

# PRINCIPAL'S LEADERSHIP FUNCTION IN IMPROVING TEACHER PERFORMANCE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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### Abstract c k

The global COVID-19 pandemic has had an unexpected impact on all areas of human life and activity, including education. Schools are closed and the learning process is done online. All schools do not have adequate preparation to face the changes in the learning process. In such conditions, there are two important things to study, namely the principal's leadership function and teacher performance during and in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic with all its impacts, including the occurrence of learning loss. What kind of leadership function is carried out to overcome the decline in teacher performance that has an impact on the occurrence of learning loss and how do school principals carry out their roles as implementers of government policies in the field of education and as leaders of educational professionals.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Principal Leadership, Teacher Performance, Learning Loss

## A. BACKGROUND

COVID-19 is a global pandemic that affects almost all countries in the world. Not only has an impact on the deaths of millions of people in the world because of being infected with this virus. But it also has an impact on the way humans carry out activities in their lives from work to study. Schools are closed and students are studying from home online.

Apart from technical problems such as poor quality of internet services, lack of internet network, inability to master information and communication technology, and inability to purchase devices to be able to connect to the internet. Because within 3 months, the face of the world has changed due to the Covid-19 pandemic (see, Sancho, et.al., 2021:). Of course, 3 months is a very short time to make perfect changes and adjustments, including changes and adjustments made by the world of education with the changes that have occurred due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Learning from home (BDR) – based on Kemendikbud Circular No. 15/2020 concerning Guidelines for Organizing Learning From Home in an Emergency Period for the Spread of Corona Virus Disease (Covid-19); Circular No. 3/2020 concerning Prevention of COVID-19 in Education Units; and Circular No. 4/2020 concerning the Implementation of Educational Policies in the Emergency Period of the Spread of the Corona Virus– changing the way learning takes place from

what takes place in the classroom at school to learning using certain technology devices and applications such as Zoom, Google Classroom and Google Meet.

Such sudden changes certainly require readiness to follow rapid changes. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the changes and how to adapt to the changes that take place quickly and we do not have enough time to prepare ourselves for those changes. Like it or not, the change must be followed because it has already happened. Problems that arise such as learning loss are the decline in the knowledge and skills that students gain from learning (see Ayu & Nurafni, 2022; Asian Development Bank, 2022: 50), the slowness of school administration and bureaucracy to adapt to new developments and conditions. Emergency, educational leadership who do not understand the changes due to the Covid-19 pandemic and also teacher performance as measured using performance measures during normal times.

On the other hand, the Covid-19 pandemic is one of the disasters that befell Indonesia. In 2021, 5,402 disasters occurred, most of which were floods, landslides and extreme weather, besides forest and land fires, tidal waves and abrasion, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions (BNPB, 2022). Known as a country prone to natural disasters, Indonesia has prepared tools for disaster mitigation. This means that the world of education in Indonesia must be prepared to face sudden changes due to disasters. The learning that takes place is carried out in a different way compared to normal conditions. Even the experience of carrying out learning during the Covid-19 pandemic can be a lesson on how the learning process takes place in educational institutions in the midst of abnormal conditions.

In abnormal or abnormal conditions due to the disaster experienced, of course the performance of teachers in the learning process, especially at the primary and secondary education levels, becomes very important. Teacher performance remains the key word to maintain the quality and learning process in schools. But of course the criteria for assessing teacher performance will be different from teachers who work under normal conditions. In addition to teacher performance, the principal's leadership is also an important part in maintaining the quality and learning process in schools during this abnormal period, including bringing the school to a new normal or in the post-Covid-19 pandemic.

Therefore, one of the important aspects to study is how the principal's leadership functions in improving teacher performance? Because no matter what learning occurs in the learning process, the good performance of the teacher will determine the success of the student learning process. From the perspective of education management, the teacher's performance is a result of the good leadership of the principal. The purpose of this study is to find forms of implementing leadership functions in educational institutions in the midst of rapidly changing situations and how to respond to these changing situations.

