



Dealing with learning loss during the post-pandemic: Understanding the perspectives of parents and teachers

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Highlights:

This study focuses on learning loss in students from low socioeconomic family settings during the post-pandemic. Learning loss has been associated with low educational attainment. Strategies are needed to address the potential long-term consequences of losses in learning. The findings shed light on strategies parents and teachers applied to maximize student learning, especially in responding to disparities in education that worsened during the pandemic.

Abstract

Learning loss has been assumed to happen during the pandemic and post-pandemic era. This study aims to explore teachers' and parents' understandings about learning loss and strategies to maximise students' learning progress during the post-pandemic. 26 participants involved in this study with age mean (M) was 44.5 years old. Four focus group discussions involving parents and teachers (2 parent groups and 2 teacher groups respectively) discussed their understandings about learning loss and strategies to minimise it. Data was analysed using NVivo 12 Plus. Three themes were found: Possible causes, quality of learning, and strategies to overcome. The findings suggest that providing support, both emotional and practical, was expressed by teachers and parents to identify and mitigate the long-term consequences of learning loss as it created routine changes in children's learning habits. The findings suggest that collaboration is the epitome of partnerships between parents and teachers.

Keywords: Learning Loss; Strategies; Parents; Teachers; Collaboration

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has caused profound impacts in various areas in life (Smeru, n.d.; Wang et al., 2021; WHO, n.d), including education Howard mentioned that students experienced about 35% of learning deficits due to pandemic (<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/30/health/covid-learning-loss-study-wellness/index.html>, 2023). The findings consistently marked the destructive effect produced by the pandemic on students' learning progress. Learning loss has been identified as a devastating result of school closure due to COVID-19 pandemic, as evidenced by several studies (Acer Centre, 2022; Asian Development Bank, 2022; Patrinos, Vegas, & Carter-Lau, 2022). Some studies have demonstrated that length of school closures have association with the presence of learning loss (Asian Development Bank, 2022; Baker, 2020; Engzell, Frey, & Verhagen, 2021; World Bank, 2020; 2021). The longer the school closures, the more likely learning loss to happen (Baker, World Bank, 2020; 2021). For example, eight months of school closure represents six months of learning loss (World Bank, 2020; 2021) or school closure diminishes students' reading score by 21 points (Muharikah, Karnalim, & Natsir, 2022). A 2022 report from UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank and others have highlighted that approximately 70 percent of children worldwide aged between ten years old are not able to produce simple written text (UNICEF, 2022). In Indonesia, school closures have lasted for more than a year. This condition not only causes students to miss out on academic knowledge, but also skills, experiences, and mindsets that are required in workforces (Dorn et al., 2021), as reported by UNICEF (2021) that the COVID-19 puts students' wellbeing at risk with long-lasting consequences. Learning loss not only disrupts academic performances, but also reduces economic lives (Asian Development Bank, 2022). If left unaddressed, this situation will threaten a generation of students who might experience economic hardships in the future (Molato-Gayares et al., 2022). The explanations above signify the detrimental effects of disrupted learning to the quality of human capital and economic opportunities (Netolicky, 2020; Tan, 2021).

It is estimated that approximately 3% of students are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Kristiana et al, 2022). During the pandemic, learning was delivered using remote instruction to minimize the curb of the infection. However, most schools are not well prepared in managing learning remotely, which has resulted in students' lack of progress. As a consequence, disengagement and loss in learning may widen the achievement gaps between students' actual and expected achievements (INOVASI & Pusat Penelitian Kebijakan, 2021). In addition, students coming from low socioeconomic families were the least likely to engage from the learning process (INOVASI & Pusat Penelitian Kebijakan, 2021; Weale, 2020), which potentially exacerbates these students' conditions who have experienced challenges in their lives before the pandemic. This shows that the pandemic COVID-19 has posed educational disparities in human capital growth (Sievertsen & Burgess, 2020).

The pandemic has caused low socioeconomic families to face greater challenges, especially economic hardships that have resulted in unemployment and limited income to meet the daily needs. During the post-pandemic, schools have reopened to give opportunities to students to return to learn (Daniel, 2020; Zhao & Xue, 2023). Experiencing remote learning during the pandemic and returning to offline learning during the post-pandemic may require learning adaptation for students to engage in learning (Zhao & Xue, 2023). The post-pandemic poses considerable challenges for teachers and parents to keep their students motivated to learn and have independence in learning (Tan, 2021). Especially for students coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds, returning to in-person classes may suffer more challenges. A very

few studies have been undergone to explore the learning loss of these marginalized groups during the transition.

