

PREPAREDNESS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PARENTS FOR OFFLINE LEARNING DECISIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Suni Hariati*, Andriani Andriani, Nurmaulid Nurmaulid, Erfina Erfina, Kusri S Kadar

Universitas Hasanuddin, Jl. Perintis Kemerdekaan km 10, Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia

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*Corresponding Author

Suni Hariati

sunihariati@unhas.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Reopening schools during the COVID-19 pandemic requires the full consideration of parents' decisions due to the worry of exposure for their children. This study evaluated parents' preparedness for offline learning decisions among elementary school children during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a cross-sectional study with 134 parents as respondents. The consecutive sampling technique was used. The online questionnaire was distributed on social media to collect data from various regions in Indonesia. The finding indicated that 99 (73%) parents sent their children for offline learning from July to November 2021 for one to three times a week (44.8%) and one to three hours a day (46.8%). The significant factor for parents' decisions was school preparedness for COVID-19 prevention ($p < 0.05$). However, parents' preparedness for self-protection and the child's mental condition had no significant relationship because almost all parents were already prepared for these factors (> 95%). Therefore, the government and primary health care have a vital role in supervising and providing a safe environment for children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: *COVID-19; elementary school; offline learning; parents' preparedness; self-protection*



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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 affected all age groups, including children from 0 to 18 years. Research stated that the possible modes of transmission of COVID-19 include droplet, airborne, fomite, fecal-oral, blood-borne, and animal-to-human transmission. Globally, schools immediately closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Unesco, Unicef, The World Bank, WFP, & UNHCR, 2020). In Indonesia, the government prevented the spread of the COVID-19 virus to children by applying learning from home for children, which had been implemented since March 2020 following a circular from The Ministry of Education and Culture no. 4 of 2020 and strengthened by circular no. 15 of 2020 about guidelines for the implementation of learning from home in the emergency period of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ministry of Education and Culture Republic of Indonesia, 2020b).

Interruptions to instructional time in the classroom have impacted children's learning abilities (Unesco, Unicef, The World Bank, WFP, & UNHCR 2020). A survey on the impact of learning from home was performed by the Ministry of Education and Culture and found that most children had

difficulty understanding lessons, lacked concentration, and found learning from home more difficult than offline learning (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). Difficulties are also experienced by parents in accompanying children during online learning, especially for younger children. They need intensive guidance to maintain the flow of their studies. Parents have also voiced their obstacles in supporting their children's online learning, such as lack of time and experience, especially parents with full-time jobs. They cannot manage daycare or caregiver support in addition to their work duties. Thus, they find conventional learning preferable. Parents perceive face-to-face learning as the best solution (Pudjadi et al., 2022).

The Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture targeted face-to-face learning to be reinstated in July 2021 by considering the vaccination target for educators in Indonesia (Wicaksono, 2021). Educators are a priority group for the COVID-19 vaccination (Director-General of Disease Prevention and Control, 2020). After the vaccination target for educators was achieved, the minister encouraged schools to open and start face-to-face learning. This Ministerial Decree

is conducted in accordance with the direction of the President of the Republic of Indonesia (Atmoko, 2021). However, epidemiologists from the University of Indonesia considered that the government needs to re-evaluate the opening of schools due to the newly discovered SARs-CoV-2 B117 virus mutation in Indonesia (Wicaksono, 2021). On the other hand, parents also expressed their restlessness for offline learning as school-aged children have not been vaccinated in June 2021 (Wicaksono, 2021).

Reopening schools for face-to-face learning need to be well-prepared to keep children safe and reduce parental concerns (Jallul et al., 2022). School management must provide children a safe environment and activities by focusing on policies, procedures, planning, and financing (Widowati et al., 2022). This research evaluated the factors influencing parents' decisions for offline learning and their preparedness during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia.

METHOD

Study design

This is a quantitative study with an analytical cross-sectional approach. The cross-sectional approach was used to describe and evaluate the factors that influence parents' decisions for offline learning and their preparedness (Polit & Beck, 2018).

Sample

This study focused on elementary school parents (father or mother) in Indonesia, and the researchers used consecutive sampling to select participants due to the pandemic conditions, which made voluntary sample selection more appropriate. This approach allowed for a broad range of research locations without limitations on the number of schools, provinces, or districts. The researchers recruited participants by advertising the study objectives, process, eligibility criteria, and how to participate via flyers. Respondents were screened using the eligibility criteria: parents (father or mother), age over 18, smartphone ownership, and familiarity with the research application (Google Forms). Participants who met the criteria completed the survey online. The questionnaire was distributed via popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to make it accessible to everyone in Indonesia. Google Forms was used to survey parents' decisions regarding offline learning and their level of preparedness. The study included 134 participants.

