PRINCIPAL'S LEADERSHIP IN IMPLEMENTING ONLINE LEARNING DURING THE PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY AT SMP INDONESIAN CREATIVE SCHOOL (ICS)

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Article Info	Abstract
	This research's objective is to describe the principal's strategy for online learning and how the principal innovates to reach effectiveness in learning during the COVID-19 pandemic at SMP Indonesian Creative School (ICS) Pekanbaru. This qualitative research employs a case study design. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation techniques. The results showed that the principal of SMP ICS Pekanbaru carried out several strategies to improve effective learning during the pandemic. The strategies include setting the right curriculum, choosing online learning platforms, strengthening teacher capacity (capacity building), implementing routine monitoring, implementing learning evaluations, strengthening collaboration with parents, and strengthening student motivation. From the innovation aspect, the principal facilitates the existence of teaching stations and the Learning Management System (LMS) application in managing integrated, structured, and effective learning. Thus, we can conclude that the principal performed well in managing the school with all the limitations during the pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic forced every school in Indonesia to implement learning from home, also known as online learning, forcing education stakeholders to immediately adapt to digital technology without proper preparation of facilities and infrastructure. Teachers have difficulty managing online learning and focusing on completing the curriculum. Learning time is reduced, making teachers feel overwhelmed to meet the required study hours and have difficulties communicating with parents and students as partners at home. However, the students are also experiencing obstacles, especially difficulty concentrating, the weight of assignments from the teachers, and increasing stress levels and boredom due to continuous isolation, which can cause anxiety and depression. Students are not the only ones having obstacles in online learning; parents, as the main determinants of children's education at home, also have obstacles in the ability to assist children in learning due to other responsibilities such as work, household affairs, and others. They also face difficulties understanding lessons and motivating children when learning at home.

James's (2021) study indicated there are some determinants of the success of online learning. They are the existence of institutional administrative support, system configuration and technical design, the level of students' computer skills, students' interpersonal behaviour, learning styles, infrastructure characteristics, environmental factors, and learning motivation. The principal effectively commands the determinant of the success of online learning as the school's leader.

Leadership is the power to make decisions and influence change distributed throughout the organization. The authority and responsibility of all organizational stakeholders join in a coordinated effort to achieve common goals (Newman, 2013). The characteristics of leadership, according to Day and Sammons (2014), include: providing a clear vision, building, being consultative/providing consultation, achieving common goals, facilitating the achievement of educational and organizational goals, being responsive to various needs and situations, having a future orientation, providing entrepreneurship education, linking resources with outcomes, supporting schools as living places of education, working creatively by empowering others, and ensuring that curriculum processes and content are current and relevant.

The leadership of the school principal during the pandemic is at stake. The ongoing effectiveness of the teaching and learning process at the school is carried out at the spearhead of the principal's leadership. A study by Korkmaz & Toraman traces the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on educators who experienced the biggest problem in online learning: school

principals did not provide positive attitudes and behaviours toward teachers who teach online (Korkmaz & Toraman, 2020).

During the pandemic, digital leadership and learning have become a new norm. As a result, principals are forced to become collaborative instructional leaders in developing their staff and teachers. Technology changed how principals learn and grow, nurturing teachers to learn and thrive. Concerning the National School Accreditation Board (*Badan Akreditasi Nasional Sekolah/Madrasah*) for SMP levels (BAN, 2020), principal leadership indicators are practising creative, innovative, participatory, collaborative, transformative, and effective leadership because leadership is central to growing people into professionals. In addition, the Institute for Development and Empowerment of Principals and School Supervisors (*Lembaga Pengembangan dan Pemberdayaan Kepala Sekolah dan Pengawas Sekolah*) (LPPKSPS, 2020), the school principal's guidance in carrying out his duties and functions during the COVID-19 pandemic while still paying attention to Health protocols. The principal's duties during the COVID-19 pandemic are ensuring the quality of student learning at home, carrying out management and leadership functions, monitoring learning, identifying online learning problems, and supervising learning.

Principals influence students' academics by supporting and interacting with teachers to foster a learning and engaging community. The principal's role as academic supervisor during the pandemic is to help teachers ensure their students study well at home (Kemendikbud, 2020). In addition, principals must also be encouraged to have professional learning innovations by embracing teachers in utilising the potential of new technologies aimed at further learning.