Given the magnitude of learning loss, decisive actions should be taken into consideration by involving teachers or parents to collaborate together to enhance learning (Naslund-Hadley & Ortiz, 2022). Therefore, it is important to listen to the voices of parents and teachers related to the learning loss of their students during the transition. Their voices are critical to ensure what can be done differently to improve and maximize students' learning during the post-pandemic.

This study seeks to understand parents' and teachers' views on learning loss and strategies to mitigate and enhance student learning.

METHOD

Study design

A qualitative study was conducted for this study. This design was chosen because it was considered appropriate for gaining a deeper understanding of learning loss, its impacts and ways to minimize from the views of parents and teachers.

Participant

A total of 26 participants from one primary school agreed to participate in this study voluntarily by signing an informed consent after receiving information from the researchers regarding the study. The majority of students from the school were from low socio-economic backgrounds. They were divided into four groups consisting of two groups of parents and two groups of teachers respectively. In general, the majority of participants were female whose ages ranged from 35-50 years.

Instrument

A focus group discussion was held involving parents and teachers. Each group discussed ways to minimize learning loss in children. The authors of this study (CG, IK, PW, and DR) were facilitators and five research assistants helped as notetakers for each group. The discussion was centered on 'what strategies do teachers and parents apply to minimize learning loss?' The discussions lasted for approximately 45-60 minutes and were audiotaped and transcribed.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was performed to find data patterns. Data was analyzed using NVIVO 12 Plus by CG and CK. Transcripts were read separately to identify potential themes. By using inductive coding, CG and CK were responsible to develop and assign categories separately and observe patterns in every transcript. CG and CK met regularly to discuss and compare categories and organize these categories into a coding guide. Different codes were revisited or modified to ensure data integrity (Thomson-Ebanks & Jarman, 2017). An in-depth analysis was performed to determine which categories should be separated and which data should be put under the same category. Three final themes were produced: Possible causes, quality of learning, and strategies to minimize learning loss.

RESULT

Participants' characteristics

The participants were dominantly females, ranging from 35-55 years old (M= 44.5 years old) who mostly were housewives. Parents had at least one child studying in the school where this study was conducted.

Themes

Possible causes

This theme consisted of children-related causes, parent-related causes, teacher-related causes, environment-related causes, and communication. This theme signified various causes that resulted in learning loss amongst students.

Children-related causes

These referred to a child's characteristics that could influence how the child learned, as described below:

“My child's history... is that he wants to be pushed” (BK-parent)

“My son is a bit slow... “

“Already this month... Wearing a mask... [the child] says Mum, if the teacher wears a mask, I can't hear her voice well, although I have increased the volume of [the child] hearing aid, but the voice is sometimes clear and sometimes not [clear] (A-parent)

These excerpts described the child's personal characteristics that were linked to physical and psychological qualities that affected their learning.

Parent-related causes

The causes were related to parents' support for their child's learning. Teachers mentioned that parental support impacted students' learning progress, as stated:

“So the actual problem is that their parents don't do their obligation as parents.

(Parents) not only provide materials, but they should also provide spare time... they also have to give attention [to their child]” (MN-teacher)

Parental support was perceived by the participating teachers as lacking. They expected that parents should participate in their children's learning process.

Similarly, some parents also highlighted busyness as the reason for parents not able to assist their children to learn:

“Parents are busy... ” (PH, parent)

Teacher-related cause

This was related to a minimum assistance the teacher provided during the learning, as described:

“When students learn from home, we [teachers] can’t control what they [students] do, whether they are learning or not” (BN-teacher)

Lack of control through punishment was viewed as diminished during the online learning, which influenced students’ lack of enthusiasm during learning, as said:

“The students have lost their enthusiasm in learning because we [teachers] don’t use punishment [when teaching]” (BE, teacher)

Environment-related causes

These referred to problems linked to network issues which affected the quality of learning. For example:

“When power shortage happens and the children learn online, it means that they can’t join” (AS-parent)

“In my case, for students whose parents are economically impacted (by COVID-19), and have no data package, they can join with their friends” (BS-teacher)

Miscommunication

These was related to communication problem derived from children and parents, as described by the teacher:

“In fact, there’s a student whose parents have problems. This student lives with his mother, and she doesn’t join the (WhatsApp) class group. That’s the problem. So I put both of parents (in the group), although they don’t communicate, they know (what happens in class)” (BS-teacher)

Quality of learning

It referred to several sub-themes: lack of attitude, lack of cognitive abilities, and lack of interest which indicated students’ decrease of learning quality. This evidence showed that online learning had been viewed by teachers and parents as a contributing factor that resulted in learning issues.

