Indonesia and has had a considerable influence on all aspects of human life, including in the field of education. In 2020 in May, there were 12 countries in the world experiencing the Covid-19 pandemic in total confirmed 4,452,806 cases, died world 298,737 people, while patients who managed to recover, namely 1,675,928 (Kresna & Ahyar, 2020). Covid-19 is an infectious disease caused by a type of respiratory pathogen, namely the corona virus which was first discovered in Wuhan, China in 2019 (Nafrin & Hudaidah, 2021). Corona virus can cause mild disturbances to infections of the respiratory system which can cause death (Zendrato, 2020). In Indonesia, cases of Covid-19 continue to increase every day, it was recorded that in March 2021 the number of Covid-19 cases reached 1,505,775 cases with a death rate of 40,754 cases (Budiman et al, 2022).

Based on this, the government made policies to limit activities outside the home. Restrictions on social interaction due to the Covid-19 pandemic or what we usually call social distancing have caused changes in many sectors including the education sector. Implementation of formal education is usually carried out in classrooms where students and teachers meet face to face every day. Social restrictions or remote methods temporarily prohibit face-to-face learning in class. On March 24 2020, the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia issued Circular No. 4 of 2020 concerning the Implementation of Education Policy in the Emergency Period of the Spread of Covid-19 which contains guidelines for implementing learning activities at home through online learning activities for all levels of education including elementary school level (Alami, 2020).

Online learning is a type of learning method carried on using internet network with accessibility, connectivity, flexibility and ability to carry out various types of learning interactions (Fikri et al., 2021). Students and teachers utilizes a variety of online platforms as a tool for teaching and learning activities such as online classroom board, video conference, live chat, and online group messages (Dewi, 2020). The utilizations of various online platforms is a way to overcome the limitations of learning interactions caused by distance learning. Through these platforms, teachers designed various methods to deliver learning materials such as making interactive videos or online worksheets, etc.

Classroom learning is an interactive platform between students and teachers that can improve students' abilities and skills (Aji, 2020). Changes in the implementations of classroom teaching to online learning can cause issues on the interaction between teachers and students. The limitation that teachers have in mastering technology needed in online learning become common problems (Dewi, 2020; Aji, 2020). Some teachers are not familiar in operating online platforms making it difficult to deliver learning materials effectively. In addition, other problems such as inadequate facilities and access to the internet network and gadgets can also affect the quality of online learning (Anugrahana, 2020; Ariesca et al., 2021; Dewi, 2020). Both students and teachers need to have access to internet network and other facilities so learning activities can be carried out properly.

Even wih many challenges, teachers are still actively exploring new and different ways to teach materials from the curriculum to their students. The urge to continuing the effort to overcome the challenges and difficulties of this situation shows the strong motivation that the teachers have in teaching, despite it being online. These consistent efforts to improve self-ability in carrying out consistent teaching quality indicate the teacher's optimism about their abilities. Optimism can foster belief that a difficult or challenging circumstances can

change for the better in the future (Munawaroh et al., 2018). This optimism can come from inside or outside oneselves. Optimism that originated from inside can arise when teachers feel that they are able to overcome the challenges and obstacles of the Covid-19 situation and can succeeds in delivering material to their students despite using online learning methods. Meanwhile, external factors are things that help teachers overcome challenges that come from outside environment such as assistance from the school that provides facilities to help them carry out online learning activities better. This study was conducted to explore the overview of optimism in elementary school teachers while teaching using online learning methods during Covid-19 pandemic.

Changes in learning methods using online methods show the necessity and readiness of all actors in teaching and learning activities to deal with various things that occur under different conditions. In this case, according to (Mahardhani, 2020) all individuals must be able to build awareness of strong optimism and be ready to adapt to the conditions that occur. Optimism is an individual's positive expectations about his future (Carver et al., 2010). Optimistic people expect good and positive things to happen in their future. Optimism is related to the positive results expected by individuals and individual beliefs such as good moral conditions, satisfying achievements, and having the ability to solve the problems they experience (Roellyana & Listiyandini, 2016).

Optimism is conceptualized as an attributional style characterized by a person's tendency to believe that negative situations are temporary because optimistic people expect good and positive things to happen in their future. According to optimists, they have more confident, comfortable, expressive personality traits and assess situations more positively (Nurtjahjanti & Ratnaningsih, 2011). Based on this concept, optimism is described as having 3 dimensions that determine its existence in individual. These dimensions are permanence, pervasiveness and personalization. Permanence dimension is a belief that a bad or challenging situation is temporary (not permanent). This belief makes a person have confidence that their future will bring good or positive things and bad situation will eventually get better. Pervasiveness dimension is a behavior of seeing the positive side of a bad situation. This perspective allows the individual to see the positive value from a negative event they are experiencing and even get a benefit from it. The third dimension is personalization which discuss the ability to control one's behavior and feelings when facing bad situation. This means that a person feels like they have the ability to overcome the negative event so that positive results can be obtained in the future.

