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Blended Learning as Solution in Character Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The learning process during the COVID-19 period has experienced a distortion in the learning quality, which resulted in less-than-optimal learning outcomes. It is because online learning can only convey material in the cognition aspect. Thus, a learning strategy is needed to convey material in the cognition, affection, and psychomotor aspects, one of which is blended learning. For this reason, this study aims to describe and analyze the blended learning model applied during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design, while the informants were determined by purposive sampling. The data collection techniques employed were in-depth interviews, participant observation, documentation, and focus group discussions. Checking the data validity was carried out by extending the researcher's presence in the field, deepening observations, triangulation, peer discussion, member checking, transferability, dependency, and confirmability. This study's results revealed that the blended learning model during the COVID-19 period was effective in the learning process because it combined online and face-to-face learning methods. Then, this study suggests that the learning process must be well designed, including during the COVID-19 period, with the hope of making students comfortable and optimal learning outcomes.

Keywords: Blended learning, COVID-19, character education, online learning

Abstrak

Proses pembelajaran selama masa COVID-19 mengalami distorsi kualitas pembelajaran yang mengakibatkan hasil pembelajaran kurang optimal. Hal ini dikarenakan pembelajaran online hanya dapat menyampaikan materi pada aspek kognisi. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan strategi pembelajaran untuk menyampaikan materi dalam aspek kognisi, afeksi, dan psikomotorik, salah satunya adalah blended learning. Untuk itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan dan menganalisis model blended learning yang diterapkan pada masa pandemi COVID-19. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, sedangkan informan ditentukan secara purposive sampling. Teknik pengumpulan data yang digunakan adalah wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipan, dokumentasi, dan diskusi kelompok terfokus. Pengecekan keabsahan data dilakukan dengan cara memperluas kehadiran peneliti di lapangan, memperdalam observasi, triangulasi, peer discussion, member checking, transferability, dependency, dan confirmability. Hasil penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa model blended learning selama masa COVID-19 efektif dalam proses pembelajaran karena menggabungkan metode pembelajaran online dan tatap muka. Kemudian, penelitian ini menyarankan bahwa proses pembelajaran harus dirancang dengan baik, termasuk selama masa COVID-19, dengan harapan dapat membuat siswa nyaman dan hasil belajar yang optimal.

Kata kunci: Blended learning, COVID-19, pendidikan karakter, pembelajaran online

A. Introduction

The current COVID-19 pandemic has had many effects on educational activities, including the learning process in schools. Teaching and learning activities that were previously usually done face-to-face now have to be done online. Thus, to activate the learning process, the blended learning model can be used, combining conventional (face-to-face) with online methods. However, the readiness of both is the primary key to success and smooth learning. This solution can be found at e-schools with their e-academic portal, which can pamper teachers in terms of designing online lectures, such as materials, assignments, video links, e-books, and others, which can be directly accessed by students taking courses.

On the other hand, this pandemic is actually felt to be accelerating the implementation of educational practices with the help of increasingly sophisticated

information technology developments in the learning process. Indeed, this change in learning style creates various new efforts and challenges that must be faced. One of them is the selection of a suitable learning method, namely using a blended learning model. In addition, the previous discussion of character education only revolved around the development of character education in schools, which was not related to the learning process, so during the COVID-19 period, carrying out character development must be related to the learning process. In this case, the most appropriate learning is to use blended learning models. The results of this study are related to the learning process for character education in public senior high schools (SMAN) throughout Kudus Regency during the COVID-19 period, utilizing a blended learning model.

For this reason, this study aims to answer the problems of learning character education during the COVID-19 pandemic, where, so far, the learning process during the COVID-19 period only used online learning methods, whose evaluation only reached the cognition (knowledge) aspect. Thus, to make learning more effective, a blended learning model can be used, which combines online and face-to-face learning. With this model, it is expected that the character education learning results during the COVID-19 period will be maximally achieved because the evaluation starts from cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. In this study, the questions arise on "how is the learning model for character education during the COVID-19 pandemic in public senior high schools in Kudus Regency", and "how is the blended learning method during the COVID-19 period". These two questions become the primary reference in this research.

In instilling character values, it should be through school education designed through the learning process. However, the learning problem that occurred during the COVID-19 period was applying learning strategies, which only used online learning methods. To improve learning outcomes, it must use blended learning in the learning process. Thus, during the COVID-19 period, the most appropriate learning model is the blended learning model, a form of refinement of the e-learning system. By using this method, learning is carried out in two directions: face-to-face and online learning. Therefore, the blended learning model can answer learning outcomes optimally.

