Mentoring and training for early childhood education teachers in facing the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic situation

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ABSTRACT

In Bandulan Village, Malang City, there are community of people dealing with the pandemic situation that need education for their children, but incapable to self-educate their children without the support of the teacher. This community service also aims to assist PAUD Mentari in providing free education to the children in local community. It is based on the phenomenon where teachers of this preschool face difficulties in carrying out common teaching practices concerning the pandemic of Covid-19. A community service team implement a series of professional development activities to enhance teachers’ skills in schooling management and crafting teaching media. The community service employs ADDIE approach. Outcomes of this professional development activities are in the forms of the PAUD Mentari teachers' simple schooling management plan and crafted teaching media. These outcomes scaffold the implementation of effective early education schooling in a local community during this pandemic. The results of the Community Service showed that Early Childhood Mentari School teachers’ readiness for distance learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic can be said to be good with educational standards facilities. During the pandemic, the PAUD Mentari school implemented a conducive learning model equipped with an online learning of Google Classroom application. Moreover, there are several aspects of the teaching and learning process at PAUD Mentari during the Covid-19 pandemic such as, distance learning, sharing learning materials digitally, support and communication with parents, creative learning activities, monitoring and evaluation, counseling and emotional support.

Kata kunci
Anak usia dini
Guru
Mentoring
Pendidikan


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INTRODUCTION

Early education is the fundamental key to provide young children with a safe, nurturing environment that stimulate their readiness for the transition to the early grades (Allen & Kelly, 2015; Duran, 2020). Continuous assistant is essential to the learning of young children, which is commonly carried out daily in a specified time by experienced teachers (Huck & Zhang, 2021; Sari & Yüce, 2020; Widodo, 2005). Accordingly, today’s pandemic of Covid-19 largely influences the practices of early education. Teachers cannot present in person to assist children’s learning, and face challenges to adapt to the new schooling practices. In 2020, the pandemic Covid-19 forced the policy maker in education to design online learning in defending the students and school member against the spread of the virus. This policy is deemed effective according to the situation on the area with access to technology and ease of non-mobility profession. There are also a consideration that people are not having enough knowledge to deal with such condition, thus creating another level of problem in dealing with the education in pandemic Covid-19 situation (Dhawan, 2020; Tintori et al., 2021; Umulkulsum & Suaji, 2020).

In Bandulun village, Kota Malang, there are community of people dealing with the pandemic situation that need education for their children, but incapable to self-educate their children without the support of the teacher. Previously, the PAUD Mentari is adequately supporting the community with their education service to the children, but the offline service is now unable to be conducted during the pandemic and creating a new situation. The PAUD Mentari is nowadays conducting a door-to-door service that is less effective than offline class.

Closing the school and switching the policy into online learning seems to be a solution, but the efficacy is debatable as there is no measurement to this policy as yet. Some consequences related to the family ability to take care of the education of their children, and degrading social ability of the children as they are closed from their peer and the world might be maintained by using an adequate policy (Barrot et al., 2021; Coman et al., 2020; Stoian et al., 2022). As school are considered effective to maintain the education and socialization of the children, a solution to education during pandemic and online school are inadequate to do so, reopening a school closure is not yet taken into consideration. Therefore, there is a need for different teaching methods such as door-to-door teaching (Pradana & Syarifuddin, 2021; Putra et al., 2020).

Education leadership during Covid-19 should see the situation from all aspects including the ‘higher-ups’ and the ‘common’. The education practitioner must consider a range of impacts in individual, organization, well-being, learning, service provision, performance, staffing, financial implications, management of resources and sustainability of business level while keeping all of their individual people in mind. Effective schooling must mind the aspects of ‘responsibility’ while maintaining their ‘freedom’ in dealing with situation related to the condition as the unpredictability of the situation is rapidly changing any policy. Education management have the ‘responsibility’ to teach knowledge and skills of the students similar to the traditional teaching, as well as measuring the improvement of the students, giving treatment on students, providing the education facilities, and doing administrative works. But, in parallel, education management also have the ‘freedom’ to act according to the situation including bypassing the said ‘responsibility’ (Chen, 2021; Filip et al., 2022; Samhsa, 2014).

