

## THE ROLE OF MOTHERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN INDONESIA

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**Abstract:** *The spread of COVID-19 impacted the education sector in which teachers cannot carry out face-to-face (offline) learning. Consequently, teaching and learning activities are conducted online and accessed by students from home with the help of their main careers, especially mothers. This study aims to explore the role of Indonesian mothers in their early childhood education amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. It reports challenges experienced by mothers in accompanying their children's online study from home. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews with six Indonesian mothers. The study finds that the roles of mothers in their children's online learning include providing for the children's needs in online classes, assisting children to do the assignments, managing time between house chores and kid's schooling, and being concerned for mental kid's health and families. It is clear that Indonesian moms encountered a myriad of challenges during their children's online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic time. These challenges were worsened by the lack of technical expertise, lack of training and support, lack of preparation among children, difficulties in managing the time between children's school and other work, and problems with internet connection. This study proposes an involvement and collaboration between parents so that online learning can be facilitated by both fathers and mothers. This collaboration is needed to ensure successful online learning for the children, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

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**Keywords:** *COVID-19, challenges, Early Childhood Education, Indonesian mothers*

## A. Introduction

Coronavirus or so-called COVID-19 has been globally spreading since the beginning of 2020. It brought an impact on human life in many sectors like education, health, and psychology. The pandemic and related consequences such as lockdown, isolation, and disruption in child-care services and schooling have impacted the lives of children and their families all around the globe. Emerging empirical data from the first year of the pandemic suggest that there might be a negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on child mental health and wellbeing, including elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress symptoms (Vasileva et al., 2021).

In the education sector, to reduce the COVID-19 spread, public sectors like schools and universities closed or limited their school programs on-site (Davis & Phillips, 2021). For the same reason, Indonesian schools including kindergarten did not conduct on-site (offline) learning. In this sense, online learning became a solution to sustain teaching and learning activities. It is considered crucial for everyone's safety during this social distancing condition. Despite these benefits of online learning, there are also new challenges experienced by the students, teachers and also parents, particularly mothers. In Indonesian society, mothers usually serve as the main careers for their children, regardless the jobs they have outside to house and their domestic responsibilities.

The challenges of online learning are in accordance with a study finding by (Metscher et al., 2021), that the new transition of education implementation is challenging for teachers in preparing programs in online classes, for students especially in kindergarten, and for parents in enacting the learning process at home during online classes. Furthermore, in online classes, the involvement of parents particularly mothers in preschool-aged children's education has played a great role. It has shown that positive parenting is crucial to enhance children's emotional and social growth (Okorn et al., 2021). Therefore, parents need to invest in their children to be ready for school in the early years. In addition, parents and teachers have a great role in recognizing the situations dealing with the readiness of children's school. However, parents have

limitations when getting involved in children's education such as lack of time, educational background, commitments of work, lack of money, and social classes (Kakia et al., 2015).

Online learning is challenging at many educational levels, let alone for young learners such as those in kindergarten, as they are not yet able to study independently using the technology. In this case, the help from the adults in their home is crucially needed, and this help is usually coming from mothers. In this matter, mothers have a significant role for their children during an online class. They prepare everything related to the school administration, learning tools like Zoom, Google Meet, and so on. As learning from home does not have the social element of meeting other kids, moms' task also includes maintaining kids' motivation and enthusiasm during learning from screens. It can be said that the involvement of mothers in their children's education during the COVID-19 pandemic is crucial to enhancing successful learning.

Previous studies have discussed the learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic. Kalloo et al., (2020) highlight that in order to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago, the right decisions are crucial to support the learning process by providing the courses of practicum and pedagogy emphasizing community, creativity, and connectivity to the readiness of technology. Further, Malta Campos & Vieira (2021) report that during the COVID-19 pandemic, both teachers and parents play the main role in children's education in which parents miss the support of the school and the presence of the life and teachers should have improvisation in online classes. It is supported by (Atilas et al., 2021) asserting that educators face a number of challenges in implementing education during the COVID-19 pandemic including the need of good preparation and service trainings to enhance a successful learning.

From the above-mentioned studies, the readiness of children's school during the COVID-19 pandemic has obtained much attention particularly on the aspect of good preparations from the side of teachers. However, parents' participation especially mothers in preschool education has not yet been explored. Meanwhile, challenges of online learning for young

learners have been experienced by parents in Indonesia. In Central Java, for instance, a number of mothers whose children went to kindergartens reported that they should do a lot of efforts for encouraging their children to study during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, they also noted that they need to do more preparations in their children's online learning in addition to their domestic responsibilities. To fill this gap, this study focuses on exploring the role of mothers in online pre-school education during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. It is aimed to obtain insights about the challenges overcome by moms in accompanying children's online study.

