THE SCHOOL ADAPTATION TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC:
The Case of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Muhammadiyah 2
Tanggulangin Sidoarjo

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 outbreak has impacted all sectors and has forced them to adapt to a "new normal" way, education sector is no exception. This article examines the extent to which the schools' adaptation to deal with the global pandemic. It is an empirical study result taking place in Sidoarjo by particular attention in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Muhammadiyah 2 Tanggulangin Sidoarjo. The study incorporated two techniques of data collection: participant observation and semi-structured interview. The findings showed that in order to sustain during the coronavirus catastrophe, the school had established three process of adaptation; fully distance learning system, cluster-based learning system, and limited face-to-face learning.

Keywords: School Adaptation, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Muhammadiyah, Pandemic, COVID-19, Coronavirus.

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the extent to which the schools' adaptation to deal with the global pandemic. Recently, this topic has been a crucial issue due the fact that the global COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted all sectors and has forced them to adapt to a "new normal" way, including education sector. The education sector in almost all countries around the world has faced a challenge to deal with the learning system because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has forced institutions of education to re-orient their education systems, from face-to-face to online based learning.

Practically, the change of the learning system has multiple effects. In Indonesia, for instance, Purwanto, et al., (2020) revealed that teachers, students and their parents experienced difficulties in implemented the online learning due to some reasons; lack of technological devices, internet costs, and the poor communication between school, students and parents during the online system. Another problem is about psychological impacts as stated by Aji (2020), and Nurkholis (2020) that internet based system might result in psychological trauma.

The internet based learning system becomes more challenging when it is implemented at elementary schools. Teaching students under 12-year-old needs special treatments and methods to make sure they can focus on their lessons. For this reason, it not a wonder when there are some studies mentioning that the new learning system is not really effective for kids. For instance, Hamdani & Priatna (2020) launched their survey, concluding that the effectiveness of online teaching system implementation reached only 66.97% in Subang West Java, Indonesia.

Due to the crucial issue above, this article focuses on investigation the way of Muhammadiyah school adaptation to the "new normal" society as result of the COVID-19 outbreak by particular attention to Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Muhammadiyah 2 Sidoarjo. We base the chose school on some reasons. First, this school is located in Sidoarjo in which this city is one of Indonesian regions that *had highest* number of confirmed *coronavirus cases* since the spread of the coronavirus in this country (Pusat-Informasi-dan-Komunikasi-COVID-19-Sidoarjo, 2020). Even its Acting Regent, Nur Ahmad Syaifuddin, died from exposure to Covid-19 (Kompas.com, 2020). Second, among the Muhammadiyah schools in Sidoarjo, MIM 2 Sidoarjo is categorized as a small school. This category leads to a presumption that it would experience harder ways to adapt the "new normal".

In order to result in a comprehensive analysis, it needs to incorporate some theoretical perspectives related to the concept of adaptation. The concept has been studied from multiple perspectives used to denote the process by which the subject adapts to the new environment associated with certain particular goal towards which the subject strives. (Terziev, 2019). Concerning an institution of education, organizational perspective of adaptation is relevant to be deployed. Riadi (2014) defines the term of organizational adaptation as an organizational ability in responding to external environmental changes by changes some aspects of internal organization. Sarta et al. (2017, 2020) explain the term as "a performance with a corresponding focus on what organizations can modify internally to achieve these outcomes under constraints".

The concept of adaptation is is a subject of study by different scientific areas, which in itself is a prerequisite for the applicability of various approaches to its definition. Among those concepts, Sarta et al. (2017) classify the concept into three forms of adaptation; as a state, as an ability, and as a process. A state or final outcome explains stability and adaptation at points in time. It means that this adaptation is viewed as the result of balance of mutual expectations of the individual or institutions and their environment. The adaptive ability of organizations emanates from the various viewpoints of organizational. Lastly, adaptation as a process describes the means by which organizations adapt the challenges they face in negotiating new positions within environments. This model was initially understood as a learning process where organizations seek feedbacks from the environment and try to adapt according to their goals.

