

# INDONESIAN EDUCATION LANDSCAPE IN MALAYSIA: A PORTRAIT OF ONLINE LEARNING INDONESIAN SCHOOL OF KOTA KINABALU

Dadang Hermawan<sup>1</sup>, Aswan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>SMAN 2 Padalarang, Jawa Barat Indonesia

<sup>1</sup>Sekolah Indonesia Kota Kinabalu, Sabah Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Indonesia, Universitas Negeri Malang

## Article Information

### Article History:

Accepted: 16-01-2024

Revised: 09-08-2025

Published: 30-09-2025

### Keywords:

Covid-19 Pandemic

Online Learning,

SIKK,

## ABSTRACT

The Indonesian School of Kota Kinabalu (SIKK) is an Indonesian school located in Sabah, Malaysia. SIKK is the parent school that oversees hundreds of schools for Indonesian children in Sabah—Sarawak. Given SIKK's extensive reach, this research aims to explore how online learning has been implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research method used is qualitative with a case study approach. Researchers found that SIKK implemented online learning due to the Malaysian government's prohibition on physical contact. Researchers also identified obstacles faced by students during online learning, such as difficulty accessing the internet, lack of electronic devices, and so on. Media used to support online learning include Zoom, Google Meet, and others. The conclusion that can be drawn is that SIKK has carefully designed and implemented online learning, considering various factors such as student needs, technological infrastructure, and effective teaching methods. This reflects their commitment to providing effective online education and providing an optimal learning experience for all parties involved.

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## Corresponding Author:

Dadang Hermawan,

SMAN 2 Padalarang, Jawa Barat Indonesia

Email: [sikk2020oke@gmail.com](mailto:sikk2020oke@gmail.com); [aswan.2202118@students.um.ac.id](mailto:aswan.2202118@students.um.ac.id)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

When discussing COVID-19, its impact cannot be separated. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed many aspects of human life (Bahri, 2022). In the world of education, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted not only one country but also globally (Friedman et al., 2021; Vijayan, 2021; Avanesian, et al., 2021). Therefore, it can be said that COVID-19 has paralyzed the global education system (Aswan, 2020a). For example, face-to-face learning can no longer be implemented during this pandemic. This is in line with the statement by Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) that the COVID-19 pandemic has created a new phenomenon and history for the global education system. This is due to the closure of schools, institutions, and learning spaces, which impacted approximately 94% of the global student population. This is said to be a new history and a profound change for human life. Social distancing policies and restrictive movements have significantly disrupted conventional educational practices. One effort to keep educational practices in the world moving is to implement online learning (Subedi, et al. 2020; Aswan, 2020b ; Suryaningsi & Pamujo , 2021; Alfarimba , et al., 2021 ).

According to Anugrahana (2020), the current Covid-19 pandemic has specifically changed the education system in Indonesia. Before the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world, learning was carried out offline (offline), also known as face-to-face learning. However, after the Covid-19 outbreak, learning was carried out online (online), also known as virtual face-to-face learning (online). In line with this, Arizona et al. (2020)

stated that the government determined that online learning is one of the efforts and solutions to realize Indonesian learning practices. Syarifudin (2020) also stated that online learning is an effort that can be applied to the current Covid-19 pandemic situation. Online learning can currently be defined as learning assisted by the internet and technological devices, thereby creating interaction between students and instructors (Singh & Thurman, 2019).

Subedi et al. (2020) stated that online learning currently plays a crucial role in assisting schools, educational institutions, and even universities in implementing learning practices. Online learning allows students to participate in learning activities with limited movement because they are given greater freedom to explore knowledge (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020). Essentially, online learning is a new way of teaching and learning. This learning relies on technology and internet networks (Rigianti, 2020). According to Imania (2019), the implementation of online learning is conventional learning developed through digital formats and the internet. Teachers and students are connected by technology and an adequate internet network, while the implementation of learning refers largely to conventional concepts.

Online learning can facilitate teachers' transfer of information in various situations and conditions. The convenience of online learning is supported by a virtual, face-to-face platform. In practice, online learning requires the support of mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, and others. These devices can be used to access information anytime and anywhere (Gikas & Grant, 2013; Herliandry et al., 2020 ; Ariesca et al., 2021 ).

According to Hamdani and Priatna (2020), there are at least eight indicators that need to be considered in online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. These indicators include: 1) learning comfort; 2) teachers' digital literacy skills; 3) students' level of adaptation to learning; 4) availability of learning tools; 5) internet connection; 6) costs incurred during online learning; 7) device comfort; and 8) post-pandemic commitment.