This research used a qualitative approach with case studies. The case studied was a blended learning model during the COVID-19 period in character education at public senior high schools throughout Kudus Regency. In this qualitative research, the objectivity was built on the formulation of specific

situations, as experienced by particular individuals or social groups and relevant to the research objectives (Moleong: 1989: 3), (Muhadjir, 2001: 83), and (Sugiyono, 2006: 233).

The types of data in this study could be divided into two: primary and secondary data. Meanwhile, the data sources in this study were speech and actions through direct interviews with key informants and other informants, direct observation on research subjects at the research site, and relevant documents to this research's purpose. The key informants are people considered to know more about things related to research. In this case, they knew explicitly about the blended learning model during the COVID-19 period in character education learning. Therefore, the key informants of this research were teachers and some students.

This research employed a case study design, so the sampling technique of this research was used in two stages. (1) In the single case study in the first case, the purposive sampling technique was utilized to find key informants who could provide the researcher with the data needed. (2) As in the first case, the sampling method was also used to obtain data in the second case. To obtain data in a holistic and integrative manner and pay attention to the data relevance with focus and objectives, three techniques were utilized in data collection in this research: (1) indepth interviews, (2) participant observation, (3) study of documents, and (4) focus group discussion (FGD). These four techniques are basic in qualitative research agreed upon by most authors (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Nasution, 1988; Sonhaji in Arifin, 1994).

Meanwhile, the data analysis used in this research was descriptive qualitative. This data analysis was carried out repeatedly to answer the questions raised in the problem formulation. Analytical activities were performed by analyzing data, organizing, dividing into manageable units, synthesizing, looking for patterns, finding what was meaningful and what was systematically researched and reported (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). According to Miles and Huberman (1992), data analysis consists of three streams of activities that coincide: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification.

Furthermore, checking the finding validity in this study was carried out to obtain valid findings and interpretations. Thus, examining its credibility was necessary by using the following techniques: extension of the researcher's presence in the field, deepened observations, triangulation (using several sources, methods, other research results, theories), peer discussion, and member checking.

Furthermore, it was necessary to check whether it can be transferred to another setting (transferability), in context (dependability), and whether it can be confirmed to the source (confirmability).

B. Discussion

1. COVID-19

2019-nCoV, also called SARS-CoV-2, was first reported from Wuhan, China, in December 2019. Later, WHO named this virus as Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (Addi et al., 2020). According to the medical, COVID-19 is categorized as a life-threatening infectious disease, especially in individuals with low immune systems (Dousari et al., 2020). COVID-19 mainly causes fever, cough, sore throat, and shortness of breath, which in most cases is self-healing. However, in some other cases, people with this virus are found to be asymptomatic (Konala et al., 2020). In addition, the increasing rate of growth of positive cases of COVID-19 has made this pandemic an international disaster by causing world instability in all aspects of life (Pugliese, 2020). COVID-19 has also proven to be a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic that a generation has experienced (Kaur et al., 2020). As a result of the easy way of transmitting COVID-19, individuals can be infected only by respiratory droplets and contact with surface contaminants (Alotaibi et al., 2020).

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to escalate, it exposes sufferers to vulnerability, not only to the virus itself but to poverty, malnutrition, and lack of access to medical care in many developing countries (Cozza et al., 2020). Further, de Maio Nascimento (2020) saw that non-patients received the negative impact of COVID-19 with poor mental health due to anxiety. News in various media is also considered one of the most significant sources of anxiety, especially for adults and the elderly, who have a reasonably high vulnerability level to contracting COVID-19 (de Maio Nascimento, 2020).

2. Blended Learning

Kravtsov et al. (2015) noted several definitions of blended learning: (1) the educational process, built on the integration and complementarity between traditional technology and e-learning; (2) education, teaching, and approach methodologies, combining traditional methods with computer-based learning activities; (3) active use of e-learning with traditional forms of learning; (4) a systematic approach to the educational process organization, expressed in a combination of full-time instruction and e-learning. There is general agreement to

describe blended learning as a mixture of traditional and e-learning (Alsarayreh, 2020). According to Wardani et al. (2019), learning with a blended learning model can dynamically shift the learning principle from teacher-centered to student-centered. Even more, according to Fatkhulloh & Haryanto (2020), blended learning can replace traditional face-to-face learning and accommodate critical thinking aspects needed as essential skills of the 21st century. In addition, changing learning from face-to-face to online is said to save thousands of dollars (Kitchenham, 2011). However, as Long & Van Hanh (2020) stated, it should be noted that this learning model can either maintain a lousy culture or help create a new good culture for students.