Due to the theoretical perspectives of organizational above, this article would like to see how the school adapts to the COVID-19 pandemic and what are its strategies to be able sustain under the new social life.

METHODS

This is a case study establishing a qualitative approach at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Muhammadiyah (MIM) 2 Tanggulangin Sidoarjo. To collect the data, it mainly incorporated two data collection techniques; participant observation and interview.

The Participant observation focused on school activities during the pandemic. The semi-structured interview conducted involving school's staffs including the principal, the vice principal, 6 teachers, and 5 students' parents. In addition, to support the findings, we collected secondary data from photos, videos, and other documents. The collected data were analized using Miles and Huberman interactive model; data reduction, data display, drawing and verifying conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The global pandemic COVID-19 seems like confirming that nobody in the world can change environment. One thing that is possible to do is try to adapt to the new environment. Otherwise, the more fatal consequences might be experienced for those who still insist on the old ways.

This paper presents how Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Muhammadiyah (MIM) 2 Tanggulangin Sidoarjo attempts to adapt the new environment under its limitations. Based on the empirical investigation, we highlight three stages of adaptation in order to sustain during the pandemic namely "fully distance learning system", "cluster-based learning system", and "limited face-to-face learning."

Fully Distance Learning System

Apart from the school commitment engage in reducing the spread of COVID-19 disease, around March 2020, MIM 2 Tanggulangin had closed the school and had established distance learning system. This decision was issued to follow the instruction from the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture as well as from the Central Board of Muhammadiyah where the school is affiliated to this organization. The instructions were issued in order to limit the spread of COVID-19 infection.

However, the closure of the school and implementing the distance education system did not mean that the problem was over. Unpreparedness in implementing the new system had caused that the teaching process at MIM 2 Tanggulangin Sidoarjo was not really effective. Based on the empirical data collected from interviews, we identified some issues affecting to the ineffectiveness of the learning process; the media of learning, the teachers' obstacles, and the problem related to students and their parents.

The Media of Learning

The digital-based education system is a process of transfer of knowledge through the internet. The system requires an availability of materials and software application of platform that are suitable to support the learning process. Unfortunately, the school had obstacles to provide these media of learning, including materials, applications or platform.

The principal confirmed that the school had not any experienced in implementing the distance learning. When the school had been "forced" to conduct the online-based learning, it made the principal and teachers worked hard to provide the digital resources and platform for the learning process. As the vice principal stated:

> "…….Yah, ini memang serba repot ya, COVID ini mengharuskan kita melakukan social distancing, termasuk dalam proses pembelajaran di sekolah. Sehingga harus ditutup sementara. Kita faham sih ini demi keselamatan semuanya. Tapi kita sendiri, terus terang kan tidak menyiapkan bahwa akan melaksanakan pendidikan jarak jauh semacam ini. Jadinya kita semua, terutama guru-guru benar-benar pusing mencari solusi media pembelajaran yang tepat. Apalagi ini anak-anak lo. Bisa dibayangkan bagaimana susahnya mengendalikan mereka. Awalnya kita mencoba menggunakan Youtube, kemudian, Google meet, dan belakangan banyak menggunakan Whatsapp .. (interview on December 29th, 2020).

To deal with the obstacles, they started to use YouTube channel. The teachers made recorded-presentations uploaded to the Channel. Another platform was Google meet. But, a few months later, the teaching processes were mostly used WhatsApp. One reason is that the students and theirs parents were more that other applications. Another consideration was to to reduce the cost of internet access.

The Teachers' Obstacles

Some people say that work at home is great fun. But teachers are an exception, at least the teachers at MIM 2 Tanggulangin Sidoarjo. During the digital learning, the teachers claimed more stressful.

