The Virtual Initial Reading Teaching and Learning Process during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract. One aspect that is seriously affected by the COVID-19 pandemic is the continuity of education's teaching and learning process, especially in the initial reading. This study explores initial reading teaching activities, which are currently mainly carried out virtually in terms of virtual platforms used, methods, learning resources, the conveniences, and obstacles faced by the teachers in several schools. The research method used was a Survey with a cross-sectional survey design. Research data was obtained online by using google form media. The respondents involved in this study were 18 elementary school teachers who taught in the lower grades and came from 18 different elementary schools. The results showed that in teaching and learning initial reading virtually, the platform used was WhatsApp video call, the most widespread method used was the syllable method, and the most widely used learning resource was textbooks provided by the school. The convenience faced by teachers when carrying out virtual reading lessons is the availability of flexible time in teaching activities. In contrast, the limited teaching time, the unstable internet connections, and the limitations of the facilities also infrastructure owned by parents become the obstacles to the virtual initial reading learning process.

Keywords: Initial Reading, Virtual Initial Reading, Initial Reading during Covid-19 Pandemic.

INTRODUCTION ~ The Covid-19 epidemic that hit the world since it occurred in Wuhan, China, at the end of December 2019 has changed all aspects of human life in the world. Covid-19 (the coronavirus disease 2019) is an epidemic caused by the massive spread and transmission of the virus through humans as an intermediary for its spread. The situation of Covid-19 cases in Indonesia, which was released on the official website of the Covid-19 Handling Task Force on November 15, 2021, confirmed that 4,250,516 people were infected with the virus with 4,097,675 recovered patients and 143,644 deaths. Reports of the number of active cases every day showing different symptoms.

Covid-19 has changed civilization in the world. Not only changing the economic, social, cultural, and political aspects, this epidemic also impacts the sustainability of the education in the world, especially in Indonesia. With the spread of the virus so quickly and with humans as the intermediary, a new policy was implemented in Indonesia's formal and informal learning processes. To prevent the transmission of the virus, the government enforces regulations to implement distance learning strategy education as stated in the Higher Education Law number 12 of 2012 article 31 concerning Distance Education and Learning and Circular Letter Number 15 of 2020 concerning Guidelines for Organizing Learning from Home. In the Emergency Period for the Spread of Covid-19 and strengthened by the Circular Letter of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 4 of 2020 concerning the Implementation of Education in the Coronavirus Disease

(Covid-19) Emergency Period, during this pandemic, based on these laws and circulars, online and offline distance learning can be applied. According to the KBBI online is in a network or connected through computer networks, the internet, etc. At the same time, offline is outside the network or disconnected from the computer network. In other words, online distance learning is learning that is carried out online using hardware such as computers, mobile phones, tablets, and so on using internet networks. Due to the ongoing pandemic conditions, almost all learning activities were conducted online to prevent greater exposure to the virus.

One of the online learning methods is virtual learning. In the KBBI the word virtual means appearing or being present with computer software. One of the online learning methods is virtual learning. In the KBBI the word virtual means appearing or being present with computer software, such as the internet. Virtual is a form of direct communication without meeting for real but similar to real (Virtual, n.d.). Online learning can be implemented with a virtual classroom, which is a learning experience in a synchronous or asynchronous environment using various tools (such as laptops or smartphones) using internet access (Zhu & Liu, 2020). Various kinds of applications that are currently widely available and easy to upload and can be used in the virtual learning process are Whatsapp Group, Zoom Cloud Meeting, Google Classroom, Google Meet, Google Form, and e-mail (Nahdi & Jatisunda, 2020).

Virtual learning strategies can be carried out in various educational science learning, especially in learning activities of specific subjects such as initial reading activities for lower grade of elementary school students. Reading has the most important position and role in the journey of human life (Harras, 2011). By reading, humans can expand the knowledge that has not been previously owned. Reading is a link for anyone who wants to achieve progress and success in life. Reading can provide an opportunity for someone to be able to explore more information in various fields in the world so that they can add insight (Rahman et al., 2020).