## **B. Method**

This study employed a qualitative research design, where data were collected through semi structured interviews with six mothers of preschool-aged children in public and private kindergartens in Indonesia. Documentation is also needed to gather additional data. This study used purposive sampling involving six mothers. These participants have been selected for the rationales of accessibility, openness and availability. In this paper, the participants' names are in pseudonyms in order to keep confidentiality. The six mothers are around 32-36 years old. Three mothers (mother 1, mother 2, mother 3) are those whose children studying at private kindergartens, while the other three mothers (mother 4, mother 5, mother 6) are those whose children studying at Public kindergarten. The recruitment of the six participants is based on principle of voluntary. They have given the permission and they were willing to get involved with this study. The data were collected on 20-27 October 2021.

During the interviews, the researcher ensured the confidentiality of the participants' identities by ensuring that all names were anonymized. The interviews were then transcribed for data reduction and coding. Later, the data were analyzed by following the procedures carried out by Widodo (2014) including: listening to a recording repeatedly, transcribing in proper format, interpreting the data by interpreting each participant's words and sentences, communicating whether the data match the participant's

intent; and building data credibility by asking for feedback on data interpretation from participants.

### C. Result and Discussion

#### 1. The role of the mother in early childhood education amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

From interviews with the participants, they have reported various roles that they have been performing during accompanying their kids' online learning. Upon the data coding and analysis, the roles of mothers can be categorized as follows:

##### a. Providing and preparing for their kids' needs in an online class

Online learning for young learners requires different approaches and equipment that can only be prepared by both educators and parents. At home, this duty goes to mothers, when fathers need to keep working outside the house. Participants reported that mothers had to do preparations to get their kids ready for online class including providing access to internet connection, listening to the teachers' instruction of learning activities during online class, preparing the needed tools and equipment, and adapting the strategies of the children's learning and teaching materials. Some excerpts from the interviews are presented below.

Mother1: *"I have to make some preparations for my kids' online learning. These include providing meals before the class, providing internet connection to access class WhatsApp group, understanding the materials given by the teachers and reexplain it to it to my kids"* (Mother1, 2021).

Mother2: *"Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic is not easy. It needs some preparations for teachers, mothers and children. As a mother, I should prepare everything to support my child's study. For example: I should prepare internet connection to access some information from school, I have to persuade my child to do*

*activities of learning since he sometimes is lazy to join the class" (Mother2, 2021).*

Mother3: *"Parents especially mothers have more tasks and preparations for the kids' school during the pandemic. First, I have to motivate my child to join the class and explain the materials from teachers. Second, I have to monitor the WhatsApp group to accommodate the information shared by the teachers. Third, I have to provide internet connection to support my child's education" (Mother3, 2021).*

The excerpts above, clearly show that participants are greatly contributing to their kids' preparation for online learning, given the fact that the kids are young learners. The preparations include thoughts, energy, time, and money to buy the internet quota. In addition, mothers need to keep their children enthusiastic, maintain the children's mood during joining the online class, and others. This is due to the fact that online learning can be boring for kids who are physically active, and who used to move around during offline learning. This finding is in line with the research conducted by Wilder & Lillvist (2021) reporting that parents and teachers had paid attention to their children's learning by adapting teaching strategies and materials.

b. Assisting children in doing assignments from the teachers

Different from offline learning where teachers are the main facilitator in teaching and learning activities, the online learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic has demanded parents particularly mothers to become facilitator in their children's learning activities. Indeed, they help their children do the assignments from the teachers. Often time, mothers need to understand the materials given by the teachers and re-explain it to their children. This surely becomes new challenges for mothers with domestic duties, let alone for those who also have jobs outside the house. The role of assisting kids' assignment can be seen from these excerpts.

Mother4: *"As a mother, I should help my kid do the*

*assignment from teachers. I also should explain the materials and become the facilitator during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not easy for me considering that I should do domestic works and focus on my kid's learning at the same time" (Mother4, 2021).*

Mother5: *"During the COVID-19 pandemic, I always accompany my kid in joining the class. I act like the teacher who explain materials and transfer knowledge to my kid. I also help him do the assignment from teachers" (Mother5, 2021).*

From these interviews, participants have reported that they played an additional role as the kids' learning facilitator which also include assisting the kids in doing the assignments from the teachers. This role can be somewhat challenging when mothers also have domestic responsibilities at the same time of their online learning.