They feel uncomfortable with this new system mainly for two reasons. First, some teachers said that they could not arrange their time for teaching as good as possible. Even they spent extra-time for teaching. It is because they could not decide to teach based on the definitive schedule. Instead, they should accommodate the readiness of their students. Unfortunately, students had different available times for learning due to some reasons; availability of technological devices (mobile phone, laptop), internet access, or parents' time. Consequently, the teaching time had been unmanageable.

Lia, the grade 6th teacher, said:

"sistem pembelajaran jarak jauh ini ternyata gak semudah yang saya bayangkan awal. Pembelajaran ini sangat menyita waktu saya. Karena ternyata, saya tidak bisa mengatur waktu pembelajaran secara bersama-sama. Sebagian ada yang bisa diatur kelas pagi, tapi sebagian mereka, orang tuanya menghendaki kelas malam, karena mereka baru bisa mendampingi anak-anaknya setelah pulang kerja. Jadinya kita sebagai guru harus banyak mengalah (Interview on December 25th , 2020).

Second, some teachers are not really familiar with any technological devices and applications or platform to support the teaching process. They do not know how to operate any kind of online learning platforms such as zoom, google meet or other platforms that recently have become very popular. This teacher inability to adapt to the new platform had impacted to the process of transfer of knowledge to be less interesting.

The Problem Related to Students and Their Parents.

The most complicated problem during the implementation of the fully distance learning system was related to students. First, as students at elementary level, ideally, they should be accompanied by their parents during the process of distance learning. Unfortunately, the vice principal reported, over 50% of the parents could not stay for him. Some of them are not at home because of work, while others are low-educated. Consequently, the teachers need extra-efforts to ensure the student participate to the transfer of knowledge process through the online learning.

Another problem faced by the students or their parents related to the new system is the internet access. Some teachers reported that the student participation during distance learning system was no more than 70%. When parents were confirmed about the reason, some of them said that they did not have enough internet access, or their technological devices did not really work for the online system. Those are some obstacles faced by MIM 2 Tanggulangin Sidoarjo when establishing fully distancing education system. For this reason, the principal and other staffs, as well as teachers, decided to change the strategies from fully distance learning to be cluster-based learning.

The Cluster-Based Learning System

Cluster-based learning was a collaborative learning system between MIM 2 Tanggulangin and local's residents around the school to provide homes or spaces used as alternative schools. The students were placed to the alternative schools grouped based on grade and home addresses.

The school introduced this system to bridge dilemma situations. On the one hand, the school tried to deal with some hindrances related to the distance learning system as mentioned above. On the other hand, this way was established to minimize the number of students gathering at the same time as an effort to protect them from the coronavirus infection. To accommodate all the students, the school provided 7 places. However, they were still not enough to cover all the students. They were limited, no more than 8 students for one class. Consequently, they are divided into several times of class meeting.

Though MIM 2 had tried to solve the two dilemmas, the system was not running well. The Cluster-based learning system was running only one month in October. The school ended this program because some reasons. One of them was that the teachers had experienced difficulties in coordinating with other teachers or school's staffs. It is understandable because teacher used to need administrative support from other teachers or school staffs, in which it could not be fulfilled when they were separated. Another issue hindering the program was that there was a feeling "ewuh pakewuh", Javanese words to express inconvenient feelings from both the teachers and the residents.

The Limited Face-to-Face Class System

The last way of adaptation, after almost one year MIM 2 Tanggulangin was closed during the pandemic, is a limited face-to-face learning. This system is being conducted at the school which means that the school has reopened for learning. The new system is called a limited face-to-face class since the class is opened with some restrictions such as the number of students, the duration and the days of learning. In terms of the volume of student, every class is only allowed for no more than 15 students. It means that every class must be divided into two or three classes. Consequently, to accommodate all students, the school reduces the time of learning. For instance, instead of five days, it is only two days and only between two up to three hours per days.