Moreover, electronic learning requires students' maximum independence and freedom (Kitchenham, 2011). In addition, it should be noted that technology is more for improvement, not a substitute for teaching and learning (Kitchenham, 2011). According to Meena & Vasantha (2018), some benefits of blended learning are (1) time flexibility; (2) students can access the material in a convenient place; (3) students can access globally based on the skills and interests they choose to study; (4) motivate students and make them study for a longer time; (5) practical exposure with web-based modules. However, some literature mentions that this learning model requires more time for teachers to plan and prepare material (Meena & Vasantha, 2018; Salakhova et al., 2020). This learning also requires students' constant access to gadgets and the internet, so teachers need to have good knowledge of various technologies (Salakhova et al., 2020). Further, the first decade of the 21st century, which led to the massive introduction of digital technology in the economic and social fields, created a new trend in education. It is coupled with the COVID-19 situation, which shifts the learning model rapidly. It then encourages literature to discuss how blended learning models can be used during the COVID-19 pandemic (Alsarayreh, 2020; Lockee, 2020; Salakhova et al., 2020).

3. Character Education

Although there is no consensus definition, broadly, character education is described as a school-based process to promote personal development in youth through the development of virtue, moral values, and moral agency (Pattaro, 2016:6). Character education is defined by Ferkany & Creed (2014) as "education for practically intelligent virtue, or the intrinsically motivated and psychically harmonious exercise of robust and stable traits involving practical intelligence conducive to individual and collective human flourishing." Values, morals, and

character education aim to develop a person's ability to make good decisions, maintain goodness, and manifest goodness in his life (Komara, 2019). Thus, Shuhari et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of special guidance in character-building efforts so that the community develops with clearly identified roles and functions. This character development is closely related to three educational paths: family, school, and community, where all three are intertwined with one another (Pettalongi, 2019; Safrudin et al., 2019).

Viewed from the character education implementation in normal conditions, supervision and learning are carried out directly by the teacher. Activities that support character education can also be carried out directly and intensively with a measurable success level (Suryaman et al., 2020). However, the differences in the learning system during COVID-19 caused many complaints from teachers to ensure the achievement of targets in the character learning process (Anugrahana, 2020). Achievements of character education, such as discipline, creativity, and responsibility, are challenging to apply when learning online (Intania & Sutama, 2020). On the other hand, learning activities are carried out online and offline, which have a reasonably effective effect on the development of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning (Najmuddin & Aprilianty, 2020).

4. Character Education Without Affective and Psychomotor Aspects

COVID-19 has changed learning from face-to-face to online learning models. In character education that requires face-to-face learning, obstacles arise because character education demands a learning process with affective and psychomotor aspects. The character education needed is a direct practice carried out by students under the teacher's guidance. This method cannot be fulfilled as long as the online learning model is applied, so a learning model is needed to achieve learning objectives in the affective and psychomotor domains, namely blended learning. In this study, the online learning experience in public senior high schools in Kudus Regency revealed that teachers could not measure the learning outcomes of character education. Therefore, public senior high schools in Kudus combined the learning process with a blended learning model, which began to be implemented in the new normal era of COVID-19.

With the blended learning model, teachers could measure the learning outcomes of character education because there was face-to-face as a practice of character education. One of the public senior high school teachers in Kudus said that online character education learning could not answer the learning material

outcomes during this pandemic, so it should use a blended learning model. With blended learning, there was face-to-face. Face-to-face could measure the affective and psychomotor domains. So far, the obstacle experienced by teachers in delivering character education materials during the pandemic was measuring learning outcomes that were less than optimal because teachers could only deliver material in the cognitive aspect. For this reason, one of the choices of the suitable learning method is blended learning, which is one method that should be applied in online learning.