#### c. Managing time between home and children's school

Good time management of parents has a crucial role in kids' learning success. Parents' engagement and responsibility on children's class during the COVID-19 pandemic is considerably important (Lau et al., 2021). For this reason, parents especially mothers need to manage their time well during the COVID-19 pandemic. They need to juggle their time between house duties and kids' schooling at the same time. For those without domestic helpers, it becomes harder to perform domestic tasks and accompanying their children's study. Below are the reports from the mothers.

Mother2: *"It needs a good time management during this pandemic. Moreover, I do not have caregivers at home. Therefore, I should do all domestic tasks and accompany my children's study in online class. Surprisingly, I have two children. They are in kindergarten and elementary school. This condition forces me to manage the time well, so that they can join online class" (Mother2, 2021).*

Mother4: *"Managing time well during the COVID-19 pandemic is crucial especially for me who do*

*not have assistant at home. I have two kids. They are 5 years old in preschool and 2 years old. Indeed, it takes time when accompanying my kid's study during online class. In the same time, I have to do domestic tasks" (Mother4, 2021).*

Mother6: *"For me, it is not really easy managing time during the COVID-19 pandemic where I have to do my works as a teacher at elementary school and at the same time, I have to focus on my child's study in kindergarten" (Mother6, 2021).*

d. Maintaining the mental health of children and family members

Parents need to maintain the mental health of children and during the COVID-19 pandemic, since kids have limited physical movement. Less physical movement, less social contact, less meetings with friends and teachers may affect the children's mental health. Regarding this, parents need to have strategies to maintain their children's enthusiasm and mood during online classes, and avoid getting bored, as has been stated by the following mothers:

Mother1: *"During the COVID-19 pandemic, my children play at home and do not go anywhere. Therefore, I should maintain their feeling to avoid stress and boredom" (Mother1, 2021).*

Mother6: *"As a mother, I should have strategies to maintain my children's mood and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. They do not have activities to go outside. Therefore, I should provide activities at home to avoid the boredom" (Mother6, 2021).*

2. Challenges of online class amidst the COVID-19 pandemic for mothers

While being supportive and helpful, not all mothers are well-educated and trained to facilitate kids' learning, let alone online learning. They have reported some challenges



that they encountered during their kids' online learning classes, as follows.

a. Lack of technical expertise

Having a technical expertise in technology is considerably crucial especially during the online class. In fact, children at kindergarten are still relying on the parents' assistance particularly their mother. Many mothers admit that they have lack of technical expertise since they rarely use online tools in teaching and learning activities. Even more, some of them need help in operating the tools. This has been proven by the following excerpts:

Mother2: *"I rarely use social media. Honestly, I found difficulties joining and accompanying my children join the online class. I always asked my neighbor if I do not understand the instruction of teacher related to the materials send to WhatsApp group. I have to struggle to accompany my kid's school during this pandemic" (Mother2, 2021).*

Mother4: *"During the online class, I can comprehend the instruction and materials given by the teachers of my kid. In fact, I am also a teacher at elementary school, so I know social media and technology used in teaching. For mothers working at home, it is apparent that some of them have lack of technical expertise during accompanying their kids' study" (Mother4, 2021).*

The excerpts above indicate that mother 4 knows well about technology in teaching and learning activities since she is a teacher at elementary school. It is different from mother 2 who is lack of technical expertise in technology since she is not used to and she does not know how it is implemented for the learning.

b. Lack of learners' readiness

During this pandemic, children are not ready to join the online class since they are not yet independent learners and they are not accustomed with online classes.

consequently, they should be reinforced and motivated by their parents especially mothers to study at home. Indeed, most children have lack of preparation in joining the online class at home. This finding is in accordance with Atilas et al., (2021) reporting that lack of preparation for distance teaching and learning and deficiencies in the pre-and in-service trainings to address the educational needs of young children distantly have become challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following excerpts have proven it:

Mother1: *“During the online class, I should make preparation including persuading my kid to join it. In fact, he often lacks of preparation during the online class. Indeed, he need adaptation with this situation. He somehow does not focus on the instruction of the teachers, play a game and others”* (Mother1, 2021).

Mother3: *“It needs struggle to ask my kid to join the class during the COVID-pandemic. I should have a preparation like motivating him to join online class. In fact, he is lack of preparation and he does not focus on it”* (Mother3, 2021).

It seems that children need adaptation in joining online class during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have lack of preparation and need readiness in joining the class.

