



VIRTUAL LEADERSHIP OF ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS DURING PANDEMIC ERA IN MAKASSAR CITY

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ABSTRACT

In this situation of pandemic, schools have to adjust to the new trends of education wherein most things have to be done online. Different platforms are used to be able to mobilize teachers, parents, students and other stakeholders of the schools in Makassar City. Applications like Zoom, Google-meet, and WhatsApp are just some of the media that so far effective in communicating with those stakeholders. In this research, the researcher aims to determine ways and means on how these principals are able to mobilize and influence all the stakeholders so that goals and objectives of the school will be achieved. Based on the findings, principals have to use various platforms and need to conduct regular meetings to tall these stakeholders to ensure that education is well delivered. This paper applies the descriptive qualitative method wherein data is mainly collected by interviews and observations based on the objective of the research. These data are then reduced and analyzed to come up with a conclusion that is based on the main objective of the researcher

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most affected institutions by Covid-19 Pandemic is from education. Most schools and universities are closed and couldn't do any face-to-face classes due to the widespread of the corona virus. It has been almost two years that this pandemic keeps on happening and it seems like it's going to take more time to end. But how do leaders in education react to this situation? How is leadership executed during this time of pandemic? And how this leadership affects the teachers and the students? These are just some of the few questions that somehow present in most leaders in education and in all educators' minds as well.

Virtual leadership is one of the most essential strategies needed by the leaders in educational institutions during this pandemic. This way, education has to continue catering good quality of learning experiences and professional growth for the educators. School leaders need to maintain the good quality of education, monitor all the administration and paperwork, and supervise all the teachers, students, and the school. How are these things done online? If it is being executed this way, is it really that effective? Educational leadership greatly determines the achievement of educational

goals (Arismunandar, 2020). In fact, there is a lot of research that could prove that the leadership of a school principal greatly contributes to the successes of every educational institution. Furthermore, a school with a great achievement shows that it has a very competent school principal.

In Makassar, schools have experienced unexpected situations during this pandemic. Private schools like SMP Bina Citra Indonesia School, SMP Metro School, SMP Dunia Harapan, and SD Menara St. Martinus have faced big challenges but have achieved things to cater good quality of education in the city. The principals in these schools have to work hard to give the best service to the students and parents. Their leadership has to be updated and be able to influence all stakeholders in their institution.

The leadership of school principals is in the midst of the most challenging and overwhelming times in the profession's history (Altemose & Lampron, 2021). Because of this Covid-19 pandemic, the government has implemented new rules, policies and health protocols to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. School principals and all the teachers need to teach from home which is something that is not new to education.

Due to the policy that the Ministry of Education in Indonesia has implemented about Work-From-Home (WFH) through Surat Edaran Kemendikbud Nomor 4 Tahun 2020, states that learning from home or distance learning has to be done through online for imparting knowledge and to achieve the competencies needed in the curriculum. This greatly affects how teachers, students and school leaders deal with all the administrations and learning activities that have to be done to achieve educational goals. It is important to understand how school principals execute virtual leadership in their schools and how this affects the performance of the students and teachers.

Because of this situation of pandemic, it is vital to understand what virtual leadership in educational institutions is all about. This research will further investigate on how teachers think about school leadership through digital platforms. Some strengths and weaknesses of virtual leadership will also be given emphasis. All these factors are needed to be studied in order that we can find ways and means to improve school leadership during this Covid-19 pandemic which we have to strictly follow health protocols and to find ways to solve some issues and problems that arise during this Covid-19 pandemic crisis.

Based on the article written by Ko et. al. (2021) research result reveals that self-presence and virtual member trust are primary determinants in facilitating knowledge sharing in a virtual learning environment. Additionally, considering the challenges of forming effective collaborations in VLE, virtual leadership for improving the coordination of joint activities was developed.

