

Optimizing Learning During a Pandemic in Improving Early Childhood Cognitive Abilities

Salma Maulida¹, Naimah², dan Suyadi³

¹²³State Islamic University of Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta

e-mail corresponden: 19204032001@student.uin-suka.ac.id

ABSTRAK. Dengan adanya pandemi Covid-19 maka diambillah kebijakan social distancing atau lebih dikenal dengan physical distancing yang artinya menjaga jarak fisik. Kebijakan ini diambil untuk menghambat penyebaran virus dengan berupaya memecah kemungkinan kerumunan akan terjadi. Kemdikbud merespon kebijakan ini dengan memunculkan kebijakan belajar dari rumah melalui pembelajaran daring (dalam jaringan). Dengan bagaimanapun keadaannya pembelajaran harus tetap berjalan. Guru harus mampu mengoptimalkan dan mengkondisikan proses pembelajaran dengan baik. Dalam aspek kognisi atau kemampuan berfikir, pada masa usia dini (0-6 tahun) terjadi perubahan yang dramatis. Perkembangan yang terjadi bukan hanya secara kuantitatif, tetapi juga kualitatif. Intelegensi memang memainkan peran penting dalam kehidupan seseorang, walaupun intelegensi bukanlah satu-satunya faktor yang menentukan sukses atau tidaknya kehidupan seseorang. Mengingat betapa pentingnya perkembangan kognitif bagi anak, maka diharapkan guru mampu mengkondisikan dan memberikan pembelajaran dengan optimal supaya perkembangan kognitif anak usia dini dapat terstimulus dengan baik. Berkaitan dengan penelitian tersebut, penulis melakukan penelitian tentang cara pengoptimalisasian pembelajaran dimasa pandemi dalam meningkatkan kemampuan kognitif anak usia dini. Penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian studi kasus. Dari penelitian ini dapat diambil kesimpulan bahwa pemilihan metode pembelajaran homevisit dan daring dengan menggunakan aplikasi whatsapp dengan memanfaatkan fitur wargrup dan videocall ternyata mampu menjaga semangat dan ketertarikan anak dalam belajar meskipun pandemi sedang mewabah, sehingga kemampuan kognitif anak dapat terus meningkat tanpa mengalami hambatan yang berarti.

Kata Kunci: pembelajaran dimasa pandemi, kemampuan kognitif

ABSTRACT. With the Covid-19 pandemic, a social distancing policy was adopted or better known as physical distancing, which means maintaining physical distance. This policy was taken to curb the spread of the virus by trying to break down the likelihood that swarms would occur. The Ministry of Education and Culture responds to this policy by creating a policy of learning from home through online learning (online). After all, learning must continue to run. Teachers must be able to optimize and condition the learning process well. In terms of cognition or thinking ability, at an early age (0-) 6 years) there has been a dramatic change. The development that occurs is not only quantitative, but also qualitative. Intelligence does play an important role in a person's life, even though intelligence is not the only factor that determines the success or failure of a person's life. Given how important cognitive development is for children, it is hoped that teachers are able to condition and provide optimal learning so that early childhood cognitive development can be stimulated properly. In connection with this research, the authors conducted research on how to optimize learning during the pandemic period in enhancing the cognitive abilities of early childhood. This research uses qualitative research with the type of case study research. From this research, it can be concluded that the selection of homevisit and online learning methods using the WhatsApp application by utilizing the wargrup and videocall features is able to maintain children's enthusiasm and interest in learning even though the pandemic is endemic, so that children's cognitive abilities can continue to increase without experiencing significant obstacles.

Keyword: learning during the pandemic, cognitive abilities

INTRODUCTION

The spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) in many countries in the world, forcing people to pause for a moment from the competition for world interests, this virus pandemic forces people to look at and re-experience the journey of life, family, and the

surrounding social environment in its true meaning. The State of Indonesia has great challenges in handling and adapting to the spread of Covid-19. One aspect that has major challenges in dealing with this pandemic is education (Wibowo, 2013). The Covid 19 pandemic forced the Government to temporarily close all educational institutions in hopes of preventing the spread of the Coronavirus. This policy does not only occur in Indonesia but is also implemented in almost all countries in the world exposed to Covid 19 (Anhusadar, 2020). In order to maintain life, a social distancing policy was adopted, or better known as physical distancing, which means maintaining physical distance. This policy was taken to inhibit the spread of the virus by trying to break down the possibility that crowds will occur. The Ministry of Education and Culture responded to this policy by bringing up a policy of learning from home through online learning (in the network) (Suharwoto, 2021). In any case, learning must continue. Teachers must be able to optimize and condition the learning process well.