As one of the provinces in Indonesia that has not been spared from the COVID-19 pandemic condition since May 2021, the Education Office of Riau province decided on the online teaching and learning process. One of the schools in the city of Pekanbaru, SMP Indonesian Creative School (ICS), is the only school with a Cambridge curriculum. This school has two curricula, the national curriculum 2013 and Cambridge with ID 325 certificate. The evaluation results of ICS Pekanbaru Middle School students for the Cambridge Checkpoint Examination for class IX in 2020-2021 have increased from the previous year. All subjects, namely English, English as Second Language, Mathematics, and Science, are above the average international level. Furthermore, 100% of students passed IGCSE class X and can continue their higher education abroad.

The increase in student achievement in grades IX and X in 2020-2021 during the pandemic is a fantastic achievement for teachers, especially school principals. The principal's hard work in nurturing teachers and students to learn effectively resulted in the best final results from

the previous year. Therefore, a study on the experience of the principal of SMP ICS Pekanbaru in seeking effective learning is needed.

Related to the research context stated above, the problem used as the basis for the focus of this research is the role of the principal in implementing the effectiveness of online learning at SMP Indonesia Creative School (ICS) Pekanbaru. The problem formulation is as follows: 1) What are the strategies of the principal of SMP ICS Pekanbaru to seek effective learning?; and 2) How does the principal of SMP ICS Pekanbaru carry out learning innovations during the pandemic?

METHOD

This study aims to describe and analyze school principals' leadership in conducting effective online learning during the Covid-19 period. This qualitative research was conducted using a case study design. Data were collected by interview as primary data, with the principal as the main informant and the teachers as control informants.

In addition to interviews, data were also collected through observation and documentation. To strengthen the validity and credibility of the data, member checking and triangulation were done. Member checking in this study was done by showing a written transcript that the author has prepared for the principal of SMP ICS Pekanbaru to confirm that the information written by the author is not a fabrication. Moreover, *triangulation* with credibility testing is defined as measuring data from various sources, from control informant data, observation, and documentation.

The analysis part was done by following the interactive model analysis introduced by Huberman (2014). He divided the analytical activities into several steps that are data collection: the analysis carried out when collecting the results of interviews with school principals and teachers, and the results of observations and various supporting documents were categorized based on the core of the problem; data reduction: summarizing data, focusing on important information, looking for themes and patterns and removing unnecessary things; data display: create a chart in the form of a matrix of relationships between categories; and conclusions supported by valid and consistent evidence.

FINDINGS

Based on the data obtained by the authors, findings of this study are described as follows. The findings are ordered following the research questions:

1. Effective Learning Strategies

In this finding, school principals implement strategies in learning settings during a pandemic that aims to achieve student learning effectiveness. There are seven strategies: curriculum setting, choosing online learning platforms, strengthening teacher capacity (capacity building), strengthening collaboration with parents, implementing regular monitoring, implementing learning evaluations, and strengthening student motivation. The design of an effective learning strategy for the ICS junior high school principal can be seen in figure 1 below.
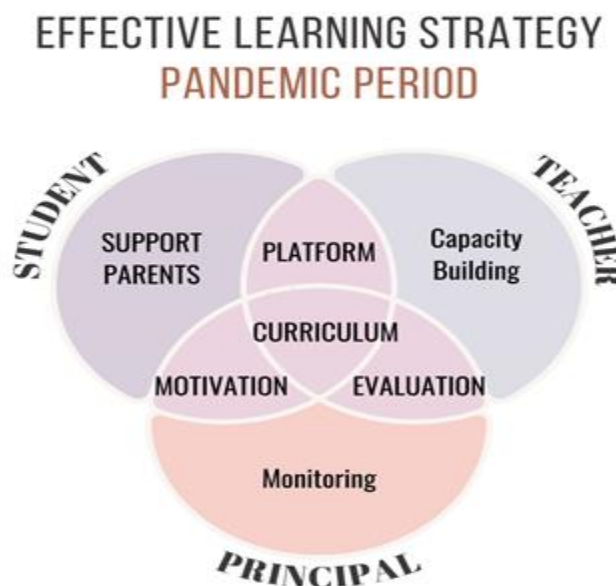
EFFECTIVE LEARNING STRATEGY
PANDEMIC PERIOD