The cultivation of reading skills should be instilled in students from an early age so that students can obtain various information and knowledge presented in written texts so that they can add new insights and understanding. Starting with the initial reading process, students can learn to read gradually until they are at the stage of understanding the reading material. The emphasis on initial reading is on conditioning students to recognize a reading material (Hartati & Cuhariah, 2015). So that at the initial reading stage, students are not required to master the reading material thoroughly. The initial reading is very important to be taught because students who have difficulty in initial reading allow these students to have difficulty in other lessons (Iswara et al., 2020).

The role of primary school teachers in 21st-century education is very complex and has its challenges (Hartati, 2017). The role of teachers is becoming increasingly crucial during the current Covid-19 pandemic, which requires teachers to be able to teach virtually. Therefore, the teacher must be able to determine what strategies and learning methods are appropriate and can be applied in the

distance learning process, especially in this initial reading lesson..

In learning initial reading in the pandemic, teachers are required to use teaching materials that can be used online. There was research in the development of application-based spelling learning media for grade 1 developed by Widyowati et al., (2020) which showed that the development of application-based media is suitable for being used in initial reading learning. Another study conducted by Kartini et al. (2021) which raised the use of the Android-based education beginning reading application to support distance learning which received a positive responses from teachers, parents, and students because it was valuable and practical regarding its use in distance learning initial reading activities. The research conducted by Mubarok (2021) related to the Android-based learning media application design for initial reading showed that the learning media could be an effective media that can increase students' interest in initial reading. The use of big book media for initial reading can also increase students' motivation in reading (Wijayanto et al., 2021). From these previous studies, in distance learning activities that are currently taking place, it is possible for teachers to be able to make various innovations in the use of methods, models, or learning media that are very likely to be used in virtual learning and analyze the challenges faced by teachers in carrying out virtual reading lessons during the Covid-19 pandemic. On this basis, the author views that it is necessary to conduct a mini-research related to virtual teaching of initial reading which is currently mainly carried out by lower grade teachers.

METHOD

The approach used in this study is quantitative by using a survey method by describing the behavioral tendencies of a population by examining the sample in question quantitatively (Creswell, 2017).

This study aims to describe the teaching of initial reading virtualy during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study focuses on the methods, learning media used and the analysis of the ease and difficulties faced by teachers in learning initial reading virtually. The subjects in this study were 18 elementary school teachers who teach in lower grades and come from different schools in West Java. The instrument used in this research is in the form of a questionnaire. Data was collected through a survey using google forms. Data processing used was a system available on Google Form, namely docs.google.com/responses, which directly generates a description of the data based on the respondents' questions.

RESULTS

In this study, the authors conducted a survey related to teaching initial reading virtually based on several criteria; the virtual applications/platforms used, the teaching method , the obstacles/difficulties faced by the teacher, the conveniences the teacher felt, the availability and suitability of the time, the learning resources and multimedia used.

Regarding the platforms or applications used by teachers in virtual teaching reading activities, they will be presented in the following table.

Table 1. Virtual Applications/Platforms Used

No	Virtual Applications/Platforms	Percentage (%)
1	*Zoom Meeting*	27,8%
2	*Google Meet*	16,7%
3	*Whatsapp Video Call*	44,4%
4	*Microsoft Teams*	0%
5	Lainnya	11,1%

In the use of virtual applications, 44% of teachers used the WhatsApp video call application in this virtual teaching of initial reading. 27.8% of teachers using the zoom meeting application, 16.7% using google meet, 11.1% using other applications and none of the teachers (0%) used the Microsoft Teams application.

The results of learning methods used based on the survey are presented in the following table.

Table 2. Results of the Initial Reading Teaching Method Used

No	The Initial Reading Method	Percentage (%)
1	Alphabet method	50%
2	Spelling method	38,9%
3	Syllable method	50%
4	Word method	38,9%
5	Sentence method	33,3%
6	SAS method	27,8%
7	Steinberg method	5,6%
8	Other methods	5,6%
9	Adapted to children	5,6%

The data showed that in the use of the methods in teaching initial reading virtually, most teachers used the alphabetical method (50%) and the spelling method (50%). Other methods used were the word method (38.9%), the spelling method (38.9%), the sentence method (33.3%), and the SAS method (27.8%). Steinberg's method and other methods adapted to the needs of children, each was 5.6%.

Table 3. Time of Study Provided for Teaching Needs.

