

The Role of Principals in Maintaining the Quality of Education Units: An Evaluation Study of Distance Learning Policies in Elementary Schools, Yogyakarta City

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Abstract

The principal, as a leader, has a role and responsibility to improve the quality of education, especially in distance learning mode, which is prone to learning loss. The principal's paradigm is that the boss must change in the current era to become a servant to the school community. This is very much needed in improving the quality of managed education units. The purpose of this study is to describe the activities carried out by school principals in preparing for distance learning to obtain a policy on the evaluation seen. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach, with data analysis using Miles and Huberman's steps. The research subject is the principal of the basic education unit in Yogyakarta. A total of 27 people. The results obtained, principals in elementary school education units in Yogyakarta have implemented distance learning following established guidelines. However, in the aspect of the care program, more action is still needed. Thus, in general, the conclusion is that the principal in the primary school education unit in the city of Yogyakarta has successfully implemented the existing guidelines.

Keywords: *the principal, role, distance learning*

Abstrak

Kepala sekolah sebagai seorang pemimpin memiliki peranan dan tanggung jawab dalam meningkatkan mutu pendidikan, apalagi dalam mode pembelajaran jarak jauh yang rentan terjadi *learning loss*. Paradigma kepala sekolah adalah bos harus berubah dalam era saat ini menjadi seorang pelayan bagi warga sekolahnya. Hal demikian sangat diperlukan dalam perbaikan mutu satuan Pendidikan yang dikelola. Tujuan dari penelitian ini untuk mendeskripsikan kegiatan yang dilakukan kepala sekolah dalam mempersiapkan pembelajaran jarak jauh, sehingga didapat kebijakan atas evaluasi yang dilihat. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, dengan analisis data menggunakan Langkah Miles dan Huberman. Subjek penelitian yakni kepala sekolah di satuan Pendidikan dasar kota Yogyakarta. Sejumlah 27 orang. Hasil penelitian didapatkan, kepala sekolah di satuan Pendidikan sekolah dasar di kota Yogyakarta telah melaksanakan pembelajaran jarak jauh sesuai dengan pedoman yang telah ditetapkan. Namun demikian, pada aspek program pengasuhan masih diperlukan tindakan lebih. Dengan demikian, secara umum simpulan yang diperoleh yaitu kepala sekolah di satuan Pendidikan sekolah dasar di kota Yogyakarta berhasil mengimplementasikan pedoman yang ada.

Kata kunci: *kepala sekolah, peran, pembelajaran jarak jauh*



INTRODUCTION

Concerning the spread of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, through circular letter number 4 of 2020, stipulates an education policy in the emergency period of the spread of Covid-19 that the process of teaching and learning activities is carried out in the form of distance learning (PJJ) (Kemendikbud, 2020). The policy for implementing distance learning is strengthened by the circular letter of the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Education and Culture number 15 of 2020 regarding guidelines for implementing learning from home (BDR) during the Covid-19 emergency (Kemendikbud, 2020). This guide is intended to be used as a reference by the Ministry of Education and Culture and Local Governments in managing and coordinating the implementation of BDR policies, as well as by Education Units, Teachers, Students, and Parents in implementing BDR. These guidelines are enforced during the COVID-19 emergency. These guidelines aim to ensure children's right to continue to receive education services; protect the citizens of the Education unit; prevent the spread and transmission of COVID-19 in the Education unit and ensure the fulfillment of psychosocial support for educators, students, and parents/guardians.

Unfortunately, although there are already guidelines, there are still many problems in implementing distance learning. These problems include communication problems, equipment or media, and the success of learning itself (Dickey, 2003; Rigianti, 2020; Rohman et al., 2020; Sari et al., 2020; Suryaman et al., 2020; Watie & Fanani, n.d.). No less heartbreaking, Commissioner of the Child Protection Commission (KPAI) Retno Listyarti stated that distance learning only serves children (Bimo, 2021). This is stated because middle to lower social class students does not have gadgets for learning tools. Even sadder, Commission X DPR RI noted that distance learning was less than 30% effective from the existing research (Mutaqin, 2021). Thus, it is necessary to take corrective steps to minimize these problems through synergy and policymakers, especially in the Principal's role as the Education Unit's Head.