STUDENT   TEACHER

SUPPORT PARENTS   PLATFORM   Capacity Building

CURRICULUM

MOTIVATION   EVALUATION

Monitoring

PRINCIPAL

Figure 1. The effective learning strategy for the principal of SMP ICS Pekanbaru

a. Curriculum Settings

The interview with the principal shows that the curriculum is strictly set because SMP ICS uses two curricula, 2013 and Cambridge. In a pandemic condition, the dense curriculum of

the ICS SMP requires the principal to take policies in curriculum arrangements that focus on fulfilling the equal rights of students to education. This can be seen from the lack of changes in curriculum content from curriculum during schools before the pandemic. All students have the right to fulfil the entire curriculum as in normal circumstances. There is just a one-hour reduction in learning time from normal conditions.

"Arranging the curriculum schedule does not change much from schools in normal circumstances because the limitations are not too significant for me. The difference is that students do not go to school. Only the classrooms are different, students at home and teachers at school."

(Interview with the principal, August 18, 2021)

b. Selecting Online Learning Platforms

During a pandemic, the application of online learning must be designed in such a way as to make it easier for students to learn, as well as teachers in teaching, so that the learning process can run effectively (Rahayu et al., 2020). While focusing on fulfilling students' equal educational rights, an interview with the principal stated that the first thing to do was to select and determine the several available online learning platforms. Doing this is so the teachers and students can immediately adapt to changes in learning modes that occur between before and after the pandemic. SMP ICS decided to use several leading platforms, such as Whatsapp, Zoom, and Google Classroom.

Every class has its own Whatsapp groups as a communication medium. The WhatsApp group members consist of the principal, homeroom teacher, teachers of each subject, and students. Through this platform, pieces of information about the lesson that is currently running will be delivered. Zoom is used for everyday learning. Zoom has many features that make the teaching process easier for teachers, such as creating an atmosphere in the classroom, a whiteboard feature where teachers can write directly for Math lessons, and a breakout room feature when children have group discussions. Therefore, teachers must master the features so that the teaching process can take place effectively and interactively. Google Classroom is used for collecting all assignments, exams, and all learning materials.

"For me, I was initially looking for a suitable and easy platform for teachers and students to communicate and carry out the learning process and for me to monitor and supervise learning activities every day while also knowing what was going on with students at home or teachers who late for teaching."

(Interview with the principal, September 18, 2021)

c. Teacher's Capability Building

The changes in face-to-face to online learning modes demand principals to support teachers in improving their abilities and creativity. The results of interviews with principals and teachers stated that the principal included teachers to attend pieces of training according to the level of education and careers of the teachers. Teachers very much need the principal's support for teachers during the pandemic. From interview data on eight teachers, all of them stated that the support or support of the school principal was very much needed during the pandemic. The following is an excerpt from the teacher's answer regarding the principal's support for teachers:

"The principal is very supportive of the teachers so that the learning during the pandemic period continues to run effectively. There is no loss of learning that occurs in schools. For teachers who cannot understand the new platform, the principal will guide the teacher in a sharing session about its use."

(Interview with a Science teacher, January 1, 2022)

d. Implementation of Routine Monitoring

Using primary platforms allows the principal to monitor the learning process easier. From the interview with the principal, it is said that when classes begin, the principal gets a zoom link from the WhatsApp group for each class so that the principal can immediately see the teaching and learning activities process. On WhatsApp, reports of students who have not joined zoom will be tracked. If the student has not entered the meeting, the teacher will send a private message to the student, and if there is no response, the teacher will report it to the student's parents.

"When learning was still fully online, I chased the children by calling them. So I will inform the teachers that if a child is often absent, then message them on WhatsApp. If they do not respond, I will question their parents."

(Interview with the principal, November 11, 2021)

e. Conducting Learning Evaluations

Learning evaluations are needed to achieve student learning success. Interviews with school principals stated that teachers must fill out attendance and observation forms related to student discipline and daily problems so that student problems can be quickly tracked and make it easier for student affairs and school principals to carry out evaluations.

"Using observation reports for students who are present but the camera is off, or not wearing the uniform."

(Interview with the principal, November 11, 2021)

f. Strengthening Collaboration with Parents

In online learning, collaboration with parents expects to achieve effective learning. Parents are expected to participate as supervisors and also as motivators for children.

"The biggest challenge of online learning is games because if one child knows their new game, they will share it with their friends. So we have to work with parents."

