

Parental Aspirations for Distance Learning during the Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The research aims to describe parents' aspirations of distance learning for children during the pandemic. Aspiration shows an individual's hope to achieve something expected. Aspirations can include theoretical differences between idealistic and realistic levels of aspiration. The aspirations are parents' hopes regarding appropriate learning for their children. These aspirations include learning methods, processes, and behavior in children. The informants are parents of elementary or middle school students who learn through distance learning with consideration that students at the level still need more parental support. The research uses descriptive content analysis methods using information from parents about school learning during the pandemic in online news media between March and November 2020. The search yielded 38 relevant online news articles. Findings include parents hoping that their children will learn face-to-face at school because online learning is considered less effective. Three types of aspirations were obtained: considering distance learning less effective because schools are not ready to carry out online learning, also considering less effective because parents are unable to accompany them and accept distance learning by accompanying children to learn. Working status seems less influential because some parents encourage face-to-face meetings and some want to accompany their children to study. This shows that distance learning requires the role of schools and parents to be beneficial for children.

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has catalyzed significant societal transformations across various nations. One prominent repercussion has been the alteration in educational practices within schools. Face-to-face interactions have been eschewed to mitigate the risk of transmission. Instead, distance learning, facilitated by technological advancements, has been embraced. The pervasive reach of internet technology has rendered it particularly apt for distance learning endeavors. Since March 2020, virtually all educational institutions in Indonesia have transitioned to distance learning modalities. Learners engage in educational pursuits from their residences, interfacing with educators and peers via teleconferencing software enabled by internet connectivity.

Behavioral changes have transpired for educators and learners within the teaching and learning process. Educators have had to adapt their instructional methodologies to ensure comprehension among remote learners. Similarly, learners have been compelled to cultivate greater self-reliance due to limited opportunities for direct interaction with educators. Distance learning necessitates learners with the ability to grasp study materials independently. Furthermore, learners must have the autonomy to seek out information and, when necessary, construct their knowledge (Nicholas et al., 2009). In the current context of home-based learning, parental involvement is expected to serve as a supportive adjunct to children's learning endeavours. Learners at the primary and junior secondary levels still require significant guidance as they are in the developmental stages of acquiring fundamental academic knowledge and skills (Akhter, 2016; Gunzenhauser et al., 2021). They have yet to attain the proficiency necessary for self-directed learning processes.

During home-based learning, the Ministry of Education and Culture has evaluated distance learning for approximately four months since March 2020 (Rafie, 2020). The evaluation has identified three primary impacts of prolonged distance learning: the threat of school dropout, a decline in learning outcomes, and the potential for increased violence and psychosocial risks. With children studying from home through distance learning methods, the home environment has become the primary focus during the pandemic. Prior to this situation, the home environment and parents were not regarded as the primary learning environment for children. The change in environment, coupled with the prolonged shift in learning methods, is highly likely to occur. This serves as the impetus for conducting this research. Parents and children experienced changes during home-based learning. Parents must act as learning companions for their children, necessitating a change in household routine. Children must study at home with their parents serving as companions or educators (Irahmani & Sahadewo, n.d.; Izci et al., 2023).

Elementary school students face numerous challenges that necessitate intensive guidance and support. The risk of learning loss is highly probable among elementary school students due to their limited ability to become independent learners. The potential inadequate use of digital technology for learning by teachers, students, and parents further complicates the situation as well (Aquami et al., 2024; Azzahra et al., 2022; Kertih et al., 2023). The consequences may include parental stress due to the additional time and effort required to support their children (Kurata et al., 2021; Nurhidayah et al., 2022). Children who learn alongside their parents may also experience dissatisfaction with their learning experiences. Furthermore, children may perceive the home environment as a place for activities other than learning, leading to reluctance in engaging with educational tasks (Lubis et al., 2021; UNICEF Indonesia, 2020). These factors may serve as underlying causes for the findings of the Ministry's evaluation mentioned above.