2. METHODS

This research applies qualitative descriptive method wherein interview is one of the most suitable ways of gathering data from the informants. They have been selected by purposive sampling as they hold the position as principal in their respective schools in the city of Makassar. These private schools are SMP Bina Citra Indonesia school, Metro School Makassar, SMP Dunia Harapan School and SD Menara St. Martinus. These are some of the top performing private schools in Makassar City based on the results of the National Examinations in the past ten years. The responses were then analyzed using reduction method and further explained in the next part of this paper.

3. FINDINGS/RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Leadership during this pandemic is more challenging than usual. It requires skills which are more on the use of technology. Virtual leadership is recently done during this pandemic situation to avoid the spread of the virus. Principals need to innovate and continue to mobilize all the stakeholders especially the students' welfare. There are five important duties of the principal according to Khairuddin (2020), to be able to execute virtual leadership during this pandemic era. These duties are the following:

- a. Give a letter of assignment to the teacher to carry out learning activities at home according to the subjects taught through various online media
- b. Make a circular to parents regarding the implementation of learning at home in the context of preventing the transmission of the corona virus in schools



- c. To socialize to students about online learning media and procedures for using these media
- d. To control and supervise the implementation of learning at home that has been assigned to the teacher
- e. Report the results of learning activities to the Education Office

These duties must be accomplished by the school leaders to be able to attain the goals and objectives of the school. The way the school leaders handles and accomplished these duties also contributes to the performance of the school as a whole. In this era of pandemic, which rules tells everyone to stay at home, leadership is on a great challenge. So these duties of the principal would guide the school leaders to somehow manage and organize their school in a good possible way.

In this research, the informants were asked series of questions based on their virtual leadership during this pandemic. The have responded the following statements during their interview.

How do you mobilize teachers to keep and maintain a good teaching-learning process?

Based on the responses, maintaining good teaching-learning process needs regular supervision and monitoring. This is one of the main keys to keep a good quality of education. This is done by filling up teacher's performance evaluation and student's feedback forms. Principals need to take a look at the situation especially during this crisis. Giving clear vision and instructions to the teachers are very helpful so that they know what they need to do. Teachers' training is also important to develop better teaching skills. As one of the principals mentioned during the interview: "As principal, monitoring and evaluation are the keys to keep in touch with teachers and school quality of education. Therefore, we conduct class visits, evaluation meeting and teachings demonstrations regularly to improve teachinglearning process."

This statement means that in order to keep good quality of education during pandemic, it is very important to consider supervision and monitoring for the teachers and students. This has to be done by the principal on a regular basis. Regular monitoring means that it can be done weekly, monthly or can also be daily. It depends on the needs by how much time it needs to take to make sure everything is on the right track. This is also to make sure that good quality of education is well maintained and monitored. It is very helpful to the leaders in keeping their duties on track. When everything is monitored, things must be on track and well maintained.

How do you influence the students to study well (discipline) and do their work properly and on time?

From the interview done by the researcher, it is found out that it is not easy to handle and implement discipline during online classes. Activities have to be done in order to make the students participate in group activities and collaborative tasks to make the learners active. As a principal, he has to always organize meetings for all the teachers to give advice and share the struggles in handling classes during online learning. Students are also encouraged to show their creativity in learning the lessons. As one of the principals mentioned during an interview:

"Learning model is now a bit different. So we influence them to work in pairs, presenting their lessons through hobbies, using platform such as reels, tiktok and blogs to bring the lessons."

This statement of the principal shows that the learners nowadays have to use different approach in teaching because of the presence of technology that affects people's lives this generation. Creativity in teaching and learning has to be based on the current trends so students can relate to what they are learning. Principals do have to make all the teachers aware of it. As the principal added on her comment:

"Homeroom teachers monitor their work by giving rewards for their complete for their complete assignments and meet the students"

This statement means that the principal also has to remind the teachers to give rewards for those students who are doing well in their learning even if it's online. Giving rewards to them would boost their willingness to learn and their confidence to do better in learning the lessons. This is also a good motivation not only for the students but also for the teachers. When students and teachers are motivated, they will excel on things that they are doing especially when they feel that they are valued and appreciated. Principals, together with the teachers must encourage students and make sure that they are recognized and appreciated.