In addition to the problems mentioned above, another issue that is no less important is learning loss (Åberg et al., 2005; Glaser, 1965; Morata et al., 2005). The results of the Policy Research Center's study of 69 schools with 3,391 students were astounding. The study found a decline in learning outcomes from grade 1 to grade 2 of 44 points for numeracy and 52 for literacy. This decrease is equivalent to 5 and 6 months of learning (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021; Pusat Penelitian Kebijakan, 2021). Policymakers, academics, and practitioners have made various efforts. Improvements in the curriculum, learning interaction patterns, learning strategies, utilization of learning resources, as well as a paradigm shift in the leadership of the education unit, in this case, the principal (Di Valentin et al., 2013; Loos & Crosby, 2017; van Helvoort, 2020).

The driving school is one of the breakthroughs in improving school management. The current situation is that the school is only a task, and a principal only manages and is primarily administrative. Teachers in schools are more focused on implementing the curriculum, not the owners and makers of the curriculum. And the teacher is the only source of knowledge, not a facilitator and source of knowledge. Learning is not only centered on expertise but uses a playful approach to improve literacy and numeracy. In addition, the teaching is based on age, not on students' ability. And the curriculum is only in the approach of academic activities (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

In driving schools, the principal is expected to be the driving force in advancing the school to become a quality school. The principal's leadership is a determining factor in school organizational change and management. Its existence is not only a symbol but a determinant of the success and quality of education in schools. This is a form of

commitment to improving the quality of learning (Gultom, 2018; Iipida, 2015; Kusumah & Alawiyah, 2021; Mansur, 2010; Shobirin, 2016; Widyastuti et al., 2020).

As a leader, the principal is responsible for improving the quality of education. To enhance the quality of education in schools, changes are needed in schools. Changes in schools will occur if they start from driving schools who are examples and role models for other schools. The driving school is expected to be an inspiration for principals and other teachers. Automatically the teachers in the driving school provide a variety of very diverse learning (Harris, 2013; Hopkins, 2013; Marks & Printy, 2003; Pont et al., 2008; Romlah et al., 2021).

As the head of the education unit, the principal is a leader and manager who greatly determines the dynamics of the school towards the gates of success and progress in all areas of life. The principal's intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social capacities of school principals significantly influence the effectiveness of his leadership on teacher performance and student achievement (Goldberg, 2001; Khairuddin, 2020; Wiyani, 2020).

The role of the principal's leadership in learning (instructional leadership) in improving the professionalism of teachers is an essential factor in school organization, primarily related to their responsibilities in improving the quality of learning in schools. Leadership is one of the managerial aspects of organizational life, which is a crucial position. A school principal must have a high responsibility for his authority, have a strong mentality, and increased education and also experience in work. Likewise, the principal's leadership on the effectiveness of the driving school is expected to understand the learning process and develop teachers. The principal in the driving school, in addition to managing the operations of a school, must understand the student learning process and become a facilitator for teachers in schools (Calomiris & Gorton, 1991; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1994).

This is important to be studied. With the role of a good principal, not only will the quality of education in the school become good, but teachers will also move their effectiveness in learning. Thus, indirectly the professionalism of teachers will develop. This is a good indicator that the circulation of a teaching and learning activity is going well (Maduratna, 2013; Manora, 2019; Mulyana, 2014).

The circular also shows the importance of the role of the principal to be studied in the implementation of distance learning, which provides a systematic description of what a school principal does—starting from the principal's task in determining the management model of his education unit, second, how the principal ensures an affordable learning system for all his students, third, how the principal makes a learning continuity plan. Fourth, how is the pattern of coaching evaluation and monitoring of learning outcomes? As well as how the principal prepares a report to the education office or related education post.