During the 2009 influenza, or scientifically described as H1N1 influenza pandemic, the Australian policy makers decided to close the school to stop the spread of the virus to the students, similar to the ongoing 2021 situation. There are considerable variation to ethical values and ethical process. As the school are showing a strong ethical duty to continue their responsibility as educational institution, the school communities had a broader view on the school managerial policy rather than the officials. This kind of relationship is between the ‘higher-ups’ and the ‘common’ seldom creating a confusion on how the education should be conducted (Arar & Saiti, 2022; Callahan & Jennings, 2002; Cherkowski et al., 2015; Poorchangizi et al., 2019). Therefore, it was concluded that the best way of conducting teaching and learning activity as well as managing the education should be conducted through trust between the elements involved in the practice of education.

Based on the above explanation, this community service program is different from previous community service activities because there are no trainers who carry out community service activities which involve the use of distance learning applications to improve the teaching skills of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers. Community service trainers previously emphasized activities on the learning of young children, experienced teachers, and educational leadership during Covid-19. In this community service activity, trainers developed activities regarding mentoring and training for early childhood education (PAUD) teachers in solving the problems of the Covid-19 pandemic in the teaching and learning process.

This community service program is important to carry out because the program that uses online learning applications involving early childhood education (PAUD) teachers have not received much attention of researchers or community service trainers. Furthermore, it contributes to improving the teaching skills of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers through the use of online learning applications such as Google Meet and Zoom Meeting as distance education media. Even though there is currently no Covid 19 pandemic, the community service program can be a guide for carrying out the distance learning process using online learning applications. Distance learning can be used as a medium to improve the teachers’ teaching skills, especially PAUD teachers. The distance learning process is still used today by educational institutions to undertake teaching and learning activities. This is because distance learning using various online learning applications that has good efficiency and effectiveness values.
This community service aims to enhance the effectiveness of the PAUD teaching by finding the best practice of the teaching and learning process conducted by PAUD Mentari in Bandulan Malang by applying series of training and workshops for early education teacher in PAUD Mentari, Bandulan village, Malang city. It uses ADDIE (analysis, design, development, implementation, evaluation) model to identify teachers’ problems and concerns in schooling management during the pandemic of Covid-19. The expected outcomes are in the forms of schooling management plan and prospective teaching strategies.

The Covid-19 issue is related to SDG 3, namely good health and well-being. SDG 3 is one of the 17 goals formulated by various UN countries which reads a healthy and prosperous life. The mission of this goal is "Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Well-Being of All Ages". Under SDG 3, global leaders and the member states are committed to nine targets and four tools. The main aim of this chapter is to discuss the intersections of COVID-19 and SDG 3 targets with a focus on two selected targets, including prevention and control of Non-communicable Diseases or NCDs (SDG 3.4) and universal health coverage or UHC (SDG 3.8) (Martín-Blanco et al., 2022; Martins et al., 2023; Takian et al., 2022). Thus, this community service program supports efforts to achieve SDG 3.

METHOD

The Implementation of the Internal Community Service Program applies training methods and workshops for teachers at Mentari PAUD, Bandulan Village, Malang City. This method uses the model of ADDIE that stands for analyse, design, develop, implement, and evaluate to help them solve problems in implementing prospective learning and teaching strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mentari PAUD teachers were appointed by local stakeholders to provide early childhood education services to young residents of the Bandulan Village. They have no background in early education or school management. Their work is solely based on the spirit of helping local parents by providing free educational services. Therefore, these teachers are a priority in community service activities in an effort to improve the quality of education in the city of Malang, East Java. This community service activity is carried out in five stages, namely: 1) analysis; 2) design; 3) develop; 4) carry out; and 5) evaluate.

Analysis phase

At the phase of the analysis, trainers identified learning problems, instructional objectives, learning environment, and students’ level of knowledge. In the stage trainers identified teacher problems. The identification process is carried out by asking several questions such as: What material do you teach? How do you teach the subject matter? How do you determine instructional goals and how to achieve those goals? This step provides a blueprint for the entire instructional design process and guides the teachers in the learning process.