Early childhood education is the stage of education before entering elementary school. Early childhood education is an educational effort that is given to children from birth until the child is 6 years old. This is carried out by providing various educational stimuli to assist the development of the physical and spiritual aspects of children so that they are better prepared to enter further stages of education. Early childhood education is carried out on formal, non-formal, and informal channels (Wibowo, 2013). According to M. Sholehudin in Ahmad Susanto's book, in terms of cognition or the ability to think, at an early age (0-6 years) there is a dramatic change. Developments that occur are not only quantitative but also qualitative. Intelligence does play an important role in one's life, although intelligence is not the only factor that determines the success or failure of one's life (Susanto, 2012). Given how important cognitive development is for children, it is hoped that teachers can condition and provide optimal learning so that early childhood cognitive development can be properly stimulated. In this article the author will discuss the types of learning models used at Raudhatul Athfal Muslimat NU 007 Gandu I Mlarak Ponorogo during the Covid-19 Pandemic, supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of learning and how to optimize early childhood cognitive abilities in implementing learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

METHOD

In this study, researchers used a case study type of research. Case study research is said to be an investigative method that is carried out directly, has a natural background, and focuses attention on an event intensively and in detail. This type of research aims to develop in-depth knowledge related to the object under study and the nature of the research is more explorative and descriptive (Ghoni & Al Mansur, 2012). The research method is a qualitative research method, which is a research approach that is oriented towards natural phenomena or events. The nature of this research is fundamental and naturalistic and can only be carried out in the field or at the scene and cannot be carried out in the laboratory (Mahmud, 2011).

This research was carried out at RAM Gandu I, with informants from the Principal, Deputy Head of Curriculum, and Class Teachers. In addition to human data sources (interviews), researchers also use document data sources in the form of rating scales or the level of achievement of children's cognitive development. In the process of collecting data, researchers began by observing learning activities at RAM Gandu I during the Covid-19 pandemic, then researchers took documentation of the learning process and recorded the development of children's cognitive

abilities and then gathered information by interviewing informants. The process of data analysis was carried out before going into the field when observing in the field and after coming out of the field. This study used data analysis techniques from Miles B. and Huberman Michael A. The first stage of this data analysis technique was collecting data about the implementation of learning during the Covid-19 pandemic and children's cognitive abilities. The second stage is data reduction which is carried out after all the data has been collected and then it will be carried out by summarizing, selecting, and focusing on the main things, which are related to optimizing learning during the Covid-19 pandemic in improving children's cognitive abilities. The third stage is data presentation, which means explaining or re-describing the reduced data into narrative text related to optimizing learning during the Covid-19 pandemic carried out by institutions to improve children's cognitive abilities. And the last stage is concluding. In this final stage, conclusions are drawn from the data that has been presented to find out how to optimize learning during the Covid-19 pandemic to improve children's cognitive abilities.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Pembelajaran Dimasa Pandemi Covid-19

Teaching and learning activities are a condition that is deliberately made. And the teacher is the maker to teach students. Teachers as instructors and students as learners. The combination of the two gives rise to educational interactions that utilize the material as the medium. In the teaching and learning process, all teaching components must be carried out optimally to achieve the predetermined learning objectives (Djamarah & Zain, 2010). In this activity, students can be positioned as objects or subjects, because the essence of learning is the child's learning process in achieving the specified goals (Djamarah & Zain, 2010). The term Learning became known and used in 2005 after the change of the 1994 curriculum to a Competency-Based Curriculum. From a linguistic point of view, the word learning comes from the word teach. In KBBI, teaching words are nouns that have the meaning of instructions given to people so that they are known. Ajar has the verb teach which means giving lessons. While the subject of teaching is the teacher, while the process and method are teaching. In contrast to teaching, learning means the process, the method, and the act of encouraging people to learn. In the learning process, the relationship between teacher and students is more dominated by students when the learning process takes place, the transformation of scientific values and skills (Wiyani, 2013).

