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Learning adaptation during the COVID-19 pandemic in Muhammadiyah inclusion schools

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ABSTRACT

The Muhammadiyah organization has inclusive schools that need to adapt during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. This study aimed to analyze the adaptation strategies carried out by two Muhammadiyah inclusion schools in Surabaya, Indonesia, *Sekolah Peduli Anak Hebat* (SPAHE) and the *Sekolah Kreatif* Surabaya. This study used a qualitative descriptive approach with a phenomenology method to see the particular context of the two inclusion schools' learning situation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data were collected using interviews and observations. Two coordinators for students with disabilities and five teachers were interviewed about policies and learning processes during the pandemic. The observation was done during the learning process. The secondary data was also collected by searching in their social media and e-learning platforms. The data analysis showed that the adaptation strategies were to coordinate and regularly collaborate between parent-teachers-students, build community cooperation, and make flexible and accessible learning policies. It proved that the two Muhammadiyah inclusion schools in Surabaya had adapted to online learning during the pandemic COVID-19. However, the two schools still need to improve quality, especially in creating an accessible asynchronous learning platform for students with disabilities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is no data information about the total of students with disabilities in Indonesia. However, referring to the UN report, at least 10 percent of school-age students have special needs, so it was estimated that at least 4.2 million Indonesian students are students with disabilities [1]. Furthermore, many of them have not been accommodated equally in education in Indonesia.

Inclusive education is the best way to achieve the goal of equal education for all. It must ensure that all students have equal access and opportunities in regular schools [2]-[4]. Indonesia's education system needs to ensure that all students get equal access to democratic education, suits their needs, and is easily accessible in their environment. Law No.20 of 2003 Article 5 Paragraph 1 as Indonesian government policy stated to fulfill the objectives of Education for All and fulfill students' right to education with disabilities. However, the law does not create a breath of fresh air for inclusive education in Indonesia [5].

The implementation of inclusive school must be supported by various aspects, including management, students, curriculum, learning process, evaluation, and community support. Among these

1 various aspects, the most important factors are management, students, and learning; but it does not mean neglecting other aspects [6]. Those aspects need to be further strengthened during a pandemic since the students with disabilities are more susceptible to depression [5]-[11]. It is because of various factors, one of which was the closure of schools. According to UNESCO, 188 countries have closed schools nationwide, making learning diverted at home. For students with disabilities, learning at home becomes more problematic because it changes their routine [7].

According to Judit Kormos, an education expert for students with special needs from Lancaster University, stated that it is vital to ensure that students with disabilities have adequate support when studying at home [12]. Particular strategies need to be carried out to improve the learning access gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several strategies that might be appropriate to create adequate support, including 1) Periodic and robust communication with students and parents; 2) Building community partnerships; 3) Teacher professional development by providing virtual learning training; and 4) Free internet access for students and teachers [13]. Learning strategies can be performed by using either synchronous, asynchronous, or a hybrid between the two formats then the teacher must decide which of the two is more suitable for students [14]. Synchronous learning using Zoom, Webex and other applications that allow face-to-face online interactions between teachers and students. Meanwhile, Asynchronous can be done by providing learning recordings to students, for example by using the Screencast O-Matic, Google+, Hangouts, and CamStudio.

In a different context, this study examined an overview of the strategy for managing inclusive education in schools managed by the Muhammadiyah organization in Surabaya during the pandemic COVID-19. It is because Muhammadiyah, as the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, has contributed to the development of inclusive education. The commitment of Muhammadiyah to inclusive education for students with disabilities began to be formally designed since the 2015 Congress in Makassar. After the congress, Muhammadiyah was then instructed to create a disabled-friendly space in all its educational and health institutions. In June 2018, Muhammadiyah announced that all religious facilities must be easily accessible to people with disabilities and develop Islamic law (fiqh), which can be used to fulfill the rights of people with disabilities [15]. Recently, in 2020 the Muhammadiyah Tarjih Council will continue the plan to constitute the Jurisprudence on people with disability in the National Pre-deliberation Halaqah Tarjih XXXI [16].