No	The Availability Time of Study	Percentage (%)
1	Appropriate	56,7%
2	Less appropriate	18,7%
3	Inappropriate	24,6%

As for the availability of learning time that is appropriate for teaching needs, 56.7% of teachers stated that the current learning time was appropriate, 18.7% of

teachers indicated that they less appropriate, in contrast 24.6% of teachers stated that the availability time of the study was still inappropriate with teaching needs.

Regarding information related to the lack of virtual teaching time for initial reading and the provision of additional teaching time if needed, the results obtained based on the survey are presented in the table below.

Table 4. Result of the Time Limitation for Virtual Teaching Initial Reading

No	The Limitation of Time	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	68,7%
2	No	17,7%
3	Appropriate	13,6%

Table 5. Results for Giving Additional Teaching Time to Students

No	Giving Additional Teaching Time	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	83,9%
2	No	16,1%

Regarding the lack of time experienced by the teachers in teaching initial reading virtually, most of them(68.7%) stated that they experienced a lack of time in teaching initial reading activities. To overcome this, the teachers (83.9%) provide additional time of study for their students.

Regarding the learning resources used by teachers in virtual teaching of initial reading, the survey results are presented in the following table.

Table 6. Results of the Questionnaire of Learning Resources Used

No	Learning Resources Used	Percentage (%)
1	Lesson textbooks	83,3%
2	Student Worksheet (LKS)	50%
3	Module	38,9%
4	Tutorial video	33,3%
5	Other sources	44,4%

The most widely used by teachers for learning resources were textbooks (83.3%) which the school has provided. In addition, some teachers also added references to other learning resources such as student worksheets (50%), modules (38.9%), learning videos (33.3%), and other sources of learning materials based on their needs (50%).

Regarding whether the learning resources that have been used are able to develop students' initial reading skills, the survey results are presented in the following table.

Table 7. The Learning Resources Used are Able to Develop Initial Reading Skills

No	Learning Resources are Able to Develop Initial Reading Skills	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	83,3%
2	No	16,7%

From the data provided in the table, according to most teachers (83.3%), the learning resources currently being used can develop students' initial reading skills. However, a small number of teachers (16.75) stated that the learning resources used were still unable to develop students' initial reading skills.

DISCUSSION

In this virtual initial reading teaching activity, some teachers can make their teaching materials or learning media based on their learning needs. Some teachers make their learning videos by themselves, make stories/texts in the form of soft files, or make traditional media made of cardboard and paper, which they then design independently to make them attractive to students. Teachers also used various kinds of online multimedia in their teaching, such as YouTube, interactive videos, animated videos, and others.

In a virtual initial reading teaching, there are some obstacles or difficulties faced by the teacher. These obstacles and challenges include more about the family's economic factor; that is, not all families have laptops or sophisticated devices that can be used to support virtual learning. Likewise, the problem of information technology not being owned by the students concerned and the parents who accompany them during the teaching process will undoubtedly hinder the teaching process. Another obstacle factor felt by the teacher was that the teacher could not focus on seeing the progress and development of each student as they could during face-to-face learning. The concern and busyness of parents towards virtual learning is another obstacle. Technical matters that cannot be controlled, such as frequently disconnected network connections or unstable networks, were difficulties teachers often face in virtual teaching.

Behind every difficulty, of course, there is also the ease experienced by the teacher when conducting virtual teaching activities. Learning time was more flexible, and teaching can be carried out from home was one of its conveniences. Another convenience was that the teacher can directly show examples of other that more interesting readings sourced from the internet. The teacher only needs to provide a link about the source that students can easily access so that virtual learning activities can also train students to be digitally literate.

CONCLUSION

From the research that had been done, it can be seen that the methods and learning resources used by teachers in teaching reading are very varied, and the use of WhatsApp video calls also dominates the virtual applications used in the teaching process. However, in the virtual initial reading teaching process there were also obstacles faced by most of teachers; the limited time of teaching, causing a lack of time in teaching reading which was done virtually. To overcome these limitations,

some teachers have taken the initiative to provide additional time outside of the learning time that the school has determined. In all the challenges and obstacles that exist in teaching reading virtually this time, from the results of this research, teachers with their creativity are able to make their own teaching materials without being fixated on the sources of teaching materials that the school has provided.

Due to the limitations of the sample in this study, the results of the study cannot be generalized to the broader study population. Therefore, further research involving more samples needs to be done to get better results.

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