METHOD

This study used the descriptive qualitative method. In this case, the researcher explores information, an overview of the role of the principal in the implementation of distance learning that has taken place (Samsudi, 2009). The sample in this study was 27 principals in basic education units in the education office of Yogyakarta City. Data collection techniques using documentation, observation, and interviews. The data analysis technique uses data triangulation, and then the Miles and Huberman model analysis technique is used, which includes data collection, data presentation, condensation, and concluding (Miles et al., 2018). The principal indicators for the implementation of distance learning are shown in table 1 below.

Table 1. Indicators of the Implementation of PJJ by the Principal

Categories	Performance Indicator
Implementation of distance learning by principals	The principal establishes a model for managing the education unit during distance learning.
	The principal ensures an affordable learning system for all students, including students with disabilities.
	The principal makes a learning continuity plan.
	Principals conduct coaching and monitoring of teachers through learning reports collected weekly.
	Principals make parenting programs to support parents/guardians in accompanying students to study at least once a week.
	The principal school forms an emergency alert team for handling COVID-19 in the education unit, provides a briefing on duties and responsibilities to the team, and coordinates with the education office or the local COVID-19 handling task force or health facilities/references for handling COVID-19 19 closest.
	Principals provide periodic reports to the education office or related regional education posts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the study, it was shown that the role of twenty-seven school principals in the primary school education unit in the city of Yogyakarta in the context of implementing the policy program in circular letter number 15 regarding the implementation of distance learning, was carried out in the following seven performance indicators.

The principal establishes a model for managing the education unit

The aspect considered in this work indicator is establishing a working and teaching model from home for teachers and education personnel. Another factor that becomes a measuring tool is determining the picket schedule by the principal. In this case, the implementation of the picket should be coordinated with the education office and the local COVID-19 handling group.

Principals in primary school education units in the city of Yogyakarta, only 48% have set a working and teaching model from home for teachers and education personnel. This is because the circular regarding the implementation of distance learning has not yet been disseminated, so principals and teachers are still groping about determining the model to be used. Another factor that influences this is the internet network. Some teachers and education staff have difficulty signaling, and some are related to the limited internet quota, so they choose to work from school using the available WIFI facilities.

Furthermore, in determining the picket schedule by the school principal, only 59% of the head of the education unit prepare the picket schedule. This percentage does not escape the domino effect of the first aspect, where there are still many teachers and education personnel who have not implemented the working and teaching model from home. Further results, out of 59% of school principals who compile schedules, only 44% are in the preparation of their picket schedules in coordination with the Education office and the local COVID-19 task force.

Based on the explanation above, the indicators that the principal determines the management model in the Education unit during distance learning have not been said to be effective. This is indicated by the percentage of aspect achievement, which is only

around 54%. Lack of socialization and coordination with related parties made this first indicator not achieved as expected. In addition to these reasons, the unpreparedness of school administrators in the sudden onset of a pandemic also affects administrative management.

The principal ensures an affordable learning system for all students (including students with disabilities)

In this indicator, the study results show that 100% of all school principals have ensured an affordable learning system for their students. This certainty is demonstrated by empirical evidence by teachers' reports in implementing their learning. This cannot be separated from the role of the principal in quality management.

An affordable learning system for students is essential because it is the basis for implementing distance learning. The technical barriers can be minimized if students get convenience in the learning process. However, because the sample schools rarely found students with disabilities, the elaboration regarding the certainty of the learning system for people with disabilities could not be explored further.

Given the results that reached 100%, the second indicator related to the role of the principal in ensuring an affordable learning system for all students can be said to be fulfilled. That means the principal has played a good position in this second aspect. The system created and the coordination carried out with its users is well established. The teaching and learning process supervision is carried out by coordinating meetings with teachers, parents, and other stakeholders.

The principal makes a learning continuity plan

The roles of the three principals related to the follow-up plan were reduced to three aspects. The aspects being considered are that the principal provides: 1) Instructions and online learning materials using online learning media and resources; 2) Offline learning instructions and materials using television, radio, books, and independent learning modules for students; 3) Instructions for adapting learning materials for students with disabilities; 4) The results showed that 93% of principals in primary school education units in Yogyakarta had developed a distance learning sustainability plan. Suppose the COVID-19 emergency period and distance learning are extended. The follow-up to the sustainability of knowledge is using media and online learning resources for teachers. The principal has also instructed teachers to provide learning materials outside the network, using television, radio, books, and independent learning modules to their students.