Given the various impacts on children's learning process, it is crucial to understand parents' aspirations for their children's education. The inability of the home environment to transform into a conducive learning environment poses potential learning loss and a significant threat to the continuity of the child's education (Buchmann et al., 2022; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010; Yuliyanto & Yamin, 2022). The transformation of the home environment is intrinsically linked to the role of parents as regulators of household activities. While children may have the right to express their opinions, the parents make the decisions and take action on behalf of the family. Parental actions related to their child's education are inherently influenced by their educational aspirations for their children.

This research is significant as it provides insights into online or distance learning prospects from the perspective of parental readiness. The findings can serve as valuable input for the government in preparing mitigation strategies when in-person schooling is not feasible. It highlights the importance of sustained efforts, as mitigation strategies can be challenging to

implement due to the tendency of individuals to revert to old habits once the pandemic subsides. Based on the exposition above, the formulated research question is: What is the description of parental aspirations for distance education experienced by children during the pandemic?

LITERATURE REVIEW/ THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Aspirations, as defined by Merriam-Webster, are strong desires to achieve something high or great. Educational aspirations are typically measured by questions regarding how far an individual hopes to go in their schooling or how much education they wish to attain (Bittmann, 2022; Gutman & Akerman, 2008) These aspirations are not only related to personal desires but can also be directed toward others, such as parents' aspirations for their children's educational achievements.

Extensive research on parental aspirations for their children's educational achievements indicates that one form of parenting or parental involvement can manifest as aspirations guiding the educational goals of their children (Buchmann et al., 2022; Chen & Hesketh, 2021; Poonuganti, 2019). However, it is crucial to understand the contextual factors related to these aspirations (Paat, 2017). This perspective aligns with the present study, which aims to investigate parental aspirations following approximately nine months of home-based learning. Parental aspirations have been found to be significant and positively associated with academic goals, academic persistence, and school attendance (Spera et al., 2009). Nevertheless, there has been no research on the contextual factors of aspirations, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia.

Aspirations occur within a specific social context (Gutman & Akerman, 2008). Individuals derive their aspirations from the lives of others or their surrounding environment. They view the possibilities around them through an "aspirational window." This window represents observing, learning, and forming aspirations ((Poonuganti, 2019). These aspirations are subjective, as individuals see opportunities based on their observations of the environment as a point of comparison. Therefore, the meaning of aspirations cannot be generalized, as it depends on the individual's life context, development, and characteristics.

The aspirational window expands when individuals have hopes and ambitions for the future. Those who can perceive opportunities are more capable of formulating their hopes and ambitions. Aspirations act as mental boundaries, guiding individuals toward specific achievable goals by removing obstacles or altering behavior (Sethi, 2018).

Aspirations can be viewed as the outcome of making choices, a process of selecting the most desired or hoped-for option among several alternatives. Gottfredson (2004; Trebbels, 2015) offers a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding aspirations through his theory of circumscription and compromise. This theory outlines four key developmental processes in matching choices: age-related growth in cognitive ability, increasing self-directed development of self, progressive elimination of least favored options, and accommodation to external constraints on vocational choice.

According to Gottfredson, adult parental aspirations are considered in the fourth process. In this context, aspirations involve hopes and expectations that must be met while remaining acceptable within the social world. This characteristic underscores the aspect of compromise, acknowledging the external constraints that influence individual choices. This aspect is accepted because individuals recognize the limitations of their knowledge, restricted access, and the need for alignment with their life circumstances.

Limited knowledge may arise due to individuals' constraints in accessing relevant and adequate information. This constraint is often attributed to factors like time scarcity, limited opportunities, the time allocated for learning new information, and the perishable nature of information. Individuals tend to limit their information search based on their interests and rely on

trusted sources. Accessibility to opportunities indicates the likelihood of limited access individuals have to fulfill or shape their aspirations. This includes how individuals can seek out or create opportunities. Creating opportunities involves the willingness and behaviors of individuals to develop themselves to become more competitive. Meanwhile, sufficiently reasonable aspirations indicate compatibility to life circumstances. Such aspirations are not excessive or unrealistic. They are easily defined and attainable based on the individual's available resources (Gottfredson, 2004).