According to the vice principal, the decision to disclose the school was issued after consulting to several parties. The first consultation was to the ministry of religious affair in Sidoarjo. The school also asked feedbacks from Muhammadiyah because the school is under control by this organization. As a result, the school ventured to reopen for the learning with some special measures to limit the spread of the coronavirus infection.

However, students' partiipants are still less than 90%. Some students' parent said that they still worry to allow their children going to school under the pandemic. In this case, though school has tried to convince them, the school could not force them to attend to the school. When these findings above are linked to the conceptual adaptation, it is clear that the way of adaptation applied by Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Muhammadiyah (MIM) 2 Tanggulangin Sidoarjo can be categorized as a process oriented. As mentioned by Sarta et al. (2017), that theoretically, there are three forms of adaptation; as a state, as an ability, and as a process. External factors are powerful to determine which forms of the adaptation would be applied.

The adaptation, as a process, carried out by the school to build a sustainability of learning comprises three stages; the fully distance learning, the cluster- based learning system, and the limited face-to face learning. The adaptation process is illustrated at figure 1. However, as a process, these are not the final stages. The school might change to another way of adaptation, by considering the development of COVID-19 pandemic as the external factor and the internal aspects.
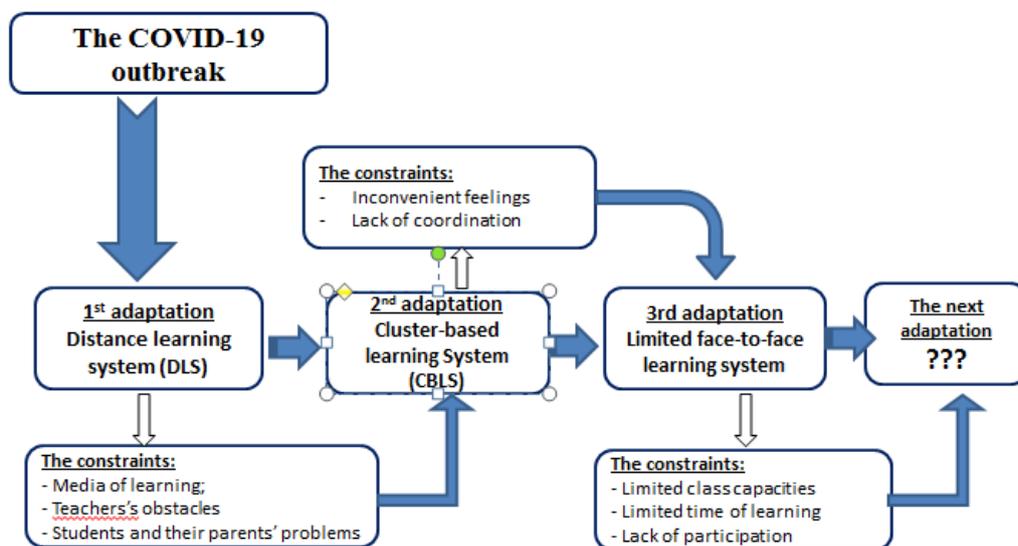
Figure 1: School adaptation processes at MIM 2 Tanggulangin Sidoarjo

CONCLUSION

The concept of adaptation can be understood as; a result, ability, and a process. Based on the empirical study of institutional adaptation at MIM 2 Tanggulangin Sidoarjo, we conclude that adaptation is a process oriented. It is a process by which school try to adapt an external constraint, in which in this case is the COVID-19 outbreak, by modifying some internal aspects of its organization. To adapt the new society under the pandemic, the learning processes at MIM 2 Tanggulangin Sidoarjo had applied three stages of adaptation; the fully distance learning, the cluster- based learning system, and the limited face-to-face learning. Yet, the case of learning adaptation is not enough to understand the school adaptation comprehensively. Some organizational aspects, such as student achievements, financial aspects during the pandemic are need to be explored deeply.

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