Lack of positive attitude

The participating teachers mentioned that students had lost foundational skills, such as being disciplined, using gentle words and greetings. The participating teachers reported a sign of disrespect shown by the students, as evidenced:

“They [the students] lack manners. Lots of them talk harshly and [they] don’t know if [they] talk rudely. This is school but [they] talk using rude words.” (MQ-teacher)

“.... they don’t shake hands with the teacher when school is over.” (MA-teacher)

“Students become too relaxed and undisciplined” (PD, teacher)

In addition, the teachers in this study showed a concern related to how students became dependent when doing the task during the online learning as parents eventually did the homework instead of their children, which demonstrated a lack of responsibility.

Lack of cognitive abilities

According to the parents and teachers, most students did not seem to focus on the task when learning was conducted online, as mentioned:

“Loss focus indicates learning loss....They [students] don’t focus, [they] interrupt by talking to their parents or siblings, and they often ask for permission to go to the toilet.”
(BS-teacher)

“[they] are getting slow... Sometimes I ask him [the child] and he says that he forgets. Then I repeat again...he says that he forgets. [He] seems to understand at school, but when learning is online, he plays games on the phone...” (S-parent)

Lack of interest

Parents and teachers in this study expressed concern that the students did not show any interest in learning, as pointed out:

“The presence of learning loss causes the child finds it difficult to study. [they] can follow the lesson at school, but [they] refuse to write when at home.” (R-parent)

“No interest in learning... doesn’t seem to be embarrassed if [he] can’t do [the task].”
(BA-parent)

Strategies to minimise learning loss

It consisted of face-to-face learning, teachers’ support, parental support, authoritative figures, communication between teachers and parents, and discipline as a social skill. These strategies involved direct and indirect involvements from parents and teachers which were viewed as efforts needed to respond to students’ learning losses.

Face-to-face learning

Both parents and teachers believed that offline learning was essential for helping students to achieve. In addition, face-to-face learning was perceived by teachers and parents as a way to connect with other students which diminished during the pandemic, as stated:

“Learning loss is about not seeing one another, that’s it! If [students] meet one another, I think it’s solved...” (MN-teacher)

“It is better [for the child] to be at school. We [parents] feel secure if the child is at school.” (R-parent)

Teachers’ support

The teachers in this study provided support to their students by developing closeness, as described:

“I use a personal approach... when we are able to build close relationships [with the students]... no secret. They will be open when having a problem.” (MN, teacher)

“Well... [we] start habituation again. It’s like teaching students in grade 1. [they] don’t remember multiplication, so we have to do habituation to these students. As you see, these students are in grade five now, they are in grade 3 during the pandemic, we repeated the multiplication again, helping how to solve it, now they can do it.” (PD-teacher)

The participating teachers showed support to their students by attending to their emotional needs and academic struggles.

Parental support

Parents in this study assisted their children to study, both in providing emotional and practical ways of supporting. For example:

“I teach him [the child] to read” (S, parent)

“My child has to be helped, otherwise he won’t do [the work]. He has to be helped to answer the questions. Sometimes I read the question and [I] guide him by asking is the answer a, b, or c? Then he answers...” (BE, parent)

The participating parents realised that providing help for their children necessitated parents’ understanding of children's lacking in certain learning areas.

Authoritative figures

This described figures who were perceived by parents as influential for their children’s learning, such as teacher and father, as stated:

“There’s a figure the child is afraid of at school.” (R-parent)

“[He is] afraid of the male teachers...” (A-parent)

“[the child] plays until 6pm, once arrived home, [the child] was scolded by his father by asking what do you choose, play or study. Then, [the child] studies with his father.” (S-parent)

“So if her teacher (mentioned the name) asks to do the task, and is being assisted, then [the child] will do it, but if [the child] is left, he will pretend that he’s doing it.” (BA-parent)

These findings showed that the participating parents admitted that having figures that were respected by the students was important in developing students’ learning habits.

Communication between teachers and parents (collaboration)

This referred to communication held between parents and teachers to ensure that the learning needs of the children were met during the post-pandemic, as mentioned:

“I tell Mr... (mentioned the name of the teacher) to assist [the child] saying if there’s anything with my child, please let me know.” (A-parent)

“I communicate with the class teacher who assists my child when [my child] wears a hearing aid. I ask her to help [my child]... what matters most is communication.” (A-parent)

“When dealing with students’ learning... we have to cooperate with parents... [we] have to support our children so they can learn maximally..” (BS-teacher)

Parents and teachers in this study agreed upon developing relationships that support children’s learning.