(Interview with the principal, November 11, 2021)

g. Strengthening Student Motivation

The interviews showed that the principal and teachers tried to motivate students during online learning. This effort is carried out in various ways, as shown in figure 2 below:
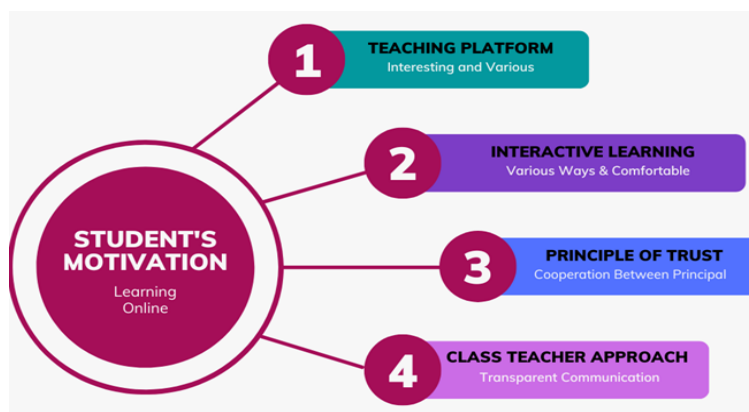

Figure 2. Student's motivation for online learning at SMP ICS Pekanbaru

1) *Providing interesting and varied teaching platforms*

The teachers carry out learning using varied multi-platform, so students do not feel bored. Based on survey data with open-ended questions to eight teachers, there are several learning platforms that students like to get rid of boredom in online learning. Most of them are learning houses, Padlet, Kahoot, google forms, Webex, Mentimeter, desmos, jam board, youtube, quizizz, and the teacher's room.

Figure 3. Students' favorite platforms

2) *Building interactive learning*

The teacher's strategy to make the learning atmosphere more interactive motivates The teacher's strategy to make the learning atmosphere more interactive motivates students to learn. Various methods are used, starting from making games, group discussions, making mind maps, assignments based on flipped classrooms, making group projects based on problem-based learning (PBL), and contextual teaching learning (CTL) where the material taught is in sync with students' real-world situations and encourages students to make connections between their knowledge and its application to their daily lives. This involves seven components of effective

learning: constructivism, questioning, inquiry, learning community, modelling, reflection, and authentic assessment.

Interview data related to interactive learning attempted by teachers in online learning are as follows:

"Some efforts I made include interactive games, variations of teaching techniques and types of assignments. For example, flipped classroom, small group discussion, Problem Based Learning/PBL, Contextual Teaching and Learning/CTL, mindmap, and use of the live quiz as a substitute for unit tests."

<div align="right">(Interview with IGCSE Biology teacher, January 2, 2022)</div>

3) Building the principle of trust

The results of interviews with school principals, one way to motivate students is to build cooperation based on the principle of trust with several students, especially students who serve as student councillors. Students who trust the principal become a bridge in monitoring their friends. The approach taken by the principal is by listening and prompting students to analyze a problem, so they get a wise understanding.

"I build more on the principle of trust, so they are not afraid to report what is not good to me."

<div align="right">(Interview with the principal, 18 August 2021)</div>

4) Empowering the role of the homeroom teacher

The interview with the school principal indicates that to build student motivation in online learning, the principal assigned homeroom teachers as a bridge to overcome student problems in open communication-based learning. Homeroom teachers are the first to follow up on students who have problems. If the problem has not been resolved, it will be continued to the student section, the principal, and to psychological help.

"Homeroom teachers shape students and direct them. Children with problems will be followed up, so there are not any students left behind. So we carry out education

holistically, not only academically but also our children's character, attitude, and future."

<div align="right">(Interview with the principal, June 21, 2021)</div>

2. The Principal's Innovation during the Pandemic

The second research question seeks to unravel what innovations the school principal made to maintain the effectiveness of learning during the pandemic. This innovation is particularly important when we see the challenges in education after the era of the industrial revolution 4.0 when various technological developments emerged and changed the world of education (Astini, 2020).

These changes require innovation and those attempted by the principal of SMP ICS Pekanbaru. Innovation in education is intended to increase learning productivity and efficiency and improve learning quality (Serdyukov, 2017). In the interview with the principal, it is found that ICS is designing innovations to achieve learning effectiveness. The principal makes two innovations of SMP ICS Pekanbaru.