Parental aspirations for children can also be elucidated by the theory above as their dynamics are similar, albeit directed towards their offspring. Flouri (2006) explains the relationship between parental aspirations and children's educational attainment through several pathways. Firstly, aspirations predict achievement because they are associated with determinants of achievement. Children's aspirations, psychological adjustment, and parental involvement are among the determinants of achievement. Secondly, parental aspirations are associated with high socioeconomic status, higher parental education, and parental mental health. Thirdly, parental aspirations are higher in parents with high-achieving children.

The aspiration remain during the pandemic, even though not all parents can accompany their children in home learning. Parents hope their children can continue learning despite not being physically present at school (Agaton & Cueto, 2021; Lase et al., 2021). Distance learning has become an alternative in elementary schools, focusing on the essential skills students need to master (Hariyanta et al., 2022). Distance education has long existed and its implementation has become stronger with the advent of digital media (Brown et al., 2015). The digital revolution has made distance education increasingly feasible. The reach of education has broadened, quality has improved, and costs have become more affordable.

From systemic perspective, distance education is advantageous due to its organized system and minimal reliance on physical facilities. However, consideration must be given to the psychological conditions of learners who study without direct interaction with teachers. Motivating learning in mature students is relatively easier, whereas face-to-face meetings with teachers are more necessary for younger students. Motivation significantly impacts learning acquisition; therefore, pandemic-era learning is evaluated by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Family circumstances, aspirations, and attitudes toward education can strongly influence decisions to pursue further studies (Sholihah et al., 2020).

METHOD

The research employs a qualitative research method to obtain a description of parental aspirations for children's distance education. The method used is content analysis, a technique to draw valid inferences from text according to its context of use (Mayring, 2014). Content analysis can be applied to all types of written texts (Bengtsson, 2016). Specifically in this research, content analysis is used to obtain descriptions of parental educational aspirations conveyed through online mass media.

The unit of analysis is parental information about home-based learning found in online mass media. The time frame determines the size of the unit of analysis, specifically at the beginning of home-based learning during the pandemic. Interpretation aims to extract meaning from news data and lead to conclusions (Bengtsson, 2016). Qualitatively, data are presented in words and themes that can be interpreted. The choice of analysis method is related to the researcher's effort to explore the topic from informant statements.

Researcher obtained data from limited online mass media sources, thus allowing data analysis employs the manifest analysis method. Manifest analysis focuses more on what the informants say, adheres to the text, utilizes informant words, and describes clarity in the text. The

interpretation is based on inductive category development because parental aspirations for children's learning are highly contextual. This inductive procedure is oriented toward reduction processes based on text processing psychology (Mayring, 2014). The formulation of criteria definitions determines the material aspects of the text described in the analysis.

Data were focused on parents' opinions about distance learning during the pandemic. The selected articles were published between March and November 2020. Eleven online news articles were found during the second semester of the 2019/2020 academic year, and twenty-seven articles were found during the first semester of the 2020/2021 academic year. The separation between semesters aims to determine whether there are differences between the initial period of distance learning and after a more extended period of distance learning.

From the analysis of the news articles obtained during the second semester (March–June), several themes emerged from the information provided by parents. These themes include parental support in learning, impressions of the impact of distance learning during the pandemic, and expectations towards schools/teachers. In the news articles from the first semester (July–November), the same themes reappeared and were further reinforced by parents' evaluations of the prolonged distance learning experience.

RESULTS

Parental involvement in children's learning

Some parents expressed feeling overwhelmed by this role, as evidenced by statements like, "I'm so stressed being a supervisor." Several factors contribute to parental stress during supervision, such as the language of the assignments ("It's so confusing, all the assignments are in English") or the management of tasks, highlighted by comments like, "When there are assignments, sometimes the pressure is high. We get confused if we can't do them or if they are late." This theme emerged in every news article, reflecting parents' crucial role in their children's learning process. The involvement of parents consistently appeared as they supervised or accompanied their children during online learning.