With the emergence of the Psychological Distancing policy, learning is also carried out remotely. This is commonly known as learning from home. Learning from home can be carried out online which is an alternative for students to receive learning and get their learning rights which were previously lost due to the pandemic (Conrad, 2002). In situations like this, it is felt that it is very important to always explore and find solutions to problems with online learning to improve the quality of learning (Dumford & Miller, 2018). Online learning for teachers and students is one of the fastest-growing trends in the use of educational technology (Means dkk., 2012). At this time, online learning is integrated with social networks that build a circle for interconnected communication between students, teachers, and professors from every corner of the world, anytime and anywhere (Bhagat dkk., 2016). The advantages of online learning are its effectiveness in implementing education for students, its use as a form of professional development, its cost-effectiveness in combating the increase in the cost of providing education,

and providing a world-class education for anyone with various live video and audio application media (Satriana dkk., 2020).

Several distance learning methods that can be applied during a pandemic include:

1. *PBL (Project Based Learning)*

Starting from the implications of the Minister of Education and Culture Circular No.4 of 2020, PBL aims to make students more willing to collaborate, work together and empathize with their peers. This method is carried out by forming small groups of students to work on a simple project or experiment together. PBL is suitable to be implemented in areas with yellow or green zones while still paying attention to health protocols.

2. *Luring*

Online or offline learning methods are learning methods that are carried out directly or face-to-face. This learning method is carried out by paying attention to the zoning and implementing strict health protocols. In this method, students are not immediately included in one class at the same time but will be rotated using the shift model to avoid crowds.

3. *Home Visit Method*

A home visit is a learning method in which the teacher holds learning activities in one of the student's homes with only a few children and a set schedule, changing to another student's house with other students as well. This method is similar to homeschooling. With the application of this method, it is hoped that the material can be conveyed properly to students with direct guidance from the teacher.

4. *Integrated Curriculum*

This method relates one subject to another subject matter. In practice, students will be formed into several groups to become work teams besides that the teacher will also form team teaching with other subject teachers so that the material can be conveyed properly. This learning method is carried out online so that it can be applied and is safe for students.

5. *Blended Learning*

Blended learning is a method that applies two approaches at once, namely online and face-to-face through video conferences. Even though learning activities are carried out remotely, students and teachers can still interact, so that students' cognitive abilities can still develop.

6. *Learning through Radio and Television*

This learning method can be said to be very effective in areas with difficult internet signals and inadequate infrastructure. Learning via radio can be done with voice input from the teacher or a competent party to deliver material according to needs or age. Likewise the use of television media, can be filled with various inspirational figures for children and those who are competent in their fields.

7. *Daring Method*

8. *Online or an extension of within the network is a learning model during a pandemic that is common and commonly used, namely by utilizing the internet network. This learning method usually utilizes various social networking applications and educational applications such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and Google Meet via Youtube and others.*

This method is very suitable for students in the red and orange zones (Meilwansyah, 2020). Learning with online methods has several characteristics, including:

- a. Learning material is delivered in various forms of multimedia elements, for example, text, images, graphics, videos, etc
- b. Communication can be carried out together or not, for example via video conferencing and chat.
- c. Learning is carried out through cyberspace.
- d. Various CD-ROM elements can be used.
- e. Teaching materials are easier to update.
- f. Increasing the interaction of students and educators.
- g. Allows both formal and non-formal forms of communication and learning.
- h. Learning resources can be varied and broad through the use of the internet .(Mustofa dkk., 2019)

Some of the benefits of Online learning:

- a. With the effective use of multimedia can improve the quality of education.
- b. Education and training are easier to reach by using online learning.
- c. Emphasis on the cost of organizing education and training (Bilfaqih & Qomarudin, 2015)
- d. Increasing the level of interaction between educators and students.
- e. Open learning communication opportunities from anywhere and anytime.
- f. Learners can be reached widely.
- g. Material storage and refinement become easier (Mustofa dkk., 2019).

Weaknesses encountered in the implementation of online learning include:

- a. The separation of the positions of teachers and students, students and their friends results in no physical interaction so it is feared that it will hinder the social development and attitudes and morals of students because they are not applied directly in daily activities.
- b. When learning is more focused on technological developments, it is feared that learning tends to be technical so it ignores the content and learning materials.
- c. Online learning tends to focus on educational training so that it places more emphasis on psychomotor aspects and pays less attention to affective aspects.
- d. Teachers are required to master technology. When a teacher has not been able to master technological developments, learning cannot run optimally and even learning can fail to be carried out.
- e. Online learning requires students to be independent without waiting for encouragement from the teacher. When learning motivation is lacking or usually guided by the teacher, the student may find it difficult to achieve a learning goal.
- f. The weakness that often occurs is that there are students who cannot take advantage of internet facilities because there are no infrastructure or network difficulties (Sari, 2015).