The COVID-19 outbreak has made schools have to adapt their learning, including Muhammadiyah inclusive schools. UNESCO urges to implement strategies and measures to reduce the impact of school closures on students with disabilities. It is because the COVID-19 pandemic has a disproportionate impact on students with disabilities as they face a lack of accessible public health information, obstacles to implementing necessary hygiene measures, inaccessible health facilities, even they face a greater risk of domestic violence [17]. To empower students with disabilities during the pandemic, UNESCO proposed several suggestions and conditions for the government and schools to improve the process and results of learning evaluation during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, such as; 1) Providing accessible and appropriate learning accommodation for students with disabilities; 2) Modifying curriculum and learning, 3) Working with teachers, parents, and students to decide on the effectiveness of distance learning arrangements and the best way to further each student's education; and 4) Providing guidance to teachers on how to deliver appropriate distance and online lessons for students with disabilities [17]. Those are necessary since learning during pandemic is not only organized in distance but also home-based learning, but not every students has good access due to economic disparities [18].

There are several Muhammadiyah schools listed as inclusive schools ranging from elementary to secondary levels. Some of these schools had been researched and showed no particular learning curriculum for students with disabilities, but these schools involve assistant teachers in every learning process [17], [18], [13], [19]-[21]. Regular schools that implement inclusive education can choose to apply six learning models, including regular class model (full-inclusive), cluster, pull out, the combination of cluster and pull out model, particular class, and full class [4]. The existence of assistant teachers for students with disabilities showed that Muhammadiyah schools had implemented an appropriate inclusive education model even though they do not have a particular educational curriculum.

Students with disabilities at Muhammadiyah inclusive schools adjust the general education curriculum; however, there are still modifications to their learning planning. It has been modified on the material simplification and learning evaluation. The modification adapts to identifying the needs of students with disabilities so that it matches their abilities [17], [18]. Although the learning model's management is appropriate, there are still obstacles for Muhammadiyah schools to implement inclusive education to recruit accompanying teachers. The accompanying teacher lacks knowledge in handling students with special needs because it is not expertise that is the main focus of teacher recruitment but more on prospective teachers' care and personality for students with special needs. Even so, Muhammadiyah schools are still trying their

1 best to equip teachers' competencies in handling children with special needs (ABK). The school also provides additional learning activities for students with special needs outside the existing learning schedule to ensure that they do not fall behind with regular students. For example, Muhammadiyah Primary School in Surabaya provides additional activities twice a week [19].

This study examined two schools in Surabaya that had implemented inclusive education for more than ten years. One of them is Muhammadiyah Elementary School, which according to m.muhammadiyah.or.id, the data has been running inclusive education since 2002 or for approximately 18 years. Quoted from the same web channel, the Counseling Guidance Teacher at the school stated that the total number of students with special needs was 76 students with 50 accompanying teachers. Besides, this study also analyzes the current conditions during the pandemic of secondary level schools in Surabaya, namely *Sekolah Peduli Anak Hebat* (SPAH) since 2004, an educational space that manages to learn for students with special needs secondary schools that focus on student giftedness. SPAH is a separate part of the regular school and has independent management responsibility. SPAH currently has received 60 students with special needs with various needs; slow learner, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), mental retardation, and multiple disabilities. Unlike previous studies, which discussed more the management of education for students with special needs, this study examines how the adaptation of the inclusionary schools managed by Muhammadiyah to adapt during the pandemic period. This study analyzes schools' responses to pandemic conditions and the innovative steps they are taking to adapt to the chaotic learning conditions caused by the pandemic.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach by looking at the phenomena in the learning situation's particular context during the COVID-19 pandemic. Phenomenon research in education uses the phenomenological method, which consists of three development paths: perception, learning situations, and learning content [22]. This study examined inclusive schools' learning situation during the COVID-19 pandemic in two inclusive schools managed by Muhammadiyah in Surabaya. The two schools consist of primary schools or known as *Sekolah Kreatif*, and high schools that focus on giftedness can be referred to as *Sekolah Peduli Anak Hebat* (SPAH). The two schools are the research subjects because they have more than ten years of experience managing inclusive education. The research was conducted from August to December 2020.