The statements indicate that parents often felt inadequately equipped to support their children's learning. Other parents found the involvement demanding because it adds to their responsibilities, particularly for mothers with household duties. This additional workload is perceived as burdensome, making parents, especially mothers, busier and potentially more stressed. Parents mentioned the challenges of online learning for their children ("The mother yells about the school's Quran recitation schedule. Meanwhile, the child hasn't finished breakfast", "... both of them still need supervision, so I'm busy running back and forth between the kindergartener and the elementary schooler", "My kids are in grades 2 and 4, using three different apps, which complicates things for the parents", "Moreover, I'm running out of time and can't fully support my child's learning"), while still having household chores to complete. Some parents also expressed that online schooling is exhausting ("I'm managing the second child and the kitchen. If I handle everything, I'll be dead on my feet", "Online school gives me high blood pressure").

Another viewpoint is that parents felt burdened because they were taking on responsibilities typically handled by teachers ("This online learning shifts the teachers' tasks to the parents. We end up struggling"). Parents felt incapable and many tasks remain unfinished due to these additional responsibilities. Working parents, in particular, found it challenging to focus on their jobs while their children are learning online at home ("It's quite a burden because I have to work...", "When my child is studying online at home, my concentration at the office is divided").

Not all parents considered this added responsibility to be a burden. Some parents accepted it and try to manage their activities so that home learning can be handled effectively. For example,

one parent responded, "I share tasks with my husband. Thank God, my husband is very caring, so if I'm tired, he takes over." Other parents viewed it as a consequence of learning during the pandemic, stating, "But we have no choice but to follow this, rather than being very anxious about sending them to school," or "But what else can we do? This has to be done."

Additionally, some parents saw it as a challenge to their parental role ("We have always entrusted education to schools. Now, for me, this is a challenge to see how parents can be both parents and teachers."). Another informant tried to manage their time so that their responsibilities and the child's tasks were completed satisfactorily. Parents generally accepted that activities should be organised to continue supporting their child's education effectively.

Impressions of the impact of distance learning during the pandemic

When asked about their children's learning during the pandemic, parents often expressed their personal opinions about home learning. The shift from formal school settings to home-based online or distance learning has affected parents, leading to specific impressions about their children's education. Several parents seem dissatisfied with distance learning due to its suboptimal educational impact and the changes it has caused in their children's behaviors.

Many parents believed that distance learning is disadvantageous for their children, as reflected in the following quote: "The children's workload is quite exhausting. If followed, assignments from teachers are not finished until midnight," "As a working parent, the current online learning activities are not ideal. But because of COVID-19, what can we do?" or "... Because if done online, it's not optimal." According to parents, one of the reasons was children prefer leisure activities over studying at home ("Most of the kids don't want to. They prefer watching TV, kids want to watch movies, not lessons," "The learning is chaotic. Yes, [the child] just thinks about playing," and "Yes, [the child] just thinks about playing. Clearly, the child is not ready to study at home"). These statements highlight parents' concerns that distance learning does not fully engage their children academically and that the home environment poses significant distractions that hinder effective learning.

However, some parents recognized certain advantages of home learning. These advantages range from shorter study periods due to the completion of online tasks ("Sabiq [her child] was given homework from pages 2-13. Finished at 9 a.m. The good thing is, after that, no more learning"), to positive behavioral changes ("The child has become more diligent; usually never helped with cleaning or cooking, but now because of school assignments requiring life skills, the child is willing to do it"). Parents saw benefits from distance learning, including closer relationships resulting from studying together at home ("On one hand, she's happy, doesn't have to go to school. On the other hand, she's bored because she doesn't meet her friends. But the best part is she just relaxes, waiting to study with mom").

Furthermore, some parents felt sympathy for their children, believing that they are missing out on the full educational experience of being at school. They worried that the lack of peer interaction may affect their children and feel sorry that their children are not experiencing the typical school learning environment ("If they study online for too long, I feel sorry for the kids, their interactions are reduced, and they can't enjoy the school learning moments").

Expectations for schools and teachers

After periods of home-based learning, many parents expressed a desire for a return to normalcy or face-to-face learning at schools. This sentiment was particularly evident in news reports from July to November. Such expectations seem to have emerged after parents had experienced home-based learning with their children for some time ("We, as parents, really want

our children to go back to school as usual," "We want our children to go to school like before, attending in-person classes instead of learning online at home").