Design phase

At the design phase, trainers carried out activities related to designing learning objectives, assessment instruments, exercises, subject matter, lesson planning, and selection of training media. This design phase is carried out systematically and specifically. Systematic means using a logical and orderly method to identify, develop, and evaluate a set of planned strategies targeted to achieve project objectives. Specific means that each element of the instructional design plan must be implemented by paying attention to the elements of the exercise in detail.

Development phase

In this development phase, the trainers make an instructional design and compiles blueprint content regarding mentoring and training mechanisms and procedures. In this phase, trainers create storyboards and graphics. During the process of implementing community service, activities are carried out with reference to procedures that have been developed and revised according to feedback.

Implementation phase

The implementation phase is carried out by developing procedures for trainers and PAUD teachers. Training facilities include training curricula, learning outcomes, training methods and testing procedures. Trainers conduct training to participants including training them on new tools (software or hardware). Implementation includes design evaluation, and this activity is also the phase where the project manager ensures that books, tools, CD-ROMs, and software are available, and the learning application or website is well-functioned.

Evaluation phase

The evaluation phase consists of two parts, namely: formative and summative. Formative evaluation is present at every stage of the ADDIE process. While summative evaluation is carried out when the training process enters its final stage. In this phase, the trainer formulates the results of all the training activities that have been carried out. The details of activities are summarized in Table 1.
### Table 1. Community Service Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Facilitator</th>
<th>Subject Matter</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Platform</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Discussion circle</td>
<td>Fourth week of May</td>
<td>Dr. Sudiran; Adityo, MA; Ria A. Asih, PhD</td>
<td>Problems description, expert analysis</td>
<td>5 teachers</td>
<td>Face-to-face meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>First week of April</td>
<td>Ria A. Asih, PhD</td>
<td>Designing the form of training based on the analysis of problem(s)</td>
<td>5 teachers</td>
<td>Face-to-face meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Third week of April</td>
<td>Adityo, MA</td>
<td>Training methods, sharing of analysis, Discussion and workshop</td>
<td>5 teachers</td>
<td>Face-to-face meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Implement</td>
<td>Teaching round 1</td>
<td>Second week of May</td>
<td>PAUD Mentari teachers</td>
<td>Observation on implementation</td>
<td>5 teachers</td>
<td>Face-to-face meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching round 2</td>
<td>Fourth week of May</td>
<td></td>
<td>Observation on Implementation</td>
<td>5 teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Discussion circle</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>Dr. Sudiran; Adityo, MA; Ria A. Asih, PhD</td>
<td>Evaluating the training</td>
<td>5 teachers</td>
<td>Face-to-face meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Figure 1 depicts the indicators and outcomes of every activity carried out during the community service.

**Figure 1.** Community Service Indicators

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After carrying out a series of internal community service activities, the service team formulates the results of the community service activities. Based on the results of internal community service, the results can be formulated that Early Childhood Mentari School teachers’ readiness for distance learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic can be said to be good with educational standards facilities. As it is well known that PAUD Mentari is a pre-school educational institution
established to educate early childhood or pre-kindergarten aged between 3 and 4 years. This school is located in Bandulan Village, Kec. Breadfruit, City of Malang Prov. East Java. This school has 4 teachers (Figure 2). They are Farida Verawati S.E, S.Pd, Iis Nur Setiawati, Dewi Munirah, and Munawarah Hidayati. Mentari Early Childhood Education (PAUD) has 11 pupils (Figure 3) and the school is led by a school principal named Farida Verawati.
During the pandemic, the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) Mentari school implemented a conducive learning model equipped with an online learning of Google Classroom application. In the context of the learning model, three out of four teachers recognize the advantages of implementing online teaching through Google Classroom, while one teacher chooses offline classes due to the special circumstances of students. During the Covid-19 Pandemic, the learning process was carried out at each student's home guided by teachers using the Google Classroom application. Google Classroom helps teaching and learning activities run as usual. Through Google Classroom, students and teachers do not need to go to school. They study from their homes and the learning process takes place online. Accompanied by parents, students can communicate with teachers through computer screens or laptops. Mentari Early Childhood teachers and students can carry out teaching and learning activities online. Online teaching and learning activities like this really help teachers and students during the Covid-19 pandemic so that they avoid contracting Covid-19.