Instrument

This study used an online questionnaire that contains demographic characteristics, offline learning, and parents' readiness for offline learning during the pandemic. The demographic characteristic questionnaire contains the child's, mothers', and fathers' characteristics. The parents' readiness instrument was developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC developed questions to help parents consider the risks and benefits of available educational choices before deciding for their children to follow offline learning (CDC, 2021). The original instrument was in English and has been translated into Indonesian. The translation is performed in two steps, i.e., forwarding translation and the forwarding translation reviewed by the research team. Three kinds of parents' readiness were used in this study: school readiness for COVID-19 prevention, planning for their children's self-protection from COVID-19, and mental health and social-emotion well-being consideration.

The school readiness for COVID-19 prevention questionnaire focuses on the family's unique needs and situation and the family's comfort levels with the school's readiness for COVID-19 preparation. This instrument consists of nine statements with a Likert scale; the answer choices for these questions were yes, no, unsure, and disagree.

The next questionnaire focuses on the parents' plans for the children's self-protection from COVID-19. This instrument ensures that the family emphasizes and exemplifies self-protective behavior and talks with their children about the changes expected for offline learning. This instrument consists of thirteen statements with a dichotomous answer choice.

The third questionnaire focuses on mental health and social-emotion well-being considerations. It concentrates on the parents' preparedness about their children's mental health and social emotion. This instrument consists of 12 statements with a dichotomous answer choice. The Indonesian version of the questionnaire was tested on 30 eligible respondents. The Cronbach's coefficient of this instrument was 0.754 of the total score.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistic was conducted to analyze the demographic characteristics, offline learning characteristics, and parents' readiness for offline learning during the pandemic. The data of children's characteristics (sex, grade, province, and transportation), mother/father's characteristics (education, occupation, and income), and offline learning characteristics (learning mode, first decision, offline frequency, and hours offline learning in a day) were described in frequency and percentages. The numeric data, such as children's characteristics (age), mother/father's characteristics (age), and offline learning characteristics (offline frequency and hours offline learning in a day) were described as the mean, deviation standard (SD), minimum, and maximum. The characteristic data were normally distributed. The Mann-Whitney U test was used because the parents' perception data (school readiness, planning for self-protection, mental health, and social-emotional well-being) were not normally distributed to the relationship between parents' readiness for offline learning during the pandemic among elementary school children.

Ethical consideration

This study was approved by the ethical review board of the Carolus Institute of Health Science Number 075/KEPPKSTIKSC/IX/2021. All participants provided their written informed consent by online mode.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the characteristics of children, mothers, and fathers of elementary school children. Most of the children were female (70; 52.2%). Among 134 children, 77 (57.5%) were in the first to third grade, and 124 (92.5) children came from Sulawesi. The children used public transportation (67.50%) and private transportation (67.50%). Mothers' characteristics include predominately highly educated (95; 70.9%). Among 134 mothers, 43 (32.1%) were housewives and 73 (54.5%) have over three million IDR of monthly income. Most fathers were highly educated (95; 70.9%). As many as 65 (48.5%) of them were private employees, and 103 (76.8%) fathers have over three million IDR of monthly income.

Table 1. Characteristics of children, mothers, and fathers

Variable	Mean (SD)	Min - Max	n (%)
Children's characteristics			
Ages (year)	8.46 (1.878)	6-9	
Sex			
Women			70 (52.2)
Men			64 (47.8)
Grade			
Grade 1-3			77 (57.5)
Grade 4-6			57 (42.5)
Province			
Sulawesi			124 (92.5)
Kalimantan			2 (1.5)
Java			5 (3.7)
Jakarta			3 (2.2)
Transportation			
Public transportation			67 (50.0)
Private transportation			67 (50.0)
Respondent's relationship with children			
Father			17 (12.7)
Mother			117 (87.3)
Mothers' characteristics			
Ages (year)	36.91 (5.142)	23-50	
Education of mothers			
Low (SD-SMP-SMA)			39 (29.1)
High (Diploma-S1-S2-S3)			95 (70.9)
Mothers' occupation			
Housewife			43 (32.1)
Private employees			25 (18.6)
Health profession			13 (9.7)
Teacher/lecturer			11 (8.2)
Civil servant			42 (31.3)
Mothers' income			
No income			27 (20.1)
< Rp. 1 billion			9 (6.7)
Rp. 1 – 3 billion			25 (18.7)
>Rp. 3 billion			73 (54.5)
Fathers' characteristics			
Ages (year)	39.5 (5.62)	26-58	
Fathers' education			
Low (SD-SMP-SMA)			39 (29.1)
High (Diploma-S1-S2-S3)			95 (70.9)
Fathers' occupation			
Farmer/daily laborer			11 (8.2)
Soldier/police/sailor			16 (11.9)
Private employees			65 (48.5)
Teacher/lecturer			8 (6.0)
Civil servant			34 (25.4)
Fathers' income			
No income			2 (1.5)
< Rp. 1 billion			7 (5.2)
Rp. 1 – 3 billion			22 (16.4)
>Rp. 3 billion			103 (76.8)