2. METHODS

This research was conducted using qualitative method to explore the overview of teachers' optimism during online learning activities. The research participants consisted of 7 teachers from X Elementary School who agreed to participate. All participants are teachers who were conducting online learning during Covid-19 pandemic and have varied roles and responsibilities. They are teachers from all different levels (1st-6th grade) and also have other roles such as subject supervisor, homeroom teacher and vice principal. Research data was taken in November 2020 and January 2021 by conducting online interview using video call platform to collect data in the form of teacher's experiences and self-evaluations in online learning activities.

The questions given were designed to explore teacher's behavior and attitudes that can describe their optimism in the form of each optimism dimensions. The following are the questions used in the interview along with each optimism dimension that the question

seeks to explore. Question (1) *"the form of activities used during online learning (materials, methods)"* explored the strategies teachers used during online teaching (personalization dimension). Question (2) *"feelings that you felt during online learning activities (in the beginning of pandemic time and right now after one semester)"*; (3) *"obstacles that occur in delivering material to students during online learning and your feelings about these obstacles"* and (4) *"the benefit that teachers obtain caused by changes in teaching methods drom classroom teaching to online learning"* explored teacher's views, beliefs and feelings towards difficult situation that they faced (pervasiveness dimension) and their positive belief and hope that a bad situation will be better in the future (permanence dimension). Question (5) *"factors that help to overcome obstacles faced during online learning"* and (6) *"opinions about the extent on how successful the materials were delivered to students through online learning method"* explored about the strategies teachers used to deliver materials through online learning (personalization dimension), their confidence to face this challenging situation (pervasiveness dimension), and positive belief of a better future while facing a bad and challenging situation (permanence dimension).

A thematic analysis was carried out to analyze the research data collected from the interview. The analysis was done by grouping the results of participants' answers into categories, namely the three dimensions of optimism (permanence, pervasiveness, personalization). The data obtained were also grouped by time, namely the beginning of the pandemic where online learning started to be carried out and after 1 semester of online learning.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interviews that were conducted to the research participants obtained data in the form of verbal answers that described a subjective experiences of participant's online teaching experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. Teacher's experiences are divided into two periods of time, the beginning of the pandemic and after carrying out online learning for 1 semester.

The result shows that at the beginning of the pandemic situation teachers had not made any effort to overcome the difficult situation that they faced which is the abrupt changes in teaching methods. They felt that they did not have the abilities and power to try to overcome it. This can be seen from their statements such as:

Participant: *"in the beginning, we were still trying to figure things out. In the beginning of online learning, we gave students assignments similar to what we use in offline class. We taught three subjects per day, and gave three assignments everyday (one in every subject). It became a burden for students, which I also experienced since I also see it on my own kids who were taught this way."*

Beside of not doing any startegies to overcome difficult situations, teachers were also unable to regulate their negative emotions that they felt while facing this situation. The teachers express their feelings about the situation at hand, such as:

Participants: *"in the beginning we were surprised. It was really a shocked to suddenly have to face a change of routine (in teaching) after all this time."*

Teachers did not show any behavior to cope with the changes that happened from classroom teaching to online learning. They did not seem to make any efforts to overcome the challenging situation they experienced, either by making strategies of teaching or by

controlling their negative emotions. They continue to teach using the methods used previously in normal situation. However, these methods turned out to be unsuitable for online learning so the problem was not resolved.

Personalization dimension refers to a form of optimism which is a belief that onself has the power to overcome difficult situations that themselves faced. This means that a person feels that they have the ability to use strategies as an effort to overcome obstacles or difficulties, able to control their feelings and/or behavior while dealing with the situations and so on. People who are optimistic perceive that positive result are more likely to be achieved. This leads to them more likely to show efforts of coping to overcome existing stressors (Perera & McIlveen, 2014). However, the data collected from the teachers showed the opposite. The teachers did not show confidence in their abilities. They also did not make an effort to cope with difficult situation. This shows that teachers did not possess optimism at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in the form of personalization dimension.