This research's data source is divided into primary data and secondary data—the primary data obtained from interviews and observations. Interviews were conducted with two coordinators for students with special needs and five teachers. Interviews were conducted to gather information about characteristics, learning management, evaluation, school and parent relationships, and supporting and inhibiting factors during learning during the pandemic. Interviews were conducted in an unstructured manner using informal, flexible conversations. The wording could be changed at the interview time according to the interview's needs and conditions.

The validity and reliability in this study used the constructivist paradigm's perspective, which used triangulation to record the phenomenon accurately [23]. Triangulation takes various forms, namely triangulation of data sources, methods, researchers/experts, and theories [9]. This study used data sources triangulation by conducting interviews with coordinators and teachers of inclusive schools. Besides, the researcher also applied method triangulation by using observation, interview, and documentation.

It is used so that more data is extracted and the interviewee does not appear to be interrogated. Researchers still prepare interview guidelines but are not as detailed as in the structured interview technique. Observations were made to obtain data on educational programs for inclusive students during the pandemic. The data collected includes the learning process during the pandemic period for inclusive students. Observations were made during the learning process during the pandemic. Meanwhile, secondary data is data obtained from learning documents during the pandemic period. The data was obtained from learning documentation, both in writing, contained in school e-learning and learning videos uploaded on the school's YouTube account.

The data collected from three aspects, namely learning planning, learning process, and learning evaluation, were then analyzed. Data analysis was carried out in several stages, including data processing, data reduction, meaning/interpretation, and concluding. The Analysis used specific strategies for inclusive education during a pandemic in a model designed by Texas Tremmel, *et al.* and UNESCO [13], [17]. Particular strategies need to be carried out by schools during the COVID-19 period to create adequate support, including 1) Periodic and robust communication with students and student guardians; 2) Building community partnerships; 3) Teacher professional development by providing virtual learning training; and 4) Free internet access for students and teachers. These four aspects are a measure for inclusive schools that are

1 adaptive to a pandemic. Data related to existing management at Muhammadiyah Schools in Surabaya related to student management development are reduced, interpreted. Then conclusions are drawn about the management of inclusive students during the pandemic period at Muhammadiyah Schools in Surabaya.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

The existence of COVID-19 is undeniably tricky for schools to adapt to the existing learning system, especially inclusive schools such as *Sekolah Kreatif* and *Sekolah Peduli Anak Hebat* (SPAH). COVID-19 came suddenly, happened so fast, and coupled with the closure of schools, neither the person in charge of the program for students with special needs nor the teacher had sufficient preparation to plan adaptive learning like students with disabilities. The results of data collection found an overview of the learning process and evaluation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools have shown their best efforts to adapt to learning during the pandemic period from the existing picture.

3.1.1. Learning proses in SPAH during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is a challenge in itself for Inclusive schools like SPAH. Difficult financial circumstances due to insufficient payments from parents and difficulty accommodating students through online learning. The SPAH coordinator explained that it was the most challenging time considering the total school lockdown in the early days of the pandemic so that neither teachers nor students were allowed to prepare themselves to adapt to online learning. At the beginning of COVID-19, SPAH only implemented e-learning and what's app. SPAH does not use Zoom media due to quota constraints. E-learning is used to fill material and accommodate student exams.

This school provides E-learning for students with special needs and regular students. SPAH uses an e-learning login system per child (single sign-in) so that parents cannot see other students's systems. All are given their password to enter, check reports, check addresses and identities, and check learning during the sudden COVID-19. What's up and video call were used to greet students approximately once a week.

Learning changes after the lockdown period is over, namely by using a combination and Zoom. Teachers have been allowed to work from the office to take advantage of the school's wifi to do online Zoom meetings. Teachers and coordinators assume that Zoom has similarities with offline face-to-face. If the teacher uses the Zoom, interaction with students can run rather than just providing material or assignments via e-learning alone.

The learning schedule changed during COVID-19. Students with special needs who have previously been divided into classes, namely Full Inclusive Class, Adaptable Regular, and Integrative Class, get three times the Zoom. The learning interactions during the Zoom period occur through teacher-student questions and answers, asking students to read, and asking students to give examples. The materials provided were not only general subjects but also life skills to avoid students's boredom. Teachers, for example, practice cooking at school and are followed by students at home.