Early Childhood Mentari teachers had different responses to the implementation of learning using the online model. Based on the responses of four teachers, three of them stated that learning models that take place online, such as Google Classroom, require more effort to motivate students to learn. Many students attended class mainly because it was mandatory. On the other hand, one of them considered that the online model was sufficient to carry out teaching and learning activities during a pandemic.

PAUD Mentari teachers try to develop effective learning models to enhance students' motivation and skills. This is because they think that online learning is not enough to motivate students during the teaching and learning process. However, they recognize the need for continuous learning while taking a safe distance to keep health and safety. They try to solve challenges that arise during the covid-19 pandemic. This is because the learning activities must proceed with paying attention to the dangers of the Covid-19 pandemic so that instructional goals are achieved.

Teachers' teaching activity follows the learning model that has been commonly used so far. In teaching the material, each teacher uses a variety of methods, such as utilizing YouTube videos, engaging students through online interactive games, presenting attractive PowerPoint presentations, facilitating interactive writing using Google Docs, and including E-Books. All of these methods are carefully selected to increase students' motivation and enrich their learning experience. Teachers design teaching material to enhance teaching and learning activities.

Teaching and learning activities at PAUD Mentari are designed to provide learning experiences that are fun, stimulating, and appropriate to the child's knowledge level. The structure of teaching and learning activities in Mentari PAUD consists of three main parts, namely: 1) Preliminary Activities, 2) Core Activities, and 3) Closing Activities. The following is a description of the teaching and learning activities conducted by teachers at PAUD Mentari.

**Preliminary Activities**

Preliminary activities are the initial stage of the learning process in PAUD Mentari. The focus at this stage is to create a fun atmosphere, generate interest, and prepare children for learning. Some of the activities that can be carried out at this stage include: (1) Greeting and opening: The teacher greets the children and gives a warm greeting to start the learning day. (2) Free play: Children are given the opportunity to play freely with various toys that are relevant to the learning topic. (3) Simple song or game: The teacher can start the session with a simple song or game that involves the whole group.

**Core Activities**

These activities form the core of the learning process in PAUD Mentari, where the main objective is to teach certain skills and concepts to children. Activities at this stage should be interesting, varied, and appropriate to the child's developmental level. Some of the core activities that may be carried out in this stage include: (1) Project-based learning: Teachers can provide simple projects that involve art activities, nature observations, or role-plays to teach certain concepts. (2) Stories and fairy tales: Teachers can teach moral values, speech skills, and enhance children's imagination through stories and fairy tales. (3) Art and creativity activities: Children can participate in painting, coloring or simple craft activities to develop their fine motor skills and creativity.