Cognitive Competence of Early Childhood Education

The word Cognitive is the adjective of the noun Cognition. In KBBI, cognition has several meanings, namely: the activity/process of acquiring knowledge (awareness and feelings), the form

of seeking knowledge through self-experience, the process of recognizing and understanding the environment, and the results of acquiring knowledge (Wiyani, 2015).

In Ahmad Susanto's book, it is stated, cognitive is a thinking process that is a person's ability to connect, assess and consider an event. The process of cognitive formation is related to the level of intelligence or intelligence which is characterized by a variety of interests in ideas and learning from someone. Gardner argues that intelligence is the ability to solve a problem or create work that can be appreciated by the environment or society (Gardner, 1993). In this opinion, Gardner expresses a pluralistic concept, namely intelligence in everyday life is not pure, but a mixture of various bits of intelligence such as linguistic intelligence, logical intelligence, intelligence, spatial, intrapersonal intelligence, and others (Susanto, 2012).

Meanwhile, the cognitive ability can be defined as something that involves cognition based on empirical factual knowledge. According to Novan Ardi W., Cognitive is applied by psychologists in explaining mental activities related to perception, memory, and information processing that enable individuals to gain knowledge, solve problems and plan for the future or it can be concluded that all psychological processes related to a person's way of learning, observing, imagining, guessing, assessing and interpreting the state of the environment. So the cognitive development of AUD is a psychological change that affects the ability to think AUD. With the development of AUD's thinking ability, he can explore himself, the people around him, animals, plants, and their environment. The various knowledge he gets will be a provision for his future development and carry out his duties as a servant of Allah SWT (Wiyani, 2015).

Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

According to Piaget's cognitive theory, children will construct their cognitive abilities. Children are always active in receiving and exploring information from their environment (Amalia, 2018). Piaget revealed that children develop through several stages of thought from infancy to adulthood. The process of thought development at each stage and for each child is different so one child's style of thinking is different from other children's. The stages of cognitive development according to Piaget include:

- a. The sensorimotor stage at the age of 0-2 years. At this stage, the baby moves instinctively and reflexively from birth to the beginning of symbolic thinking. Infants construct interpretations of the world by coordinating sensory actions with physical actions
- b. Pre-operational stage at the age of 2-7 years. At this stage, children describe the world and their environment with words and pictures. These words and images are evidence of an increase in symbolic thinking beyond censorship and physical action.
- c. The concrete operational stage is at the age of 7-11 years. At this stage, the child can think logically about various real events and can explain and relate objects in different forms.
- d. The formal operational stage is at the age of 11 years – adults. Children enter their teenage years and are more able to think logically and abstractly. Children have more idealistic thoughts (Wiyani, 2015).

Early childhood is in the sensory-motor and pre-operational stages, namely 0-6 years old. In the sensory-motor stage, children think through sensing and perception of real objects that are right in front of them, and in the pre-operational stage, children think not only of objects that are in front of them but also of objects that are symbolic as well. This means that at the pre-operational stage, children can represent various things that they imagine without the need to present these objects in real terms.

The pre-operational development stage is the stage of improvement of motor senses because the child can think symbolically. Jean Piaget said that the most important symbol is the word spoken and then written. Children's knowledge of symbols makes children able to remember shapes, and qualities and express them to others. Beberapa kelemahan anak pada tahap perkembangan pra operasional diantaranya:

- a. Centration. In this case, the child only thinks about one aspect and ignores the other aspects, so it often happens that the child draws illogical conclusions.
- b. Irreversibility. It is a failure to understand that events can happen in reverse.
- c. Focus on circumstances rather than change. Here the child has not been able to see and understand a process that occurs.
- d. Transductive Reasoning. This relates to logical thinking activities consisting of deduction and induction or thinking from general to specific and vice versa.
- e. Egocentrism. It is the inability to see a problem from another person's point of view. This does not mean selfishness, but children are only able to understand a problem from their perspective because of their limited thinking ability (Wiyani, 2015).