Leadership is an important factor in determining the performance of educational institutions, especially student learning outcomes (see, Bush, 2017; Julaiha, 2019;

Khairuddin, 2020), including during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, it is important to examine what the principal does in carrying out his leadership. During the Covid-19 pandemic, educational leadership faced challenges to carry out its leadership role. Nadeak & Juwita (2020) described the challenge as being able to manage emergency situations so that the learning process can still be carried out. Because during the pandemic crisis, online learning was the only or last option to continue learning, even though this kind of learning is not necessarily right for everyone (Xiao, 2021).

## **B. RESEARCH METHODS**

This research is a case study in 3 private high schools. The three schools were chosen because of the uniqueness of each school due to the background of the establishment and affiliation of the private school. The schools that are the research sites share the applicable national curriculum and try to run their educational institutions in accordance with the National Education Standards (SNP).

This study focuses on two main questions, namely (1) how are teachers' perceptions of their performance in learning during the school closure period due to the Covid-19 pandemic; and (2) how the principal as a leader seeks to maintain and improve teacher performance during the Covid-10 pandemic.

Data were collected through interviews with principals and teachers. In addition, a study of documents owned by schools related to the learning process was carried out. The interview focused on these two questions. Most of the interviews were conducted by telephone and text messages via WA.

The data is processed by doing data reduction by referring to the aspects in the main questions of this research. Then the data is linked from one aspect to another and analyzed using theories related to principal leadership and teacher performance. Based on the results of the analysis, conclusions are then drawn which are placed in the context of post-Covid-19 learning or referrals for conducting learning during times of crisis, especially those caused by natural disasters.

## **C. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In general, leadership is seen as an important factor that influences the performance of subordinates (see, Nasra & Arar, 2019). Although there are also some studies that show the opposite, in general there is a positive association between leadership and subordinate performance. Citing the results of the study by Organ & Konovsky (in Nasra & Arar, 2019) there are two important components of employee performance, namely (1) behavior in carrying out its main (formal) role in the organization such as carrying out all tasks that must be done, and (2) activities voluntary (informal) such as carrying out activities beyond what is required in the job description. Usually what is associated with the performance of subordinates is the leadership style used in the organization. However, in the practice of educational leadership, as stated by Jakhongir & Gulnor, (2021), in the context of education various theories, models and leadership styles are

applied. Although different and varied, the core of leadership in educational institutions emphasizes one thing, namely responsibility, especially professional responsibilities as educators (Jakhongir & Gulnor, 2021).

In the Indonesian context, it is formulated that there are seven roles or functions of school principals as leaders of educational institutions. The seven functions/roles are principals as educators, managers, administrators, supervisors, leaders, innovators, and motivators which became popular with the abbreviation EMASLIM (see Mulyasa, 2011). The function of the principal as formulated in the acronym is often a reference for assessing how the principal carries out his role, including during the Covid-19 pandemic. More operationally, Burhanuddin (in Khairuddin, 2020), emphasizes the principal's leadership as an effort. Here the effort is by influencing, encouraging, guiding, directing, and mobilizing school members so that they can work effectively in achieving educational goals. However, it should be remembered, what was stated by Bush (2007), that the concepts of leadership that developed in the West or in African countries collectively show that the concepts of school leadership are quite complex and diverse. The concepts are clear enough to show their normative framework so that leadership can be understood but relatively weak in their empirical support for the construction of these concepts.

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic has indeed prompted changes in various fields. However, what is actually happening in schools is not how the principal faces change, but how the Covid-19 pandemic triggers the emergence of a crisis so that it requires handling the crisis through crisis management. As Beauchamp, Hulme, Clarke, Hamilton & Harvey (2021) point out, there is very little research on educational leadership and crisis management. From that few, his studies have also shifted from studies that focus on the sudden impact of crises such as violence in schools or natural disasters and the preparation of post-crisis recovery plans to consider long crises whose impact is slowly felt and then enlarges. We really lack study materials related to principal leadership and crisis management in education. Although the crisis that occurred due to the Covid-19 pandemic felt very big, especially with regard to the occurrence of learning loss and its long-term impact.

## **D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The use of standards and indicators of teacher performance and principals' leadership by using the measurements set for measurement in normal times is certainly not appropriate. The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the learning process and the implementation of the principal's leadership duties. Because all activities in the learning process are limited so that the learning interactions that occur are more in the form of media interactions, especially media based on information and communication technology.