Classroom teaching station

Hybrid learning preparation requires schools to meet ICT tools in every classroom. Therefore, SMP ICS Pekanbaru fulfils teaching stations in each class by mining devices such as computers, web cameras, tripods, projectors, microphones, pointers, pen tablets, network devices, and conducive internet connections. The following is an excerpt from an interview with the principal regarding the procurement of devices for each class:

"Procurement for learning devices for each hybrid learning class, namely computers, web cameras, tripods, projectors, microphones, pointers, pen tablets, and cables"

<div align="right">(Interview with the principal, October 10, 2021)</div>

The fulfilment of ICT in each class is used when the teacher explains in class connected online using the zoom platform, so students who study from home get the same lessons as students in class.

An initiative for Learning Management System (LMS)

The interview with the principal and data from observation show that one of the innovations the principal of SMP ICS had initiated during the pandemic was starting to build a learning management system (LMS). The principal maintained that the ICS had tried to cooperate with vendors since a year ago to make this initiative come true.

"We are still looking for a suitable LMS; there are vendors who have come with a proposal but are not in line with our expectations. We are waiting for a new vendor. Hopefully, it can be used soon."

(Interview with the principal, August 18, 2021)

Regarding the LMS, there are many studies show how LMS resources support students' achievement continue to emerge. The continuous change and refinement of LMS technology resources can impact pedagogical changes to assist students in online settings (Al-Fraihat et al., 2020). The results of research by Anugerah & Kusuma (2021) stated that LMS became students' most preferred online media, beating other online platforms. Students' assessment of the application of LMS in learning is said to be effective because students find it easier to find material and look for additional learning resources. Similarly, research by Pratomo & Wahanisa (2021) states that the use of LMS technology in learning has had a tremendous influence in the field of education during the pandemic, where the benefits are felt by students, teachers, students, and lecturers who use LMS.

The innovation in implementing LMS in the ICS SMP environment is explained. The principal hopes the students will efficiently use this LMS system. They can be integrated with all school systems, such as administrative, financial, attendance, and Dapodik (database of education) systems, making it easier for students to learn independently, ask questions, and take system-based exams.

From the research exposure above, it can be seen that the principal's leadership as a motor in the effectiveness of learning during the pandemic has succeeded in building enthusiasm for learning and motivating teachers and students to change technology-based learning modes. Teachers and students of SMP ICS Pekanbaru quickly adapt to changes in learning modes, it can be seen from the results of achieving the IGCSE graduation target and Cambridge checkpoint examination with the expected value. It is different from the research (Argaheni, 2020) that states the impact of online learning on students is 1) confusing students, 2) students being passive, less creative, and less productive, 3) less informative concepts, 4) experiencing stress and the benefits of increasing literacy skills Learner's language.

Sari et al. (2021) found that online learning during a pandemic negatively impacts teachers because they are not optimal in providing learning materials, so the expected learning objectives are not achieved. In contrast to what was done by the Pekanbaru ICS Junior High School teacher, teachers are trained precisely for this online learning to become more creative and innovative in providing various varied teaching materials to achieve effective learning.

The leadership of the SMP ICS Pekanbaru principal during the pandemic made a positive contribution to teachers and students. The pandemic has produced a variety of creativity for teachers. With the strategies and innovations carried out by the leadership of the SMP ICS Pekanbaru principal, it open great opportunities for students to study anywhere, anytime. They only need to cultivate online pedagogy and student motivation.

CONCLUSIONS

The state of the pandemic has forced school principals and teachers to make learning changes with the support of technology. In this study, the principal as a guide for the realization of effective learning during a pandemic has seven strategies, namely choosing the right curriculum, selecting an online learning platform, teacher's capacity building, implementing routine monitoring, implementing learning evaluations, strengthening collaboration with parents, and strengthening student motivation.

Innovation support in technological developments in education facilitates academic units in managing integrated, structured, and effective learning. The innovations initiated by the ICS principal are 1) equipping teaching stations in each class so that when students participate in hybrid learning, students in class and at home get the same learning. 2) starting to build a Learning Management System (LMS) so the students can access their learning materials during their spare time, anytime and anywhere. With the support of LMS technology, it is possible to provide a convenient virtual learning environment and make the learning process better managed, more effective and more efficient compared to traditional learning platforms.

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