### c. Lack of training and support

Technology has played a pivotal role in education (Istianah & Wahyuningsih, 2019; Wahyuningsih, 2018, 2021; Wahyuningsih & Dewi, 2019). Training and support in using technology for learning are badly needed by parents and children in online class. This can be done by giving the internet allowance, training of technology usage and others. In fact, some parents admit that they have lack of training and support from school. In addition, children and parents need to be able to make use of modern technology to develop approaches that match the requirements of different circumstances and conditions (Assaf, 2020). The lack of training and support was proven by the following excerpts:

Mother4: *"It is difficult for me to operate the online tools considering I never know and use it. I have to ask other people about how to operate Zoom"* (Mother4, 2021).

Mother5: *"At first, I felt difficult in preparing online tools in online class since there is no training from schools. Then, I asked my neighbors to help me operate online tools"* (mother5, 2021).

d. Difficulties in managing the time between children's school and other works

Based on the interviews, it is apparent that Indonesian mothers are more involved than fathers in their children's education. Indeed, they have more barriers and challenges during accompanying their children's online class. Further, they have difficulties in managing the time between children's school and their works at home or at office. Moreover, they have to adapt and give response to the demands of social distancing, hygiene, new protocols and transition to online education (Atiles et al., 2021). This finding is strengthened by Lau et al., (2021) highlighting that Chinese mothers, are generally more involved than fathers in children's education, they may experience more challenges during their involvement in children's online learning. Consequently, for this reason, mothers tend to feel less satisfied than fathers with their children's online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been proven by the following excerpts:

Mother1: *"I think it is so challenging for me in managing the time between my children's school and domestic works particularly considering I do not have domestic helpers. It is surely not easy to perform domestic tasks and accompanying my children's study"* (Mother1, 2021).

Mother2: *"It is not easy for me to do works at the same time. I should manage the time between my children's study in kindergarten and elementary school. Even more, I have to prepare other works outside the house like teaching my elementary school students"* (Mother2, 2021).

e. Problems with internet connection

It has been already known that internet is very crucial in online class. Unfortunately, some mothers have problem with internet connection when they accompany their children's online class. This is evidence by the lack of internet quota or bad signal in their areas. Therefore, it can disturb the learning activities. It is line with Atilés et al., (2021) asserting that internet connection problems can prevent people from working. The following excerpts have proven it:

Mother5: *"I often have trouble of internet connection so that it can disturb online learning class of my children. This may be caused by the lack of internet quota and the rural area where we live. To overcome it, I should buy more internet quota and adjust the number of mobile phones that support the better connectivity"* (Mother5, 2021).

Mother6: *"Poor Internet connection has become challenges for mothers in their children's online class. I experienced it when accompanying my children join the online class. Somehow it is difficult to send videos in WhatsApp group, the voice of teacher cannot be heard well and so on"* (Mother6, 2021).

The above elaborations highlight that the COVID-19 pandemic has altered all aspects on human's life particularly in education sector. This has been evidenced by the policy of school to conduct online learning to reduce the risk of the COVID-19 spread. Indeed, a number of schools in Indonesia starting from kindergarten to higher educations have conducted online learning in 2020. Although online learning benefits both for students and teachers for its effectiveness and efficiency, it has limitations such as depending on the use of better internet connection and others (Wahyuningsih, 2021).

Regarding online learning, the study related to the role of mothers in the early childhood education in online learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic has

gained less attention. Indeed, many studies exploring on the implementation of online learning viewed from the students' or teachers' perspectives have been done by some scholars. The results of this study, therefore, reflect that the involvement of parents especially mothers in their kid's study during online learning is badly needed considering that children in kindergarten have not been able to study in online class by themselves.

Thus, parents should have more preparations during online class like the readiness of children in joining online class and technical preparations including the internet connection. More surprisingly, mothers particularly those who have no better educational background experienced barriers in helping their children's studies like they have difficulties in operating technology and others. Further, this study reflects that the need of involvement of parents not only mother but also father in encouraging the children's social and emotional adjustment (Okorn et al., 2021). Finally, this study pinpoints that teachers need to reconsider the children's ability in learning independently so that the parents will feel satisfied (Lau et al., 2021).

#### **D. Conclusion**

This study concludes that mothers in Indonesia have played multiple roles in helping their kids' online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. As reported in the interviews, in addition to their domestic roles, mothers also act as a learning facilitator, a technology assistant, a mental health therapist for their kids' learning. Mothers provided their children's needs in online class, helping children do the assignment from their teachers, managing time between home and children's online schooling, maintaining children's mental health and providing access to technology for children in online class. In performing these roles, mothers also experienced some challenges such as: the lack of technical expertise, lack of preparation among children, lack of training and support, difficulties in managing the time between children's school and other works, and problems with internet connection. This study implies that there is a need of involvement and collaboration of both parents to enhance the

successful online learning for the children. It is also needed some technical training and support from school regarding the implementation of technological tools in distance learning.

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