The interaction of teachers and students in the learning process generally uses devices and applications, which are quite popular, namely Zoom and Google Meet. Several schools, after the pandemic lasted for a while, developed a Learning Management

System (LMS) that could be adapted to the learning needs of the school. However, in general, schools use applications that allow for online learning.

In general, teachers complain that the learning process is like walking in the middle of a pandemic. Because for teachers, the best thing or ideal condition for learning is through educational interaction activities that take place in the classroom or at school. It is not done online which does not allow direct face-to-face interaction between those involved in the learning process.

Moreover, the learning process often cannot be followed by all students due to poor internet service in one area, students who do not have adequate equipment or do not have sufficient funds to purchase internet subscription packages from cellular phone operators. In addition, students' seriousness in learning also differs between face-to-face learning at school and online learning.

On the other hand, not all of the teachers themselves have the ability to operate and use the applications needed to conduct online learning. Therefore, teachers are still learning how to operate, for example the Zoom and Google Meet applications, when the online learning process has to be done. In addition, teachers also learn to use Google Forms for the purpose of evaluating learning. However, teachers also experience obstacles in accessing the internet because the quality of internet services has not been evenly distributed, especially for accessing the internet via cellular telephone networks.

In addition, students and teachers also interact through social media networks such as through WhatsApp (WA), Facebook or Instagram groups. In general, such social media services have been controlled by teachers long before the Covid-19 pandemic occurred, so there are not many problems in using them. However, the content of information conveyed through social media is converted into educative content.

However, teachers are actually more familiar with the use of computers for learning purposes. Such as making PowerPoint presentations for learning materials, accessing reading resources on the internet or using electronic books which, among other things, can be accessed through the electronic book service of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology and Higher Education. This shows that teachers actually do not start from point 0 in utilizing information and communication technology for learning purposes.

On the other hand, principals who were initially accustomed to conducting reviews by conducting class visits at schools or checking paper-based reports made by teachers including checking lesson plans, experienced a changed reality. Principals also cannot meet directly with teachers, communicate face-to-face and discuss problems faced with teachers. The interaction and communication carried out by the principal with the school community is carried out through media such as through social media or other applications that can facilitate interaction and communication. Meetings are held online, both with teachers at schools and with other parties such as the Education Office.

In addition, both teachers and principals have difficulty in changing habits in interacting and communicating. For a long time, interaction and communication between fellow teachers or teachers and the principal/deputy principal has been done face-to-face and occasionally through telephone conversations or through text messages such as via WA. But usually, telephone conversations or textual conversations are carried out to strengthen face-to-face direct conversations. That is, for confirmation of information or messages conveyed in face-to-face communication, both before and after face-to-face conversations are carried out.

The habit of interacting and communicating like that has been ingrained for quite a long time and the Covid-19 pandemic is forcing change. Of course, it is not easy if you suddenly have to change to media interaction and communication. Because media interaction and communication is different from direct interaction and communication. There are different perceptions of mediated interaction and communication because the number of senses involved in communication is limited and not all nonverbal expressions can be accommodated by the media used in interacting and communicating.

Of course, this change in habits also occurred not only among teachers and principals/deputy principals but also among students, even parents. Students are forced to take part in online learning processes due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Without having sufficient preparation to face these new situations, students have to deal with new learning situations. It is not surprising then that what is called learning loss appears, which for Indonesia, based on a study by Afkar & Yarrow (2021) school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the loss of between 0.9 – 1.2 years of learning and an average decline of between 25 – 35 points for the PISA reading score.