In terms of implementation, there are five things teachers must pay attention to (Wahyono et al. 2020). The explanation is as follows.

1) Daily Schedule

Teachers must clearly and thoroughly develop lesson plans to ensure that the learning process runs according to plan. Given that all subjects in schools are taught online, teachers must be skilled at managing an appropriate schedule for delivering material.

2) Clear Learning

Teachers must develop online learning concepts with simple and engaging activities. Teachers must be proactive in providing feedback to students. Feedback is essential for learning to proceed as planned. Teachers can also incorporate motivational remarks during lessons.

3) Learning Design

Teachers must be able to design independent learning for students, especially for lower grades, which require parental supervision. Therefore, teachers are expected to be able to create learning that does not require much assistance from parents.

4) Pay Attention to Emotional Conditions

Teachers must be able to pay attention to students' emotional states. This is essential in online learning. Not all students are comfortable with the digital devices teachers use, so teachers need to pay close attention. Ideally, teachers should be able to set aside time for intense communication with students.

5) Instructional Media

Teachers must be able to select appropriate media for learning materials. Many technological tools are now freely accessible, making online learning easier for teachers and students. However, teachers should limit the tools, applications, or platforms they use to avoid difficulties for students and parents. Essentially, the media used should not be numerous but should be able to effectively represent online learning.

Based on the brief explanation of online learning issues, it can be said that online learning is a very complex activity. Teachers play a crucial role in designing learning in accordance with the curriculum used. Other elements must also be considered, such as the preparation of teaching materials, media, students' emotional readiness, and so on. In essence, online learning is a complex learning activity because teachers and students can only meet online. This means that only visuals and audio are the focus, while other elements such as internet connection, media device readiness, etc. must also be considered.

Given the complex nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, this research aims to explore how online learning has been implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic at the Indonesian School in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. SIKK (Indonesian School for the Children of Indonesian Migrant Workers) is the subject of this research due to its role as an educational center for the children of Indonesian migrant workers in Sabah. The results of this research are expected to provide stakeholders with insights into improving the quality of education for the children of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia. As an educational center for the children of Indonesian migrant workers, SIKK plays a significant role in providing educational services to the

children of migrant workers (Masturoh & Ridlo, 2020). Therefore, this research is crucial to ensure the public understands SIKK's role in implementing online learning practices during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This research builds on previous studies that rarely discuss online learning for the children of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) living abroad. This issue and topic are relevant to discuss, given that many Indonesians live abroad, and those affected are the children of Indonesian migrant workers, especially those attending the Indonesian School in Kota Kinabalu. Research related to the conditions of online learning has been widely conducted within the broader educational context in Indonesia. For example, Putri et al. (2020) found that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted online learning for elementary school children in Indonesia. In fact, online learning can even cause stress for Indonesian junior high school students (Ningsih et al., 2020). Furthermore, research by Winarti et al. (2020) also revealed that online learning also presents many challenges at the high school level in Indonesia. Similarly, Giatman et al. (2020) revealed that universities in Indonesia also implement online learning and encounter many challenges. However, over time, teachers and learners can independently adapt to environmental conditions and student characteristics in implementing online learning (Azhari & Fajri, 2021).

Research examining online learning practices in Indonesian schools abroad has generally been conducted by Nida et al. (2021) on high-risk and low-risk learning designs at the Indonesian School in Kuala Lumpur. Mubarak et al. (2021) also studied the implementation of distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic at the Indonesian School in The Hague and the Indonesian School in Kuala Lumpur. Furthermore, Tesa et al. (2021) also studied dance learning during the pandemic at the Indonesian School in Kota Kinabalu. Based on the results of this research, there has been no comprehensive discussion regarding the conditions of online learning during the pandemic at SIKK. Therefore, this research is expected to provide comprehensive answers regarding the conditions of online learning, especially at SIKK.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

The method used in this research is a case study. The researchers employed this method to provide an overview and understanding of the phenomenon of online learning at the Indonesian School in Kota Kinabalu during the Covid-19 pandemic. Using this method, the complexity of the phenomenon can be revealed and explained in detail. This aligns with Merriam and Tisdell's (2015) findings that the case study method can provide insight into ongoing social processes, concrete events, and so on.