Discipline as a social skill

Discipline was viewed by the participating teachers and parents as missing during the online learning, causing teachers and parents to impose this positive quality once offline learning was delivered, as emphasised:

“During the offline learning, I have started to give some discipline training. Because they [the students] are in the 6th grade, they have to focus. It’s a limited time to catch the missed learning materials, so I ask them to manage their time, ... not coming late” (BS-teacher)

“The students have been offline for almost two months...they have started to have responsibility compared to online learning. During the online learning, they only learn for an hour, the rest would be for gaming.. If he wants to play [a game], I always ask him to finish his schoolwork. He is more responsible than during online learning.” (BE-parent)

“Students must be disciplined, must have a target that they can finish the tasks on time. Being responsible and disciplined to do their tasks ... “ (BN-teacher)

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates that learning loss has occurred during the pandemic and has been continuing to happen during the post-pandemic. Learning loss is understood by parents and teachers as a deficit in students’ abilities to learn what they have learned. It is manifested in various behaviours shown during the meeting in online class and independent study. This finding verifies some studies related to challenges of online learning (Febriana et al., 2022; Muharikah et al., 2022), especially within the context of primary education. Students face difficulties to remain focused, become disengaged and passive as they get easily distracted from distractions, which indicate students’ low level of learning readiness. Learning readiness influences students’ motivation and achievement. Online learning requires students to develop self-directed learning which indicates students’ active involvement in setting their learning that comprises planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning (Lee, Tsai, Chai, & Koh, 2014). Students with high self-directed learning show high independence in learning (Dwiyanti, Pratama, & Manik, 2020). In contrast, the findings of this study signified challenges related to online learning which is students’ dependency from parents with their schoolwork and low motivation to learn (Muharikah et al., 2022).

The implementation of hybrid learning that includes a combination of a limited face-to-face learning (Pembelajaran tatap muka/PTM terbatas) and online learning after experiencing two-year lockdown was perceived, especially by parents, as positive as the children showed some improvements in their attitudes toward learning, such as showing their willingness to repeat the

learning materials. Face-to-face learning is believed by parents and teachers to be an effective approach for their children as it provides direct psychological and social interactions which potentially increase their motivation to learn (Dwiyanti et al., 2020). In addition, face-to-face learning can minimize barriers, such as limited internet access and inability to provide a smartphone as experienced by students during online learning. However, it may not be the case for the teachers as learning loss is still experienced by the students after the face-to-face learning takes place, especially related to comprehension, memory, and learning motivation. Although face-to-face learning may provide students with opportunities to have direct psychological and social interactions, this study demonstrates a potential prolonged learning loss after pandemic. Further studies are needed to explore the severity of learning loss during the post-pandemic.

When learning was transitioned into offline learning, parents and teachers shared a relatively similar concern regarding student learning habits. Teachers and parents emphasize the lack of self-discipline resulting from a disrupted learning during the pandemic, which diminishes familiar learning routines, therefore, the teachers and parents tend to focus on fixing and maintaining student learning behavior by implementing learning goals. Sudden shift from online to offline learning may create a low self-efficacy for students because they felt a low sense of mastery experiences in online learning due to lack of hands-on learning experience, which in turn affects their motivation to stay engaged with their learning (Weishaar, n.d).

Support from parents and teachers are paramount for children, especially in providing emotional and practical support are highlighted in this study. Even so, some parents in this study, in particular, may find it difficult to provide support for their children due to house chores, work and incapability to grasp the schoolwork. This finding indicates that parents may have less involvement in their children's learning before the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic shifts the situation where parents are involved in their children's learning as they spend most of their time at home, with parents acting as 'substitute' teacher, ensuring that their children are doing the tasks well. This situation potentially causes discomfort for parents to some extent because they are not prepared to teach. In addition, given the fact that students in this study were from low socioeconomic backgrounds, parents experienced challenges in providing sufficient support as they have to manage to meet the family needs. Socioeconomic status contributes to the widening learning gap that describes the quality of learning received by students.

Understanding collaboration or partnerships between parents and teachers demonstrated equal and active responsibilities, as well as participation of both parties related to particular roles and relationships within the environment (Carrington, 2007). Online learning during the pandemic has taught that relationships are paramount to minimize learning loss. Therefore, having open communication between teachers and parents can reduce barriers to supporting their students (Saggers, Macartney, & Guerin, 2012). In addition, it can also address issues of unequal power relationships demonstrated by professionals that exist and circulate in the school system.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to identify strategies to combat learning loss in primary school students by taking into account the perspectives of parents and teachers. They understood learning loss as a condition that is characterized by a decline of students' academic skills due to the discontinuity of learning process. Also, learning loss was also linked to students' lacking in character development. Efforts to minimize learning loss involve collaborations between parents and teachers to help students with their learning. In addition, face-to-face learning has been viewed as an effective way to develop positive learning habits.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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