Other data were obtained regarding the condition of teachers at the beginning of the pandemic. Data shows that teachers did not see nor feel positive or good things from the pandemic situation or online learning activities. In contrast, teachers were actually feeling negative things such as dissatisfaction towards their teaching experience during online learning. They said that their teaching experiences at the beginning actually caused them to feel more negative things compared to normal conditions, such as:

Participants: *"We felt different atmosphere, different feelings in the beginning. It was the beginning of the semester, so we haven't got the chance to meet the students in person. We didn't know their characters yet. This of course caused difficulties in teaching. To be able to evaluate their character and attitude, it was different from normal condition. We cannot interact with the students and we cannot clearly pinpoint their character while interact with friends."*

Pervasiveness dimension is a form of optimism that shows a person belief that there are positive things that can be obtained from a difficult situation they are facing. When a person can see positive things or the benefit from online learning activities that they are currently doing, it indicates that they have optimism. On the other hand, data collected from teachers shows that they were unable to see the positive sides and benefits that come from the difficult situation which is Covid-19 pandemic. This means that the teachers did not show optimism in the form of pervasiveness dimension at the beginning of online learning implementation.

After implementing online learning for 1 semester since the beginning of Covid-19 pandemic, there was a change in how teachers perceived their experiences. Unlike before, teachers stated that they starting to feel like they were able to control the negative feelings such as boredom and fatigue that they felt during bad situation that is teaching in pandemic situation.

Participant: *"Because the situation has been going on for far too long, the feeling that came (during online teaching) was boredom. However, since we start to understand the situation at hand better, we try to control ourselves and not letting the feelings affect our teaching plans. Us as teachers are trying to give the best for our students."*

Teachers tried out various strategies to control these negative feelings by focusing more on positive side of things, trying to be tolerant to difficult situation and always reminding themselves their responsibility as teacher which is to teach students to the best of their

ability. Teachers felt empowered to overcome difficult situation and obstacles. They are able to show efforts to solve the problems they encountered while teaching during pandemic. Teachers made adjustments to the learning methods so that online learning activities can be implemented. Some adjustments that they have done are:

Participant 1: *"Us first grade teachers have agreed to arrange online video call with students twice a week. In that meeting, we reviewed past materials that students have learned before and also new materials. For old material, we strengthen their comprehension and for new material we try to introduce it to them. Alhamdulillah, this method can be carried out and it helped us (to deliver materials)."*

Participant 2: *"Other challenging thing for us is that we need to try to be more creative. How to carry out materials with all this dynamic, but still able to deliver the competencies that demanded by the school. And after the delivery, we need to make sure students master that competency."*

Teachers view bad things that happened in the implementation of online learning are caused by external factors that they cannot control. On the other hand, they see good or positive things as something that are caused by internal factors or things that came from within themselves that can be controlled and done by them.

Participant 1: *"The problem with (internet network) signal is a bit tricky. Or problems related to availability of gadget at students' house. For example, there are students that are not allowed to use gadget by themselves, so their parents took the phone with them (to work). We try to overcome this by scheduling another video call."*

Participant 2: *"Our responsibility as teacher is to teach our students, but now we need to divide this responsibility with parents. That's why we tried to improve things that might help them (parents) so the learning activities become more comfortable for students. We also try to communicate more openly with the parents."*

A perspective that view internal factors as the cause of positive situations makes individuals feel empowered to overcome bad situation that they faced so they start making efforts to overcome them. This includes controlling negative feelings and implementing various strategies to overcome obstacles.

Teachers who actively try to do something positive to overcome the difficult situation they faced shows optimism in the form of personalization dimension. Someone who is optimistic tends to solve problems more courageously without giving up easily trying to solve existing problems (Indawati & Kholifah, 2017). Strategies and efforts to solve this situation can be expressed in the form of emotional control through planning or implementation of new teaching methods adapted to the online learning situation.

In addition to feeling empowered to overcome difficult situations, teachers also believe that there are benefits or positive things that can be obtained among all the bad things they faced. Teachers can see and feel positive things from online learning situation despite facing obstacles in its implementation. Teachers stated that teaching experiences during online learning had a positive impact on themselves, such as:

Participant 1: *"We feel grateful, since parents are giving attention (to their children study). Sometimes we just started to grade the student's works, but the parents already ask (about it)."*

Participant 2: *"I am lucky to have friends who are willing to support each other so we did not feel lonely. It was very helpful for me. All of the difficulties can be solved because of it, insyaAllah."*

Participant 3: *"There are many advantages that I gain. Before pandemic, we might be slightly ignorant towards Information and Technologies competency. But now, we need to suddenly master those abilities. At first, I also felt the same. I didn't know what kind of online platform that is available, but now I know. We also start to learn to make flyers. So, there will be new competencies that we could get because of this pandemic."*

Teachers feel various of positive things when implementing online learning activities, one of which is the support and helping behavior between them and their colleagues. Social support from peers can be one of the factors that make teachers successful in overcoming and adapting to changing situations due to the pandemic. Social support can help individuals to overcome psychological problems and adapt to stressful situations which then increase their positive expectations on how the situations would progress in the future (Wardiyah et al., 2015).