The data collection techniques used in this research were surveys, observations, and documentation. Surveys and observations were conducted to obtain real-world data. This means that researchers observed all movements of the objects and phenomena studied in this research. This allows researchers to easily interpret data such as attitudes, opinions, and even behavior. Documentation served as supporting data in this research. Its availability can help researchers conduct a more in-depth analysis of the cases studied. Data collection took place at the Indonesian School in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia, during the pandemic. The main aspects described in this research are school policies, student and teacher adaptations, and the media used. These four points are the most prominent indicators of online learning at the Indonesian School in Kota Kinabalu.

The data analysis technique in this research uses the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1992). This interactive model is a data analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman, which considers several stages. These stages include data collection, data reduction, data presentation, conclusions, and verification. The data analysis used a descriptive approach. This means that the case description is carried out using in-depth descriptions in accordance with this interactive model.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Indonesian School in Kota Kinabalu is a school under the auspices of the Indonesian School Abroad. This school has approximately 17,129 students. SIKK consists of early childhood education units, elementary school, up to secondary school. Uniquely, SIKK, besides its large number, students are spread across three Indonesian Representative Offices, namely the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Kota Kinabalu (KJRI KK), the Consulate General in Kuching, and the Indonesian Consulate General in Tawau (2 Provinces, namely Sabah and Sarawak). In mid-January, Malaysia began to be hit by the coronavirus outbreak originating from Wuhan, China. Several schools were immediately closed because some students were infected with the outbreak. Finally, in March, the Malaysian government officially issued a ban on all activities involving large groups until the end of 2020. Consequently, the face-to-face learning system carried out at SIKK was suspended.

The Covid-19 pandemic has delayed all major SIKK programs, and even basic services such as learning have been suspended. The lockdown policy has brought all activities to a complete halt. The entire SIKK academic community must work from home. Effective March 18, 2020, all movement in Malaysia is strictly prohibited. Movement in various sectors, including the economy, tourism, education, and so on, must be

halted. SIKK, as the parent school overseeing approximately 313 schools and serving 17,000 students, needs to develop strategies to deal with this pandemic. Limited teacher availability, lack of signal in some plantations, and the lack of internet access for students have compounded the problem.

The coordination of approximately 345 teachers in the two provinces of Sabah and Sarawak took into account various challenges faced by each school. Consequently, the leadership decided to divide the services provided to students into several categories. The first service, a category of fully online teaching and learning activities, is provided to students with adequate signal and internet access. The majority of students receiving this service live in urban areas. The second service, a learning category, is for students with network limitations and limited internet access. The third service is for students who do not own any gadgets or electronic devices. This learning is carried out in several schools, with teachers delivering learning materials to students' homes.

SIKK's policy aligns with that of schools across Indonesia and even the world. Online learning is a viable solution and alternative to break the chain of COVID-19 transmission (Handarini and Wulandari, 2020). This is to avoid physical contact between students, students, and teachers, among other things. The learning concept implemented by the SIKK academic community is in accordance with what is happening in several schools that implement online learning at the kindergarten level (Wulandari and Purwanta, 2021; Farantika and Indrawati, 2021; Andini and Widayanti, 2020), online learning at the elementary school level (Dewi, 2020; Yanti, et al., 2020; Sari, et al., 2021), online learning at the junior high school level (Fauzy and Nurfauziah, 2021; Ekantini, 2020; Mayangsari and Nurrachmah, 2021), online learning at the high school level (Umamah and Muassomah, 2020; Bariham, et al., 2021; Bali and Musrifah, 2020), and online learning at the vocational high school level (Pratomo and Gumantan, 2021; Farell, et al., 2021; Sandre et al., 2021; Rifa'ie, 2020). Thus, it can be said that during the Covid-19 pandemic, learning at various levels was conducted online. This was not only in Indonesia and Malaysia, but also globally.

During online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, students faced several obstacles in participating. First, some students had difficulty accessing the internet. This was because they lived in areas with limited signal reception. This led to a decrease in student motivation to learn online. Second, students lacked electronic devices such as gadgets, laptops, and so on. This limited access to electronic devices served as the primary means of communication with teachers. The lack of these devices made it difficult for students to ask questions, and vice versa, causing them to miss out on learning information. Third, students who owned electronic devices faced family financial difficulties, making it difficult to afford internet quotas. The majority of students with financial problems faced limitations in employment opportunities, which impacted parental income. Fourth, boredom arose among students whose social activities were limited. As a result, students lacked enthusiasm for learning even though they could access online learning. Therefore, it can be said that students tended to be slower to adapt to online learning conditions. Fifth, students found it difficult to understand the material, especially in natural science subjects. The reason is, these materials must be accompanied by a teacher.