According to the principal of SMAN 2 Kudus, schools that used the blended learning model in the learning process had advantages, covering a flexible time used, cost-and time-efficient, students were comfortable in learning, and the results were effective and efficient. According to Islamic religious education (PAI) and citizenship education (PKN) teachers, the learning outcomes of character education materials were that each student had a different way of learning from one another. Some participants were comfortable studying in the morning, afternoon, or even at night while relaxing and listening to music. Some other students were more comfortable studying in their room, a coffee shop, or a classroom. That way, by using the blended learning method, students could learn with much experience, including face-to-face.

Learning Bloom's Taxonomy Description Cognitive Affective Psychomotor Achievements Aspect Aspect Aspect Online √ Learning achievement is only at the level of cognition/knowledge. Face-to-face $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ Learning outcomes are at the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor levels. $\sqrt{}$ $\sqrt{}$ Blended The COVID-19 pandemic era requires online learning, so blended learning is

Table. Learning with A Blended Learning Model

The table above explains that learning outcomes in online learning were only up to the cognitive aspect while learning outcomes in offline learning were in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Further, blended learning is an alternative during the COVID-19 pandemic because it combines online and offline learning.

used to bridge learning success.

5. Blended Learning in Character Education during the COVID-19 Period

During the COVID-19 pandemic, public senior high schools in Kudus Regency experienced difficulties implementing character education due to fully online learning. Teachers could not carry out face-to-face learning. When it was not possible with face-to-face learning, the achievement of the student character value formation through school was less than optimal. After the transition to the new normal period of COVID-19, the learning model was implemented with blended learning. To measure student learning outcomes, learning considered good during the COVID-19 period is blended learning.

Shodiqun, a PAI teacher at SMAN 1 Kudus, said that character education in his school was taught by involving aspects of knowledge (cognitive), affective (values), and psychomotor (behavior). The learning process must use these three aspects; it will not be effective if it does not use these three aspects. The implementation must be done systematically and continuously. During the COVID-19 period, learning using blended learning was more effective than learning that only used online methods. The blended learning model emphasizes the combination of conventional (face-to-face) with online methods so that the readiness of both is the primary key to the success and smooth running of online learning.

In addition, senior high schools attach great importance to the element of character education in every activity carried out in the school environment, primarily through Islamic religious education, citizenship education, and other subjects, to form better and more polite morals and instill Islamic religious values and Indonesian culture in the character of students. In summary, this blended learning model combines face-to-face learning with online learning, both from the delivery method to the learning style, so that the combination of teaching created still emphasizes social interaction and does not abandon the technological aspect. Character education in public senior high schools (SMAN) is also a crucial element to be applied in the school environment, where this education functions as forming the students' character and morals in their interactions in the community.

6. Blended Learning Model in School

The principal of public senior high schools throughout the Kudus Regency explained that the blended learning model in character education during the COVID-19 pandemic became necessary. Because if it is implemented with online learning, it will only become a discourse, apart from not being understood more

fully and thoroughly in the context of national education. Character education, which is partially understood and not on target, is counter-productive for the students' character formation. Actually, character education is a process of inculcating values, which is often understood narrowly, so a comprehensive understanding is needed. To achieve a comprehensive understanding, online learning is not enough. It must be combined with face-to-face learning, making the blended learning model appropriate during the COVID-19 pandemic to achieve student learning outcomes, especially character education learning.

By religious education, citizenship education, and other subject teachers, implementing the blended learning model was that the teacher divided students into two large groups. Group 1 would conduct face-to-face learning in the first period and online learning in the next period. On the other hand, group 2 would conduct online learning in the first period and face-to-face learning in the next period. The teacher also divided the teaching materials into two categories. Category A was material that students could learn independently, and category B needed to be guided/discussed with teachers and peers. For group 1 students, the first period was used for face-to-face learning, focusing on category B material, emphasizing more discussions and learning activities guided by the teacher. After that, when students studied at home, the teacher could conduct online learning that emphasized category A material in the next period.

In contrast, for group 2 students, the first period was used for online learning, focusing on category A material, which emphasized more self-assigned activities that students could do from home. After that, when students learned face-to-face in the next period, the teacher could focus on category B material by holding discussion activities and other active learning in class. The teachers should ensure that they could manage the time well so that the learning hours of group 1 and group 2 students did not collide with each other. For example, face-to-face learning could be done in the morning and independent online learning in the afternoon. In addition, the teachers conducted periodic reflections to check students' understanding and feedback regarding the obstacles or difficulties faced during blended learning.

Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic must combine online and face-toface so that the blended learning model can bridge the learning. In the process of learning character education, it will not be achieved online because the delivery of material online is only in the cognitive aspect. Supposedly, in delivering learning, especially character education, there should be three cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Each of these domains is further divided into several categories and subcategories, which are sequentially hierarchically, starting from the simplest behavior to the most complex. Behavior at each level is assumed to include behavior from lower levels. For example, in the cognitive domain, achieving "understanding" at the second level also requires "knowledge" at the first level.

This blended learning model is a lesson that teachers must implement in improving learning outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic. This model is the research result that must be carried out to improve student learning outcomes. Meanwhile, character education today has become the attention of many parties, including the government, which has scheduled the importance of character education in schools and has become a national policy. It is implicitly affirmed in the National Long-Term Development Plan (RJPN) for 2005-2015 and 2015-2020, where character education is the foundation for realizing the vision of national development.

Blended learning is the answer to learning during the COVID-19 pandemic because it can increase student learning outcomes. Blended learning can also help teachers deliver material with three aspects of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. With the blended learning model during the COVID-19 pandemic, maximum learning outcomes will be achieved. Classroom learning and e-learning each have their advantages and disadvantages. It is what underlies the formation of the blended learning method. Moreover, the use of the internet in learning, usually called e-learning, is increasingly in demand by many students. The existence of e-learning helps anyone to learn regardless of time and place. However, for some students, it still requires face-to-face meetings in class to discuss and complete the learning process passed through the internet. It is called blended learning. Thus, the notion of blended learning itself is a learning method, where the face-to-face learning process is combined with the e-learning process in harmony. Ellen G. White argued that character building is the most important endeavor ever given to human beings. Character building is a great goal of an actual education system. In both home and school education, parents and teachers remain aware that building a great character is their task (Alen Marlis: 2010). Therefore, the learning process is the spearhead for understanding the material to students. Through a blended learning approach, the material will be optimally accepted by students.

Teachers in planning learning make devices adapted to the times, including abnormal conditions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Planning the learning process includes a syllabus and lesson plans, which contain the character and culture of the nation. In organizing learning, it includes four activities: (1) choosing the right tactical tool, (2) choosing the right learning aid or audiovisual, (3) choosing the class size (the correct number of students), and (4) choosing a strategy appropriate for communicating complex rules, procedures, and teaching adapted to character education. In addition, classroom management is related to two main activities: (1) management related to students and (2) management related to physical (rooms, furniture, learning tools). The learning process uses active learning strategies. This strategy can lead students to achieve learning competencies and shape students' character. For all subjects, this active learning strategy is effective for students because it adds broader insight to understanding and practicing subject matter in everyday life, including being able to respect, tolerate, help each other, and not discriminate against social class, ethnicity, race, and religion.

Compared to previous research, this research is different as it emphasizes the learning process utilizing blended learning in the COVID-19 pandemic era to produce maximum learning outcomes. Previous research only explained character education in schools and did not relate it to the blended learning process. The author has not found research that discusses the online character education learning process, where online learning cannot answer learning outcomes since it only uses cognitive aspects. This study also produces a solution for the success of learning character education during the COVID-19 pandemic with a blended learning model. This blended learning model can use cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects so that the learning outcomes of character education can be achieved optimally. In addition, this study's results include new research that other researchers have never done.

The limitation of this research is that it was conducted at public senior high schools in Kudus, with the research results in Kudus Regency for a pilot project for senior high schools at the national level. Besides, this research was conducted in 2020 at schools that carried out the blended learning process, with a sample taken at seven high school senior high schools in Kudus Regency. As a limitation of this research, it was also only on the blended learning model of character education for students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

C. Conclusion

Learning character education materials during the COVID-19 pandemic with the blended learning model produced optimal learning outcomes because it was taught by combining online learning with face-to-face. Online learning could only convey the cognitive aspect, so only knowledge could be measured. At the same time, character education should measure knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. In this case, blended model learning could convey cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects, so the blended learning model was more successful than the online model as it could measure ranging from knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. In character education, behavior is also the most important learning outcome.

In this study, the blended learning model in public senior high schools throughout Kudus Regency was still local research results. From the local level, it is expected that it can be used at the national level. This research can be a pilot project in fostering the character of the nation's children because the research that has been done only discusses character education in schools and ignores the learning process.

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