How do you communicate to the parents regarding the school's situation during this pandemic? (academics, health protocols, school's policies)

Communication is the key to understanding by all means. During this pandemic, there are many issues that have to be resolved not only by the school leaders but also by the parents. Online learning is not easy especially for younger children. For the principal to be able to have a good communication with the parents, he has to use a platform and social media applications just to hear the parents' needs and demands. Based on the interview, one of the principals mentioned that there must be string partnership between the school leaders and the parents. This way, issues and challenges will be resolved. Good cooperation between parents and teachers is also a must. As mentioned by the principal during an interview:

“We have three kinds of sessions with the parents during this pandemic:

- a. Weekly letter and information with e-flyers
- b. Parenting webinar in each month with our partner
- c. Homeroom teacher conference with parents every three months

We also have special session, meet the principal every semester. We make a topic differently especially mental health during pandemic and remote learning.”

This statement from a principal shows that there has to be a regular meeting with the parents. It is very important to open suggestions and feedback from them as they are always part of the development and growth of their children's welfare. As a principal, he needs to organize all these meetings and give updates and information to the parents. Suggestions from the parents also matters and it has a very important role in the development of school's aspects a whole. Parents do contribute essential ideas which are very helpful in developing the schools. They can see the needs and things to be improved in school. So they must be always part in school systems.

How do you do your supervision and monitoring online to the teachers and students?

A certain platform used by some schools is known as *Google Workspace*. This platform is used for supervision and monitoring. These factors are very important to see whether there is something to be improved. Teachers and students need to be monitored by the principals to make sure that all the standards are being followed. During this pandemic, supervision and monitoring by the principals are done online. Based on the responses by the principals, regular monitoring should be done whether online or onsite. As one of the principals mentioned in her interview:

“We have Google workspace where every student and teacher has their own organization account. It is easy to conduct online teaching, online class, assignment, homework, polling and class group work with the platform.

Leaders are visiting the class randomly every day and invite teachers or students to attend the meeting after class dismissal. We also have a link for students and teachers to send their daily report and attendance, reflection of the day also opinion and experiences.”

This statement from the principal shows that regular monitoring and supervision has to be done by the principal regularly. Especially during this pandemic that things have to be done online. Principals cannot physically see the teachers and students on what they are doing. When the connection is not good, cameras couldn't open and the voice is barely heard. These affect the activities and the performance of both students and teachers.

How does the city government influence your leadership during pandemic?

The government implements policies directly to the schools of the city. When there are updates about health protocols, they usually work together with the supervisors and principals to give attention to some concerns of the parents, teachers, and students. In terms of these private schools, the ministry of education has a strong cooperation to be able to avoid the spread of the virus and on how to deliver learning in such a way that students would still learn enough from the schools. As a principal mentioned in the interview:

“Frankly speaking, our learning system is not familiar with the government especially our supervisor. The good thing is they are able to understand and willing to learn. I think everyone is starting to be aware of the latest technology available for learning systems. Besides, the government shows strong cooperation system to the school with unique system in adapting technology to teaching and learning process.”



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This statement from a principal shows that there must be a strong cooperation between the school and the government to be able to execute virtual leadership well. Principals have to exert extra effort during this pandemic because even if it is online, they have to work hard on how to deal with teachers, students and parents online. It is not that easy because usually there is miscommunication. Schools and the school leaders need to adjust to the new trend in educational system. Updates must be directly from the education ministry and memoranda must be clear for implementation in schools.

4. CONCLUSION

This Covid-19 Pandemic has affected schools in many ways. School principals have to adjust to this new trend and learn new skills to be able to execute service to all the parents, students, and all the stakeholders of the school. Based on the findings, there are ways on how to mobilize these stakeholders to achieve school's goals and objectives. One of them is to regularly monitor and supervise teachers and students to maintain good learning outcome. Another one is to build strong partnership between the school and the parents. And lastly, keep good cooperation between the school leaders and the local government. These are just some of the ways and means on how to handle struggles and difficulties of virtual leadership during this pandemic in Makassar City.

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