In line with the obstacles mentioned above, Huzaimah and Amelia (2021) stated in their research that the majority of students do not have facilities that support online learning activities, making it difficult for them to adapt quickly. Similarly, Alshwiah (2021) stated that the main obstacles arise due to the unsupportive student environment, lack of instruction, difficult navigation, and so on. Research conducted by Amran et al. (2021) explains that the availability of internet for accessing learning can also make online learning ineffective, especially in mathematics. This was emphasized by Fauzi et al. (2021) that one of the subjects that is difficult for students to understand is mathematics. These obstacles occur at SIKK, especially considering that SIKK is a parent school that oversees hundreds of other schools. The process, practices, and impact of online learning still require improvement in the implementation of learning to achieve holistic educational goals for students (Hardiansyah, 2021).

Given the challenges faced by students, the role of teachers in education is crucial. Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring effective and active learning during the pandemic. The first step teachers took was distributing questionnaires to students and parents to assess their condition. After assessing their condition, teachers developed several innovations to help students learn more effectively. First, they implemented a motivation-based learning approach, which involved injecting motivational discourse into students' minds to encourage them to participate in online learning. Second, they designed more engaging and interactive learning, such as creating challenging quizzes with the theme "SIKK Legend." This engaging and interactive presentation of the material proved highly engaging for students. Third, teachers conducted frequent evaluations to monitor student progress during online learning. Fourth, teachers working in remote areas conducted limited online learning due to difficulties with internet access. This limited online learning included visiting students' homes and providing teaching materials for several sessions. These efforts by teachers were the most effective in revitalizing education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The above description of the conditions of students and teachers aligns with findings in the field. For example, Raniah et al. (2021) at the Indonesian School in The Hague (SIDH) stated that online learning significantly impacts students. As a result, students find it difficult to understand the material presented by teachers. However, innovations implemented by teachers can help students understand the material. Khoriah et al. (2021) in their research revealed that teachers play a crucial role in online learning for Indonesian Schools Abroad, such as the Indonesian School in Kuala Lumpur and the Indonesian School in The Hague. This is because teachers are required to operate various tools that can support learning. Therefore, it can be said that teachers are the primary resource in supporting online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The media used during online learning at SIKK is very diverse. The applications used are inexpensive, easy, and engaging. Applications are the primary medium for delivering learning materials. These applications include Zoom, Google Meet, Webex, Skype, and various other supporting applications. The use of these applications is very helpful in online learning. Applications are the main capital for effective learning. Research conducted by Tesa et al. (2021) on dance learning at SIKK showed that the appropriate use of media such as Zoom can improve student understanding. This is because most online learning concepts are theoretical rather than practical. In line with these findings, it can be said that Zoom is the most popular application during this pandemic, especially for online learning. Several researchers have found Zoom to be highly effective in online learning (Syaharuddin et al., 2021; Muhtarom, 2021; Yasin et al., 2021; Reviandani, 2021; Laila, 2021; Masluhin, 2021; Rodliyah and Sa'adah, 2021; Sugiantari, 2020; Monica and Fitriawati, 2020). Therefore, it can be said that Zoom, as a learning medium at SIKK, is highly appropriate and effective. Other supporting media also help make online learning more engaging.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results and discussion presented, it can be concluded that learning at the Indonesian School in Kota Kinabalu during the pandemic was conducted online. This was because the Malaysian government did not issue regulations limiting physical contact. Therefore, learning was conducted online at various levels. During online learning, students faced several obstacles, including difficulty accessing the internet, lack of electronic devices, lack of access to data quotas, and so on. Teachers offered solutions to mitigate these obstacles, including incorporating motivational elements into the learning process to stimulate student enthusiasm for learning. Furthermore, teachers created engaging and interactive teaching materials to capture students' attention. The most popular medium used was Zoom, due to its effectiveness. This research certainly has limitations, for example, in its presentation of aspects related to online learning, such as the perspectives of students, teachers, and the SIKK academic community. Therefore, points not yet explored in this research can provide ideas for other researchers to add to the body of knowledge in Indonesia. However, this research can be an initial overview for other researchers to continue or research matters related to online learning at the Indonesian School of Kota Kinabalu.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researchers sincerely thank all members of the Indonesian School Kota Kinabalu academic community for their outstanding cooperation in implementing online learning. This success not only reflects their dedication and strong collaboration but also demonstrates their shared passion for continuously improving the quality of education, even under distance learning conditions. May this positive spirit continue to yield brilliant results in the future educational journey.

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