**Closing Activity**

This activity is the final stage of the learning process in PAUD Mentari, where the teacher closes the session with a summary and ensures the children understand what they have learned. Some closing activities that can be undertaken in this stage include: (1) Summary: The teacher repeats what has been learned and asks questions to ensure that the children have understood what the teacher has said. (2) Re-reading stories or fairy tales: The teacher can re-read stories or fairy tales that have been previously presented and ask related questions. (3) Group play: Children can participate in group play involving learned social skills and knowledge.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, pupils' development assessment activities were carried out with the aim of knowing the increase in their knowledge, attitudes and skills during the learning process. In assessing pupils' progress, teachers use assessments which is relevant to the specific skills they teach. This assessment includes a variety of methods, such as monitoring activity within Google Classroom, gathering feedback via Google Forms, and conducting online trials to measure student progress and understanding.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching and learning activities in Early Childhood Education (PAUD) Mentari underwent significant changes to keep the safety and health of children, parents and school staff. Several steps and
adjustments have been taken to continue the learning process amidst this challenging situation. There are several aspects of the teaching and learning process at PAUD Mentari during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely: (1) Distance Learning: In an effort to minimize the risk of spreading the COVID-19 pandemic, PAUD Mentari is turning to distance learning. Teachers use online platforms, such as video conference, virtual classes, or special learning apps to interact with children and parents. Through this platform, teachers provide learning materials, assignments, and activities that can be done at home. (2) Sharing Learning Materials Digitally: Learning materials and assignments are shared digitally via email, messaging apps, or online learning platforms. These materials can be instructional videos, presentations, audio materials, or other learning resources. (3) Support and Communication with Parents: During the pandemic, parents have become important partners in their children’s learning process at home. Teachers communicate regularly with parents via messages, phone calls, or virtual meetings to provide guidance and support in helping children learn at home. (4) Creative Learning Activities: Teachers are trying to provide interesting and creative learning activities, even though they are carried out online. These activities include presenting material through stories or fairy tales, composing online games that are relevant to the learning topic, or providing art projects that can be done at home. (5) Monitoring and Evaluation: Teachers track individual children’s learning progress through assignments, projects or online exams. Evaluation is conducted to understand the extent to which children understand the material and provide feedback for improvement. (6) Counseling and Emotional Support: During the pandemic, many children have experienced anxiety or difficulty adapting to changes in routines and learning environments. Teachers play a role in providing emotional support and counseling, both to children and parents, to help them overcome difficulties and challenges. (7) Community Engagement: Schools and teachers can collaborate with local communities to provide additional support in the form of food distribution, technology assistance to underprivileged families, or other support needed during the pandemic.

In the teaching and learning process, the teacher uses online teaching media or in the internet network. In terms of media by utilizing online learning facilities, all teachers take advantage of interactive platforms to enhance the learning experience. These platforms include: Google Forms, cloud services such as Google Drive, social media applications such as WhatsApp and Classroom, and collaborative tools such as Jamboard. This selection of interactive media is carefully selected to encourage effective engagement and communication between teachers and students in a virtual learning environment.

Learning facilities and media that support the process of teaching and learning at PAUD Mentari are effective. Regarding the availability of online learning media, all teachers agree that internet-assisted gadgets are the most effective learning tools during the Covid-19 pandemic. This tool provides an important means of facilitating virtual education and ensuring continuous learning (Martin-Blanco et al., 2022; Martins et al., 2023; Takian et al., 2022).

PAUD Mentari teachers play an important role in the teaching and learning process in the era of the covid-19 pandemic. They have various roles such as, advisers, facilitators, assessors, and motivators. As advisers their task is to provide guidance to students so that they can study well. Their task is to give pupils advice and direction to help them become obedient children to their parents and respective religious. As facilitators, their task is to prepare teaching materials that are easy to implement in class. As assessors, their task is to provide an assessment to measure the progress of pupils’ knowledge and attitudes. Meanwhile, as a motivator, the teachers’ task is to provide encouragement and enthusiasm so that pupils have strong learning motivation and succeed in achieving their goals. The implementation of the teachers’ role demonstrates their adaptability and commitment to ensure a comprehensive and supportive learning experience for their pupils, even in challenging circumstances.

Apart from teachers, parents have a significant role in the teaching and learning process during the pandemic era at PAUD Mentari. They provide essential assistance with necessary facilities and act as motivators to encourage their children's academic progress. However, their role is less prominent for adult learners because adult learners are more independent and able to facilitate their learning activities.

During the pandemic era, the learning process faced problems. The challenges of learning in the pandemic era are mainly related to internet networks or signals because all educational media at all levels rely on internet access. A strong and quality internet connection is highly recommended as an important factor in an effective and efficient teaching and learning process so far (Basar et al., 2021; Lubis & Dasopang, 2021; Selvaraj et al., 2021).