Table 2 presents the offline learning implementation during the pandemic in Indonesia. Between August and November 2021, 99 (73.9%) children have been in offline learning mode. Most of them had their first offline learning classes between June-December 2021, but there were children in offline

learning mode since January-June 2020. Among 134 children, 60 (44.8%) did offline learning one to three times a week, and 62 (46.3%) children did offline learning for 1-3 hours each day.

Table 2. Offline learning characteristics in August – November 2021

Variable	Mean (SD)	Min - Max	n (%)
Offline learning mode			
Yes			99 (73.9)
No			35 (26.1)
The first decision for offline Learning			
Never			35 (26.1)
June – December 2021			79 (59.0)
Jan – June 2021			7 (5.2)
April – June 2020			13 (9.7)
Offline frequencies in a week	2.64 (2.19)	0-6	
Never			35 (26.1)
1 – 3 times			60 (44.8)
4- 6 times			39 (29.1)
Hours of offline learning in a day	2.48 (1.96)	0 - 8	
Never			35 (26.1)
1 – 3 hours			62 (46.3)
4-6 hours			31 (23.1)
7– 9 hours			6 (4.5)

The parents' perception of their preparedness for their children's offline learning is shown in Table 3. Most of the parents perceived that the school's preparation for COVID-19 prevention was sufficient or ready at 100 (74.6%) people with an average score of 15.14. Almost all parents had the perception that they were ready about the preparation of

COVID-19 prevention for offline learning at 98 (73.1%) people, with an average score of 11.19. Most of them also believed that they had done enough mental health preparation for offline learning during the pandemic at 95 (70.9%) people, with an average score of 10.05.

Table3. Parents' perception of the preparedness for COVID-19 prevention for offline learning during the pandemic (August – November 2021)

Variable	Mean (SD)	Min - Max	n (%)
School readiness for COVID-19 prevention	15.14(3.44)	4 – 18	
Ready			100 (74.6)
Not ready			34 (25.4)
Planning for self-protection of children from COVID-19	11.19(1.65)	5 - 13	
Ready			98 (73.1)
Not ready			36 (26.9)
Mental health and social-emotion well-being consideration	10.05(2.37)	3 - 12	
Ready			95 (70.9)
Not ready			39 (29.1)

The relationship between parents' preparedness and perception of COVID-19 prevention in offline learning is presented in Table 4. The average parents' perception of school preparedness for COVID-19 prevention that chose offline learning mode for their children (15.76 ± 3.05) was higher than the parents that did not choose offline learning (13.4 ± 3.89), with a significant difference (P value < 0.05). The planning score for the self-protection of children from COVID-19 among the parents that chose offline learning

(11.05 ± 1.77) and online learning (11.57 ± 1.95) differed. However, there was no significant difference in statistics (P value > 0.05). There is a small score difference between mental health and social-emotion well-being consideration among the parents that chose offline learning (10.11 ± 2.45) and online learning (9.89 ± 2.17). However, there was no significance in statistics (P value > 0.05)

Table 4. The relationship between parents' readiness for offline learning during the pandemic among elementary school children

Variable	Offline learning mode		P value
	Yes (mean±SD)	No (mean±SD)	
School preparedness for COVID-19 prevention	15.76 ± 3.05	13.4 ± 3.89	0.000
Planning for self-protection of children from COVID-1	11.05 ± 1.77	11.57 ± 1.95	0.109
Mental health and social-emotion well-being consideration	10.11 ± 2.45	9.89 ± 2.17	0.631

DISCUSSION

This study shows that only a few parents have allowed their children to conduct offline learning in elementary schools since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak. However, the government officially reopened schools in June 2021 if the positivity rate in the area is below 5% and the mortality rate is

declining, per the recommendations of the Indonesian Pediatric Society (IPS) (Pudjiadi et al., 2022). Daily cases have declined since reaching a peak in July 2021, from 56,000 cases to 2,577 cases in September 2021. The recovery rate is above the world average, and the number of people vaccinated has reached 34.4% of the target and will

continue to increase the national vaccination rate (Ministry of State Apparatus Utilization and Bureaucratic Reform of Indonesia, 2021). Thus, most parents were satisfied with the face-to-face learning policy during the end of the pandemic (Safira, 2022).