3.1.2. Learning process in *Sekolah Kreatif* during COVID-19 outbreak

Before the pandemic, one class had 25 students, consisting of regular students and students with special needs. However, during this pandemic, classes were reduced to 15 to 17 students depending on the study group's size. Of the total number of students with special needs, each class has two students with special needs plus one deaf student.

Learning in *Sekolah Kreatif* uses a full Zoom system. The class is divided into two, namely an extensive Zoom class system and a small Zoom class. Big Zoom class is conducted once a week with a total of 125-500 students. Meanwhile, a small Zoom class is conducted every day with a reduction in the lesson's length. This school also uses video calls to monitor students with special needs. Services with video calls are carried out personally to be optimal.

All students with special needs continue to mingle with regular students during online learning. However, students with special needs are still accompanied by shadow teachers who work from home. The policy was given for the ineffective evaluation of learning through Zoom. Shadow Teachers are obliged to guide students with special needs who are close to their respective homes. They are obliged to provide intensive learning by providing teaching aids to help students better understand the material.

The online learning strategy that is carried out is not monotonous in the room. *Sekolah Kreatif* provide opportunities for all students, both regular and special needs, to learn from guest teachers invited to school and provide material through Zoom. One time, the teacher also invited students to a field study by showing a video of the teacher's field experience, and the students were asked to make a summary of the trip.

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3.1.3. Learning evaluation

The learning evaluation at SPAH and *Sekolah Kreatif* has similarities, especially in the Mid-Semester Examination. The similarity of these systems lies in the process of implementing project-based exams. This kind of test involves students' creativity to make something then present and make an exhibition of the work they make. Meanwhile, SPAH is more concerned with aspects of life skills and skills than cognitive abilities with a ratio of 50:30:20. This comparison means that life skills get the highest percentage score, namely 50%, 30% for skills, and only 20% for cognitive abilities. In contrast, the *Sekolah Kreatif* emphasizes cognitive or academic aspects more than skills and life skills aspects.

In the assessment points for the life skill aspect as seen in SPAH, the main thing that is most assessed is the students' independence. This assessment is placed in the most crucial aspect because it seems that the cognitive level of students with special needs has not been able to reach the material level that is equivalent to regular students. It is also to support them to be able to adapt to society when they graduate from school.

Meanwhile, the *Sekolah Kreatif* considers that students' cognitive level with disabilities is almost equal to regular students's ability. On the other hand, parents also have an outstanding level of awareness and concern in accompanying their students's learning. The coordinator said 90% of parents are willing to cooperate with the school to support their students. It makes school policy altogether emphasize student cognitive outcomes with evaluation records and adjusting to their respective abilities.

3.2. Discussion

After being analyzed, the data shows that SPAH and *Sekolah Kreatif* adapt to learning during the pandemic through regular collaboration and coordination with parents, collaborating with various parties, and establishing accessible and flexible learning for students. Even though there were various obstacles during learning, it was not an obstacle because the three strategies had been implemented well.

3.2.1. Teacher-parent-student collaboration and coordination

Parents' involvement in learning is essential, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, parents need to collaborate and coordinate with the school during this pandemic since it determines the factor in learning effectiveness [24]. Parents play a full role in guiding their students because they are a much-needed partner for teachers, especially during a pandemic. Teachers at SPAH specifically expressed their hope that parents would actively assist their students's learning process. On the other hand, teachers at the *Sekolah Kreatif* level do not worry about parental involvement because they think parents show their full involvement in accompanying their students's learning. This condition shows a tendency for parental involvement to decrease along with the higher level of students's education. It is similar to the research of that the involvement of parents of students in regular schools tends to change with a decreasing pattern as the level of students's education is higher [25].