The occurrence of learning loss cannot be directly related to teacher performance. But more so because of the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced schools to close and learning to be diverted to online learning or distance learning. In a study by the Asian Development Bank (2022:49) it is stated that it has three impacts, namely (1) the absence of distance education and remedial education, each closing of the school year further reduces the expected completion of the school year, which linearly affects learning outcomes. Such losses can be mitigated by continuing distance education while schools continue to close; (2) school disruptions that coincided with economic difficulties resulted in more students dropping out of school, thereby lowering the expected average length of schooling; and (3) school closures reduce the quality of learning because distance learning is not precise. For this reason, it is recommended how to overcome it by making learning adjustments which are determined by two factors, namely (1) the availability of access to distance learning and (2) increasing the ability to conduct distance learning Asian Development Bank (2022:50)

In the three research locations, it is known that the teachers are worried about the learning loss because the online learning process has lower quality of learning under face-to-face learning in the classroom. The teachers did not conduct a special study on learning loss in their classrooms. However, draw conclusions from the interaction and media

communication during the learning process and examine the results of student learning evaluations. The conclusion is the decreasing absorption of information knowledge and skills of the students.

However, teachers are generally aware that school closures and online learning from home activities are government policies as part of efforts to reduce the number of people infected with Covid-19. Because it is a government policy, teachers see themselves as having to implement the policy because it is carried out for the common good. In addition, teachers also know that most parents do not want learning to be carried out in schools during the Covid-19 pandemic.

When the school closure period enters its second year, in 2021, teachers also face another challenge, namely the saturation of running the online learning process. The teachers hope that the school closure period will end soon and learning activities will continue as normal. Because online learning also causes boredom among students, who lose the opportunity to do physical activities and have face-to-face interactions with their classmates.

Thus, it can be concluded that the level of teacher performance during the Covid-19 pandemic decreased when compared to the "normal" period. Especially if the performance criteria use measurements for normal conditions. However, during the pandemic, which forced to minimize physical contact between fellow school members, performance could be said to be quite good if the measure was an abnormal situation that teachers and students had to face in the learning process. When schools are closed, the learning process becomes very dependent on learning media based on information and communication technology. Therefore, it certainly requires a different performance assessment due to the emergency situation faced by the world of education due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

There is also the learning loss experienced by students due to the media learning process, it can indeed be used as an indication of the declining teacher performance. But the decline, once again, is not because teachers do not carry out their professional duties well. Rather, it is caused by other factors outside of the teacher's professionalism in carrying out his duties in carrying out the learning process.

This is precisely where the leadership of the principal plays an important role so that the learning process in schools can continue to run even with various limitations due to the closure of schools. The principal must ensure that learning is also more than just running, but as far as possible learning can be carried out in a quality manner and achieve or approach the quality standards of the learning process set out in national education standards. This means that the principal must maintain that the learning process is not carried out at random, but is still endeavored to take place as best as possible.

In the three schools where the research was conducted, the principal stated that the school closure due to the government's policy to tackle the spread of Covid-19 was a good policy to protect public health. However, they still perceive a decline in student

learning outcomes as a result of the learning process not running in full because learning is done online which was initially done almost without any preparation. The teachers suddenly moved from learning in the classroom to online learning with the level of technical mastery to operate the applications used was also not so good. Because of that what happens is that teachers transfer what is usually done face-to-face in the classroom into a network through online learning.

The teachers teach their students while learning also operate the applications used in learning. When you are quite proficient at operating the applications used in learning, the next challenge arises, namely starting to feel bored with online learning. The teacher admits that boredom is experienced not only by the teachers but also by the students. Here the challenges faced by school principals are increasing, namely maintaining the enthusiasm of students to learn and the spirit of carrying out learning as well as possible for teachers.

Principals are also faced with the classic choice between being responsible for the implementation of educational policies set by the government and professional responsibilities as leaders of educational institutions who are responsible for the success of students mastering the knowledge and skills set. During the Covid-19 pandemic, several policies related to standardization of education such as secondary education and school principals preferred to implement government policies related to preventing the transmission of Covid-19, such as learning from home activities and school closures.

Moreover, the principal also carries out his leadership by being aware of the abnormal conditions being faced due to the pandemic. The three principals are aware of the different conditions that are being faced which require restrictions on direct interaction and communication. However, they still yearn for conditions to return to normal and return to conditions that are considered ideal for carrying out learning, namely face-to-face learning in schools. The hope for a return to ideal conditions grew even more when most of the students had already been vaccinated against the first and second vaccines. Although in reality, face-to-face learning has not yet been implemented.