The instruction has been implemented by 67% of principals out of 93% of schools that have made a learning continuity plan. The principal has given instructions to adapt learning materials to students in general and students with disabilities in particular. Although only 67% of principals provide education, it can be said that the principal's role is going well in this aspect. This is shown by 93% of principals in primary school education units who have prepared a distance learning sustainability plan.

Principals conduct coaching and monitoring of teachers through learning reports collected weekly

This fourth indicator has six components that focus on the principal's role in distance learning. First, the principal ensures that teachers facilitate online and offline distance learning. Second, ensure that the lesson plan implements meaningful education, life skills, and physical activities. Third, ensure that there are educational materials for parents/guardians of students regarding preventing COVID-19 and enforcing clean living behavior patterns at home. Fourth access to online and offline learning media. Fifth, distribution of offline learning facilities and teaching aids to

students' homes, including educational aids for students with disabilities (for those who do not have access to online learning). Lastly, coordinate with the education office, social service, and the women's empowerment and child protection office to seek psychosocial support services for educators, parents/guardians, and students.

The results showed that the principal had implemented the six components of the fourth indicator as the head of the education unit. It can be shown that all respondents, in this case, the principal, have provided guidance and monitoring to teachers through learning reports collected weekly. All school principals have also monitored and ensured that teachers had been facilitated in distance learning.

Of the principals who have coached and monitored teachers, 923% of principals have supervised the learning implementation plan (RPP). The lesson plans prepared by the teacher have (in writing) implemented meaningful learning, with activities that reflect life skills and physical activity. In terms of monitoring the implementation of distance learning, the results obtained are that all school principals have observed/ensured the existence of educational materials for parents/guardians of students related to preventing COVID-19 and implementing clean living behavior patterns at home. The principal has also played a role in coaching and monitoring teachers through learning reports collected weekly.

Regarding equipment availability, 93% of principals have monitored the availability of devices/computers/laptops for online learning facilities. The principal has also ensured internet access in the education unit led to distance learning media. The thing that is still homework for school principals is related to distributing infrastructure facilities to the homes of students with disabilities. Only 59% of principals distribute offline learning facilities and teaching aids to students' homes, including educational aids for students with disabilities who do not have access to online learning.

In terms of coordination, 74% of school principals coordinate with the education office, social service, and the women's empowerment and child protection service to seek psychosocial support services for educators, parents/guardians, and students. This is a good thing regarding the principal's role in coaching and monitoring the teaching and learning process by teachers in the Education unit. Although it seems trivial, the impact is extraordinary. Learning outcomes will be easily achieved with good coordination between schools and existing stakeholders.

Principals make parenting programs to support parents/guardians in accompanying students to study at least once a week

The fifth indicator challenges principals in the education units they lead. Coordination with parents/guardians of students regarding the implementation of distance learning has been carried out. Unfortunately, parenting programs that support parents/guardians in assisting students in studying are problematic. 63% of school principals make parenting programs for parents/guardians of students in school. Although making a program, the impression is only an appeal to accompany and escort children's learning at home. Training is needed in creating parenting programs to support parents/guardians in assisting students in education.

The top school forms an emergency alert team for handling COVID-19 in the education unit, provides a briefing on duties and responsibilities to the team, and coordinates with the education office or the local COVID-19 handling task force or health facilities/references for handling COVID-19 19 closest

In the sixth indicator, related to the formation of an emergency alert team for handling COVID-19 in the Education unit, principals at the elementary school level in the city of Yogyakarta have formed an emergency alert team (task unit) in their respective schools. 97% of school principals have prepared an assignment letter for this matter.

This emergency alert team acts as a filter and liaison for school residents affected by COVID-19 with existing stakeholders. Of the 97% of school principals who have formed a standby team (task unit), 85% of school principals provide a briefing on the duties and responsibilities of the emergency standby team. The debriefing was carried out in coordination with the Education office, the local COVID-19 handling task force, and the health facilities that became a reference in handling. This is a good asset in carrying out the task of the standby team.