Looking at the positive side of bad situation that the teachers showed indicate their optimism in the form of pervasiveness dimension. Behaviors such as being grateful and seeing the benefit of the situation at hand indicate a belief that a bad situation has something positive within. Gratitude can make individuals view situation as positive and beneficial (Mukhlis, 2016). Feelings of gratitude have a significant positive correlation with optimism (Atiqoh & Fu'ady, 2020). The more grateful a person feels towards the circumstances they are experiencing, the level of their optimism would also increase.

Changes that occur in life, including changes to learning activities at school caused by Covid-19 pandemic made the future cannot be predicted. However, even with how unpredictable the future become, teachers showed confidence that the difficult situation of this pandemic was only a temporary event and could change for the better. Teachers have hopes for the future that difficult situation in this pandemic time will end, such in statements like:

Participant 1: *"We have hope that this pandemic will end soon."*

Participant 2: *"Even so, we hope that learning activities can be done normally like before this pandemic time."*

Other than the belief that bad situation can improve for the better, teachers also believe that good or positive situations have permanent causes. This belief implied that things caused a good situation to happen can be repeated or reproduced and will be resulting in the same good thing or situation.

Participant: *"There's still uncertainty about this pandemic situation, when will it end is still uncertain. So, we decided to try to work in this situation. With this not-so-ideal situation, how can we deliver materials in an exciting way for the students so they can still grasp it."*

Teachers stated that even with the uncertainty of how long this pandemic would last, they still have hope by making efforts to be able to create positive outcomes similar to the situation before pandemic. They tried to plan and adapt the lesson methods for online learning so that the outcome would be similar to the outcome of the usual normal methods used before pandemic. Positive view that the bad situation can improve in the future show teacher optimism in the form of permanence dimension.

Analysis towards teachers' experiences resulted in an overview of teachers' optimism during online learning implementation in Covid-19 pandemic time. It shows that teachers generally experienced similar things. At the beginning of the pandemic, teachers haven't show forms of optimism through their behavior or thoughts. However, after implementing online learning for 1 semester, they start to show optimism when teaching using online methods. Optimism emerged in three forms of dimensions. Teachers' optimism was shown when they feel that they have the ability to overcome difficult situation and they also made efforts or strategies to overcome it. Teachers can also recognize and feel the benefit of online teaching methods and can see the positive side of things in bad or difficult situation. Beliefs that pandemic situation can improve and be better in the future also contributed to the emergence of optimism on teachers.

4. CONCLUSION

Covid-19 pandemic is an unexpected situation that is hard to predict. The optimism that teachers feel at the beginning of pandemic time when they started to implement online learning seems different with what they feel after doing it for one semester. At the beginning, teachers have not shown optimism while doing online learning activities. They have not done any efforts to try to overcome difficult situation they faced (personalization) and viewed the situation to have no positive or beneficial side for them. Even worse, they saw the situation to bring obstacles towards their teaching activities (pervasiveness). After one semester of doing online learning method, teachers seem to be more optimistic. Teacher's optimism shown in the form of these behavior, namely (1) teachers felt that they have the ability to come up with a strategy to overcome the difficulties of teaching during pandemic situation (personalization), (2) teachers have belief that pandemic situation is temporary and could improve to be better in the future, and (3) teacher's also able to see the positive side of a bad situation and take advantage of the situation faced while doing online learning (pervasiveness).

The result of this study provides information that teachers believe that the Covid-19 pandemic will get better in the future, making teachers feel motivated to keep trying to make the situation advantageous for them. Teachers and education institution such as school should take this opportunity to upgrade teachers' competencies in teaching using online media and platforms, and diversifies learning materials and contents for students. Even when the pandemic ends, teachers should continue to use the new platforms, contents and media that they have learned during online learning and integrates them to classroom teaching. This will enrich the teaching methods and materials given in class and expose students to variation of new learning experiences. With this continuation of efforts to upgrade teachers' competencies, teachers will continue to feel the benefits resulting from the pandemic and feel that they have the means to teach even in difficult situation, which then resulting in the emergence of optimism within themselves.

There is limitation in this study where this study was conducted in the first few months of Covid-19 pandemic. The data collected are limited to teachers' experiences while adapting to the change of learning situation at the beginning of pandemic. Further research could explore more about teachers' optimism as Covid-19 pandemic start to improve for the better and learning activities start shifting towards normal or hybrid methods. More researches are needed to explore how optimism are shown by teachers while teaching during those changing times.

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