The parent's decision to allow their children to conduct offline learning early was because of the many obstacles of online learning. Parents argued that during online learning, their children lacked concentration, lacked self-regulation, and had difficulties in learning support due to the parent's lack of time and experience, particularly for parents with full-time jobs (Pudjiadi et al., 2022). A previous study regarding the readiness level of 38 parents from elementary school, secondary school, and senior high school students showed that 96% of parents were very ready to accompany their children to learn online, 92% instructed their children to learn online according to the school's learning schedule, 82% did not understand their children's lessons, 16% were grumpy when accompanying their children's learning process, and 47% became stressed (Siahaan et al., 2021). This study's results differed than previous research as only a few parents (26.1%) prefer online school. This may be because the research was conducted after nearly two years after the beginning of the pandemic.

The parents' readiness for offline learning during the pandemic among elementary school children was greatly influenced by their perception of the schools' preparedness for COVID-19 prevention. This is in line with a previous study that found the highest reported reason for parents' satisfaction level was their trust in schools' safety protocols, besides improvements in learning processes and outcomes (Safira, 2022). A previous survey in Indonesia showed that most parents were "quite satisfied" with the face-to-face learning policy based on gender, region, household income, marital status, work status, and their children's school level and school type (Safira, 2022). Another study among elementary school children from July to November 2021 showed that 100% of parents have a good readiness for face-to-face learning during the pandemic (Made et al., 2023). This result is in line with this study, which showed that parents sent their children to school since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic as distance learning has faced some resistance in Indonesia, especially among those living in rural communities, i.e., being disproportionately disadvantaged due to gadget ownership issues and limited access to internet connectivity (Safira, 2022).

Previous research has also found that there were several factors that affect parents' decision to keep their children conducted online learning, including the presence of vulnerable people at home, children with comorbidities, perception of COVID-19 as a dangerous disease, experience with COVID-19-positive cases in the community, COVID-19 related death in the community, approval for adult COVID-19 vaccination, and ownership of private transportation (Pudjiadi et al., 2022). Moreover, another research indicated that some parents were uncertain about the preparedness of schools for limited face-to-face learning. The same research also showed that the surveyed parents reported a 50-70% readiness level for schools to conduct offline learning (Mujiarti et al., 2022).

This study also shows no significant relationship between parents' planning for the self-protection of their children from COVID-19 and their decision to send their children for offline learning. Another previous study showed that children, especially teenagers, commonly practice COVID-19

protocols, such as hand hygiene by using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer or soap and clean running water, wearing a medical mask, and avoiding touching one's eyes, nose, and mouth (Seniwati et al., 2022). Self-protection for children was not the main factor for parents because the parents have instilled this behavior since the beginning of the pandemic. The main factor they considered was the school's readiness for offline learning. In a previous study, the school must implement ventilation standards, adjusted school duration, and physical distancing before they reopened the school (Widowati et al., 2022).

Based on the results of this study, parents who opted for offline learning did not show any notable discrepancies in their mental health and overall well-being compared to those who opted for online learning. The participants demonstrated a high level of mental health and overall well-being. Earlier studies highlighted the adverse effects of the pandemic on the mental health and well-being of parents, who have reported feeling depressed, stressed, and overwhelmed due to the added responsibilities of managing both their work and their children's education. These parents have also struggled with managing their time effectively between work and their children's studies (Lase et al., 2021). Another research also showed that parents experienced stress and exhaustion while managing multiple pressures and conflicting responsibilities related to home, school, and work, without their usual support system and in the context of disrupted routines (Dawes et al., 2021). The findings of this study diverge from previous research. According to the results, the parents showed positive mental health and well-being, evident from their high scores. One possible explanation for this could be that the pandemic had been ongoing for almost two years, allowing parents to adjust and adapt to the sudden changes in the learning methodologies brought on by the pandemic (Afrilyasanti & Basthomi, 2022).

The limitation of this study is that the respondents were collected with voluntary sampling, and the questionnaire was distributed on social media. Therefore, this study only used a small sample. This may result in bias as the target population does not represent Indonesia's population. Hence, we suggest collecting data from the centers of several regions in Indonesia to obtain a more representative sample.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Parents in Indonesia have sent their elementary school children to offline learning since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, most of them sent their children to school in July 2021. School preparedness for COVID-19 prevention was the main factor for parents to send their children to school because they have prepared their children with self-protection and good mental health. Hence, the government and primary healthcare centers are important in supervising and providing safe schools for children from COVID-19.

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