Principals provide periodic reports to the education office or related regional education posts

In the seventh indicator, the role of the principal in the implementation of distance learning in the education unit, five things serve as the basis (aspects) that serve as guidelines—first, the health condition of the residents of the education unit. Second, the distance learning method is used (in the network / outside the web / blended learning). The third is the number of students who cannot be served. Fourth, the obstacles to the implementation of distance learning. Lastly, good practice and student learning outcomes.

The results showed that 74% of school principals had provided periodic reports to the education office regarding the health conditions of residents in the education unit. Periodic reports are given once a week or are incidental. 82% of school principals also provide regular reports to the education office regarding the distance learning methods used. In addition, 74% of school principals have provided periodic reports to the education office regarding the number of students who have not been served. And, 96% of school principals have also provided regular reports to the education office regarding obstacles in implementing distance learning. In addition, 82% of school principals have provided periodic reports to the education office regarding good practices and student learning outcomes.

This is a good record in terms of administration. With the data bank from the report, the principal and the task force team can follow up on the notice with real action in the field. In addition, with the data, school principals can estimate and anticipate the follow-up plans for distance learning in their respective education units.

The activities carried out by 27 elementary school principals under the Yogyakarta City Education Office showed data related to the education unit management model are essential things that must be carried out according to the conditions of each school. Of course, this is not without reason, given the various characteristics of schools. The principal, in this case, needs to look at the strengths and weaknesses of each. In implementing school programs for quality improvement, school principals need to conduct a SWOT analysis (Nur et al., 2016). This is, of course, to know the strengths and weaknesses of each school.

In managing distance learning, the principal also monitors students related to ability to access learning activities carried out by teachers. It is essential to do this where in school management, it is necessary to pay attention to the diversity of students from all socioeconomic, physical, and so on. Classroom management needs to accommodate student diversity (Mustafida, 2021). The ability of teachers to accommodate the entire diversity of students indeed cannot be separated from the role of the principal in terms of managing human resources.

The success of distance learning carried out by a school cannot be separated from the implementation of supervision and guidance for teachers. One of the principal roles is as a supervisor, in which case the principal must guide teachers in improving the learning process. Supervision is essential to be held by the principal because it can enhance professional abilities and the educational process in schools to be better and of higher quality (Ginting, 2020)

In implementing distance learning, the principal also establishes synergy with parents. Communication-related to all matters relating to the development of students continues to be carried out. Obstacles in implementing school programs can be minimized by actively involving parents in implementing school programs (Yuli & Cucu, 2021). Parental commitment to participating in school will positively impact the implementation of school programs (Norlena, 2015).

School principals in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic also need to form a covid alert in schools. This is important considering that children need to receive education related to COVID-19 in this regard. Education about the spread is necessary for children about COVID-19 and how to prevent it (Jamilah et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

In general, it can be concluded that the principal in the primary school education unit in the city of Yogyakarta has played a good role. This role has been referred to as circular letter number 14, which includes 1) Principals establishing a model for managing academic units during distance learning; 2) The principal ensuring an affordable learning system for all students, including students with disabilities; 3) The principal makes a learning continuity plan; 4) Principals provide guidance and monitoring to teachers through learning reports that are collected every week; 5) Principals make parenting programs to support parents/guardians in assisting students in studying, at least once a week; 6) The principal forms an emergency alert team for handling COVID-19 in the education unit, provides a briefing on duties and responsibilities to the team and coordinates with the education office or the local COVID-19 handling task force or health facilities/handling referrals. Nearest COVID-19; and 7) Principals provide periodic reports to the education office or related regional education posts.

The thing that is still a note for further research is related to parenting programs to support parents/guardians in assisting students in learning. More assistance is needed in program preparation, which gives a clear picture of the duties of parents at home in their duties to assist children in learning. Thus, the circular regarding the guidelines for implementing distance learning for the head of the elementary school education unit in the city of Yogyakarta can guide the principal's duties. To not seem just administrative, collaboration with related parties is needed to provide a complete picture for school principals in translating intentions into an appropriate instrument.

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