Factors influencing cognitive development

- a. Heredity or descent. Based on the theory of nativism, humans are born with a potential or talent that is not influenced by the environment or other humans, as well as their level of intelligence. According to psychological theory, 75-80% of human intelligence is derived from their parents.
- b. Based on the theory of empiricism, humans are born like white paper that is pure white without blemish. So human development is greatly influenced by the surrounding environment, as well as the level of intelligence which is determined by the experience and knowledge of the environment in which it develops.
- c. Maturity. Each physical and psychic organ has a different level of maturity when it is time to be able to carry out its duties. The ability of each of these organs is closely related to the maturity of individual intelligence.
- d. Formation. The formation is a condition from outside the individual that influences the development of intelligence. The formation is divided into 2, namely intentional formation, for example, schools, and unintentional formation, namely adjustment to the surrounding environment. So intelligence maturity is formed when it can adapt and survive.
- e. Interest and talent. Interest is the drive to do an activity better. Meanwhile, talent is a person's innate ability that still needs to be trained and honed to become an expert.
- f. Freedom factor. Freedom, namely the freedom of humans to think broadly to solve the problems they face and are freed to choose the problems they will face. (Susanto, 2014).

Optimizing Learning During a Pandemic in Improving Early Childhood Cognitive Ability at RAM NU 007 Gandu I

During the Covid-19 pandemic, RAM NU Gandu chose to use home-visit and online learning models. This learning model was chosen because it was felt to be very supportive of the situation and conditions at RAM NU 007 Gandu I. The home visit learning model was implemented in turns, alternating days with other classes. Meanwhile, the online learning model is carried out through the Whatsapp application by utilizing the group and videocall features. During

home visit lessons, the teacher came to the house of one of the students who had gathered several children to carry out the lesson as usual. Learning activities in this model are carried out as usual when learning is offline, but with a shortened time and a limited number of children while still implementing health protocols.

Online learning is carried out through the Whatsapp application with the group feature every day outside of the home visit schedule. In this lesson, as usual, the teacher opened the morning lesson with greetings and prayers and then gave the day's material. On several occasions for delivering material, the teacher sends videos or voice notes. On another occasion, the video call teacher took turns with several children in learning activities. In improving the cognitive abilities of early childhood, RAM NU 007 Gandu I has its method for dealing with and maintaining children's enthusiasm for learning. One example of an effort to improve the cognitive abilities of early childhood is in terms of the introduction of vowels and consonants. This letter recognition is carried out by the teacher by giving a special time or schedule for studying vowels and consonants. This learning is easy to implement during home visits and can also be carried out during online learning, namely using video calls.

The teacher holds a video call scheduled with several children, then the teacher writes a few letters and faces the camera screen. So that the child can see clearly what the teacher means and how. During the home visit, the introduction of consonants and vowels was carried out using pictorial media and practiced by the children directly in front of the teacher. Children can immediately recognize and express their level of understanding of the learning provided by the teacher. An example of an aspect of cognitive ability that tends to be difficult to teach children in distance learning is the grouping of objects into 3 variants. This tends to be difficult to teach so that children can understand the teacher's intentions because it requires real practice. Choosing the home visit method can be overcome, even with alternating schedules. When using online learning, the teacher uses the video call feature by asking for help from parents to prepare objects at home as practical materials, such as colored pencils that can be grouped by color, notebooks and picture books that can be grouped by shape, and story books. can be grouped by size. From these two things, it can be concluded that a pandemic is not an excuse not to improve children's abilities. The pandemic is a whip for teachers to always rack their brains in various ways so that children can always be interested and continue to be enthusiastic about learning. Especially in developing children's cognitive abilities, where cognitive abilities are indeed very important as a provision for taking education to the next level.

CONCLUSION

The pandemic is not an excuse to always remain silent. especially in terms of learning. even though during a pandemic physical activity must be limited, learning must continue to run well so that all aspects of children's development can continue to develop optimally. Especially the aspect of cognitive ability, which is one of the important provisions for children to continue to a higher level of education. there are many learning methods during a pandemic to choose from. However, based on the research that has been carried out, the researchers concluded that the online learning method using the whatsapp application by utilizing the group and video call features and using the home visit learning method is a learning method that is suitable for use during a pandemic like today and by the conditions and situation. and this method is also able to help improve the cognitive abilities of early childhood with maximum use.

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