School initiatives are one of the factors in maintaining the involvement of parents in guiding students with special needs [26]. In SPAH and creative schools, parenting is a way to keep parents involved. During the pandemic, these activities do not disappear, but instead change in different ways. In SPAH, parenting activities had been held face-to-face and even specifically involve students to show their expertise in musical or other talents. Meanwhile, at the *Sekolah Kreatif*, this activity was carried out online. Furthermore, collaboration and coordination with parents take various forms because teachers think they have full access to meeting students during the pandemic. Conditions were very different in the pre-pandemic era because students had more face to face with teachers than parents. Therefore, regular communication with parents is needed so that students with special needs get adequate learning support [13]. The teacher keeps on communicating with parents about the learning agenda. They are starting from learning preparation to learning evaluation. Since learning preparation, the teacher contacts parents via telephone or WhatsApp by sending a learning schedule and materials. Communication at the preparatory stage is considered essential for teachers because they expect parents to stabilize students's emotions so that they are ready to learn. One of them is by making the situation at home as close to school as possible. Students are conditioned like studying in school by wearing uniforms for each lesson. The preparatory stage is the essential learning stage, and the teacher has to make sure parents know that learning is going on.

Apart from parents, Narsizi also suggests that schools maintain communication with students with needs to support learning during the pandemic, especially for students with autism [27]. They need to maintain social contact with their friends at least once a week. Schools have implemented this strategy during the pandemic by using Zoom media. The SPAH coordinator specifically stated a change in the impact of better learning support when learning was added through Zoom media rather than just through the school's online platform. However, learning through Zoom media alone was no better at replacing face-to-face offline for the two schools.

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3.2.2. Community partnership

Texas Tremmel, *et al.* describe community collaboration at various levels ranging from internal to external. This collaboration meets students' needs outside the context of learning, such as meeting basic food needs or access to mental health services [13]. Generally, the cooperation in Muhammadiyah inclusive schools is mostly carried out within educational institutions such as universities, both domestic and foreign. Collaboration is forming inter-institutional activities, for example, in the framework of a parenting program or parent society. The existence of this program is a further means of forming a community partnership between schools and parents.

The pandemic situation did not prevent parenting activities from being carried out in two schools, both offline but still adhering to health protocols such as at SPAH and online as carried out at *Sekolah Kreatif*. According to the two school coordinators, parenting events for schools are essential to make the parents understand how an education at home is following their students' needs and, more importantly, make parents aware that students with special needs are also part of society. They are capable and normal like any other child. Therefore, schools usually involve students with special needs to participate in these activities by showing their respective talents. The most important thing for parents is to see their students appear brave in front of many people and become their pride.

Activities other than parenting reflect a larger goal, namely to form an inclusive society. The goal reflected in the two schools' paradigm accepts all students regardless of their conditions, namely education. Such as activities carried out by SPAH such as the commemoration of national disability day by holding cooperation programs with universities abroad. Besides, sign language training activities were attended by internal school parties and general groups. SPAH students also continued to excel during the pandemic. They received several awards from various activities held by several universities, one of which was the pantomime talent award.

3.2.3. Accessibility and flexibility

Students with disabilities are considered the most vulnerable subjects to experience online learning failure [29]. It was reflected in the pandemic's early days when SPAH students only received learning through the school's online platform or Blogspot account that the teacher used to deliver the material. Their accessibility is disrupted because the material presented does not meet the aspects such as learning objectives, contextual, and in the form of audio-visual [29]. The learning material is seen in descriptions even without pictures, which makes it easier for them to understand. There is also no meeting forum with classmates and meet face-to-face with the teacher only once a week. Face-to-face forums with teachers helped them avoid depression during the pandemic [27]. Meanwhile, if an online platform without face-to-face schools, it may be necessary to pay attention to suggestions to collaborate with online education specialists so that the learning platform is suitable for students with special needs to study [30].

Furthermore, the period after school closure is over, and teachers can work from home to make schools change their learning strategies to make them more accessible. According to Massengale and Vasquez, accessibility of online learning for students with special needs is determined by affordability, flexibility, quality of instructor, and guidance through their online learning experience [31]. The affordability factor was determined by policies of the two schools to ease the burden of school fees during this pandemic. Meanwhile, the flexibility appeared in the assignment submission allotment and assessment. Meanwhile, teachers had skills to operate technological devices because majority was millennial generation and the schools also provided training for technology-based learning. Thus, online learning during the pandemic at SPAH and *Sekolah Kreatif* had fulfilled the principle of accessibility. It was carried out through Zoom media so that learning objectives were more precise than without Zoom. Hal ini karena Zoom lebih memungkinkan guru memberikan guidance kepada siswa. The interaction becomes two-way between teachers and students; teachers could also provide contextual examples by showing videos that made them easier to understand. For example, the teacher at SPAH taught life skills to students, such as teaching cooking then followed by the students at home. Meanwhile, teachers in *Sekolah Kreatif* invite students to field studies by using Zoom or recording the teacher's trips in the field. *Sekolah Kreatif* students are asked to make a summary of the journey from the teacher's field practice. The learning strategies by the teachers in the two inclusive schools were considered the most appropriate for students with disability especially for those who have autism disorder and complex needs [32]. Teachers in two inclusive schools had considered this can create good learning atmosphere and make students did not get bored easily.