The principal's concerns in the three schools are basically the same as those of the teachers, namely related to the quality of learning and the occurrence of learning loss. Various obstacles and challenges faced in carrying out online learning have not been fully answered. The teachers also have not been able to overcome various obstacles in learning such as technical problems such as unstable signal strength of telecommunication operators. In addition, it was admitted that there were some students who argued that the poor quality of the signal to access the internet was the reason for not participating in full learning. However, the most important thing is the teacher's efforts in the learning process that minimize the level of learning loss through improvement and refinement of the online learning process.

Here the principal's leadership role becomes important in giving direction to teachers. Principals are forced to get used to communicating by relying on communication media, especially popular applications such as WA, Google Meet and Zoom. Therefore, of the



seven principal leadership functions, their implementation cannot be equated with normal conditions. In crisis conditions, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, school principals are still trying to carry out these functions by making adjustments to the pandemic situation, especially in the form of adjustments to the way of communicating and interacting.

Almost all communication and interaction activities between principals and teachers are carried out online. While the forms are generally submitted via Google Form. That is, here there is still an atmosphere directing the teachers to work as in normal conditions, not in a crisis situation.

In general, these school principals do not carry out crisis management in running their schools, especially learning during the pandemic. They have heard of the term crisis management, but have never experienced how to carry out crisis management, including the steps needed when facing a crisis. Therefore, the basic steps that are actually carried out by the school principals are carrying out the concepts of leadership under normal conditions in abnormal situations and doing what can be done in the midst of a very limited situation due to social distancing, lockdown, and learning from home policies.

What he did was a form of the principal's professional responsibility to the education profession. In any situation, learning must continue, even with various shortcomings. School principals continue to play their role as motivators who encourage teachers to work as best they can for good student learning outcomes and reduce learning loss to a minimum. The principals view that providing motivation is very important because the teaching spirit of the teachers is different between teaching in the classroom and learning online.

As for other functions, generally related to administrative roles in learning such as conducting supervision, most of which can be categorized as e-supervision because they rely more on digital forms and communication using digital devices. Through this digital device, some of the supervisory activities are carried out by the principal. Principals monitor what teachers are doing and try to continue to encourage teacher performance amidst the declining enthusiasm of teachers who feel bored with prolonged online learning. If it is often stated that online learning is not suitable for all students, then so are the teachers, not all teachers feel suitable for online learning.

Here, the principal is trying to carry out two important functions. First, positioning oneself as a person who leads the implementation of national education policies, especially online learning policies. Second, trying to maintain teacher performance so that student learning outcomes are not disrupted due to the Covid-19 pandemic as a form of responsibility as educational professionals. On both sides, the principal carries out his leadership role and function in the school.

Under these conditions, principals learn from invaluable experience for the development of their professional abilities as leaders of educational institutions. Principals are learning how to be leaders in the face of this huge crisis. However, it is not enough just to learn from the experience of dealing with the crisis, because the most important thing is to learn

how to develop and plan post-pandemic programs to overcome learning loss. Because what was done in the post-pandemic period was a strategic step for leadership to overcome what had happened.

## E. CONCLUSION

School management is basically not based on how to manage schools in times of crisis. When schools were suddenly closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, school residents did not have adequate readiness or adequate procedures to deal with the crisis. Educational leadership in times of crisis has not been well developed in educational institutions. The leadership that is developed is leadership in normal times.

Principal leadership is based on one important thing, namely responsibility. Because of that responsibility, the principal tries to carry out leadership that has two aspects. First, implementing government policies related to education. Second, encourage teacher performance because of professional responsibilities as leaders of educational institutions. Both of them are two sides of the coin of the leadership of the principal who is in a crisis situation due to the pandemic which still has to be carried out. Although the way to run it is different from normal situations. In times of crisis, what is more prominent than the principal's leadership function is the administrative function, especially supervision and motivator functions so that teachers' performance is maintained.

The important thing that needs to be recommended for school principals from this study is the need to develop post-pandemic steps to carry out the necessary recovery to reduce learning loss. Because the reopening of schools does not mean returning the learning process to normal conditions, but the world of education still requires efforts to minimize learning loss due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

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