In undertaking the internal service, the teachers put forward their suggestions regarding teaching and learning activities during the current pandemic. They provided valuable suggestions for improving the teaching and learning process. First, they proposed developing an independent online website in the form of a special Learning Management System (LMS) designed for the benefit of educational institutions. The system functions as an important infrastructure capital to effectively anticipate future learning challenges (Bradley et al., 2021; Sumardi et al., 2021). Second, they emphasize the importance of conducting regular evaluations of both teachers and pupils by school management. This evaluation process assesses the effectiveness and quality of implementing online learning. This is useful for identifying areas and necessary repairs or changes based on specific conditions (Chernyayeva et al., 2009; Coman et al., 2020; Selvaraj et al., 2021). Third, the teachers recommended providing training sessions for them which is relevant to their ages and levels of technology mastery. The training focuses on introducing new features and technical issues that commonly arise during online learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Esteve-gonzález et al., 2015; Malik, 2018).

Finally, teachers highlighted the need to modernize learning resources to meet pupils learning needs during a pandemic by utilizing online learning. To solve the teaching and learning problems, school management needs to update teaching materials and resources that reinforce a more interesting and efficient learning experience for pupils.
CONCLUSION

During the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers at PAUD Mentari School were ready to implement various learning models such as online teaching using Google Classroom. Meanwhile, the responses of students’ parents indicated that online learning alone was not enough to motivate them. However, teachers acknowledged the need to continue learning while maintaining safety and health. The delivery of material involves a variety of methods, such as YouTube videos, online games, and interactive presentations, all of which aim to increase student motivation.

Learning methods include Google Classroom activities, Google Forms, and online tryouts. In terms of online teaching media, all teachers use interactive platforms such as Google Forms and social media applications to engage students. Gadgets with internet connectivity are considered the best tools for teaching during a pandemic. During the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers have very important and various roles. The role of the teacher includes instructor, facilitator, assessor, adviser, and motivator. Parents play an important role in supporting early childhood education by providing facilities and motivation. However, their role is less significant for adult learners, who can learn independently. The weakness of the learning process during a pandemic related to internet connectivity is that it is very dependent on an internet connection which sometimes experiences interruptions. In this case the teachers provided valuable suggestions, namely, the need to develop a supportive LMS, the need for regular evaluations, teacher training, and modernizing learning resources to meet students’ learning needs through online learning.

Based on the findings, this research offers suggestion to further enhance the online teaching and learning experience during the Covid-19 pandemic by strengthening the following aspects: (1) Motivation and Engagement: PAUD Mentari School teachers need to focus on strategies to increase student motivation and engagement in the online learning process. They need to apply interactive and dynamic teaching methods, and consider gamification aspects so that learning becomes more fun and effective. (2) Professional Development: it is expected that school management will provide comprehensive training to teachers to improve their skills in using online teaching platforms and technologies effectively. The training should also emphasize innovative approaches to engage students so that they are able to overcome technical challenges. (3) Assessment and Feedback: teachers need to develop comprehensive assessment systems that include ongoing monitoring of student learning progress and outcomes. Teachers need to provide feedback to students to help them improve their performance. (4) Parental Involvement: school management needs to encourage active parental involvement in supporting the learning process in early childhood education. Efforts are needed to provide motivation and guidance to parents on how they can help and motivate their children in the online learning process. (5) Infrastructure and Connectivity: efforts need to overcome internet connectivity problems and provide better internet access for teachers and students. There needs to be a partnership with an internet service provider. School management is expected to take the initiative to distribute internet-assisted devices to students to support teaching and learning activities. (6) Curriculum Adaptation: the curriculum needs to be adapted to existing conditions so that it is relevant to the demands of online learning. It is designed to make the teaching and learning process interesting, relevant, and suitable for online learning activities. (7) Learning Management System: school management needs to develop a Learning Management System (LMS) that suits the needs of the institution. This LMS system must facilitate smooth, directed, and integrated communication. By implementing the suggestions above, schools can create a more dynamic, effective and efficient online learning environment that meets the needs of students, teachers and parents during a pandemic. Continuous improvement and adaptation is very important to ensure the successful delivery of quality education so that challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic can be overcome.

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