The failure of students with special needs to achieve the output of online learning objectives during the pandemic can be avoided if teachers must emphasize students with special needs to apply self-regulated learning. There are three steps: always initiating and maintaining communication, presenting rules during online learning to students, and reminding them to complete assignments [28]. Teachers have done all the steps more flexibly.

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Communication becomes flexible because it knows no time limit and even outside the context of learning. It is not uncommon for students with severe special needs to ask their teachers for more attention by continuously contacting their teachers via video calls or WhatsApp. This action happened repeatedly and even into the night. Students often call or send messages that are always the same. The teacher always serves their behavior with all their heart.

Almost the same flexibility occurs in learning time. The teacher has explained to start learning at a predetermined time. However, it is often because the sleeping routine of students with special needs during a pandemic is chaotic that the scheduled lessons are sometimes behind schedule. This situation makes the teacher adjust it to the physical and psychological readiness of the students with special needs so that they are forced to decide to postpone the learning schedule that was initially determined.

Flexibility also occurs in the completeness of material achievements and the limit of assignment submissions. The short learning time during the COVID-19 pandemic meant that completeness could not be maximized because students only studied until noon. This situation is based on students's physical and emotional nature who are aware that the teacher is more drained in online learning than offline. It also has implications for the assigned tasks. Often students do not complete existing assignments. Even projects that are given as assessment for midterm exams do not finish. It makes the teacher allow time to complete the assignment. If the task is not completed at the given time limit, other policies will be taken, such as replacing the task with an easier one.

3.2.4. Barriers of online learning

Teachers believe the learning of students with disabilities during the pandemic period requires the full role of parents. Therefore, difficulties in communicating with students arise when the parents are not entirely beside the students. Inclusive school teachers in Muhammadiyah described this situation as an essential factor in online learning. They are even worried that the progress of students has been achieved since before the pandemic period will decrease during the pandemic. Especially for students with special needs who experience mental or multiple retardations, the teacher was worried that they will start learning independence for these students from the beginning after active school again. It illustrated that parents' absence during the pandemic has a major impact on students's emotional and attitude development with special needs.

Teaching and social presence are the two important factors that determine the learning success of students with special needs [33]. These two factors were a dilemma for educators both at SPAH and *Sekolah Kreatif*. Teachers stated that learning during the pandemic hampers their skills in creating teaching aids for students. They realized that the success of learning for students with special needs lies in optimizing their five senses so that props are the best way to convey material. Meanwhile, teachers emphasized that face-to-face meetings with students were important because their social presence had an impact on student compliance. Students who got an advice directly or without using technological intermediary come to understand what should they do and whether it was right or wrong. Hence, the school's policy of allowing home visits during pandemic become a distinct advantage.

4. CONCLUSION

The research has explained that both SPAH and *Sekolah Kreatif* have adapted learning to students with disabilities. These two Muhammadiyah institutions have shown their expertise in managing inclusive education. However, obstacles are often encountered, primarily if parents do not support their child's learning during the pandemic. These constraints are well handled through their flexible policies during the pandemic period and by coordinating and communicating with parents. Of course, the ability to manage inclusive education in schools is not without gaps. The asynchronous learning design still needs to be improved to make it more accessible to students. Further research can be carried out by looking at the extent to which school e-learning platforms designed for asynchronous learning are easily accessible for students with disabilities. Besides, it is necessary to do further research related to the factors that influence parental involvement in online learning because this study found a tendency to decrease parental involvement and higher education levels.

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