A significant number of parents hoped for schools to reopen with strict health protocols in place ("It's not a problem if the children go back to school, as long as the safety protocols for distancing are implemented," "At least there is hope that the children's enthusiasm for learning and meeting their friends can grow again after being stuck at home for 8 months. But the health protocols must be strictly enforced"). Some still preferred distance learning in a different format ("Please stop the online lessons. Instead, the teachers can provide written materials for a week. The materials can be taken at the group leader or teacher").

When linked to the impact of distance learning, these requests reveal that parents perceived online learning as less effective. One reason is that not all parents have the time and capability to assist their children with learning. Otherwise, some parents are convinced that learning objectives may not met when children study at home.

Conversely, other parents viewed home-based learning as better for their children during the pandemic. They saw home learning as serving an important purpose, which is to reduce the risk of children contracting COVID-19 ("If possible, DL should continue until the pandemic is under control, until all areas are truly green zones," "The choice is between the child's safety and the child's academic progress. If we had to choose, we choose the child's safety,"). According to them, home-based learning can be effective with appropriate facilitation from the school. The lack of learning facilities was one of the complaints from parents. Although it is important to note, these complaints do not pertain directly to aspirations related to the learning process or educational goals for their children ("If possible, the school should also help with providing learning support facilities," "Regarding online schooling, I agree with it for now because of COVID-19. Online schooling also keeps students engaged with their studies at home, and I think they will be more diligent in reading,").

DISCUSSION

Parents provide education for their children as an integral part of caregiving. This caregiving aims to educate children to become independent and skilled as they grow into adulthood. There are many ways to deliver this education, including distance education. Online or distance learning is quite long known method of instruction. While widely used, this method requires thorough preparation and consideration of the learners. The pandemic context is crucial in the implementation of distance learning. Rigorous preparation might not conducted due to the emergency nature of the pandemic. Ideally, learners and instructors/facilitators should have sufficient skills to utilize or reproduce ideas in digital media (Anderson, 2016). Moreover, distance/online learning should ideally be conducted in a hybrid manner (Wempen, 2015). Teacher-guided classroom instruction can complement the more self-directed nature of distance learning.

The involvement of learning facilitators or teachers in online learning is expected to enhance learners' understanding. However, the emergency caused by the pandemic revealed that the components involved in the learning process—teachers, schools, and students—were not adequately prepared for online education (Aquami et al., 2024). This lack of readiness was evident from evaluations by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the data collected in this study. Schools and teachers were insufficiently prepared for online-based learning (Ujianti, 2021). Parents perceived this reality in the educational process. Parents felt unprepared to facilitate distance learning and were concerned about their ability to support their children's education. In addition, parents have expressed concerns about inadequate feedback and insufficient quality of learning. Children are perceived to benefit little from remote learning, and the home environment is often

not conducive to effective study. Students experience demotivation due to the need to study at home, while parents also face significant limitations (Alharbi et al., 2023; Kalman et al., 2023).

The demands of their job and a perceived lack of teaching skills led many parents to prefer face-to-face learning at school which has also been identified by Azzahra et al (2022). This preference was reinforced by their perception that schools were not adequately equipped for online learning, thus emphasising the importance of health protocols for in-person classes. Additionally, socioeconomic factors influenced parental aspirations, with parents who had to work and those who lacked the means to provide online learning equipment preferring their children to attend school physically. This finding aligns with one of Tukiyo et al.'s (2021) conclusions that busy parents are a significant factor in influencing decisions about their children's education. Another reason for preferring face-to-face learning was the desire for children to socialize directly with their peers.

The culture of Indonesian society still largely adheres to the view that successful education requires students to attend school physically and learn directly from teachers. This is a common perspective regarding children's education (Adri, 2019; Hofman et al., 2001). Some students believe the physical classroom environment significantly impacts their learning and motivation (Asiyai, 2014). This prevailing view shapes parental aspirations, as aspirations are formed through perceptions and interactions with individuals and their environments. Purportedly parents' limited knowledge about distance learning and expectations based on their needs influence their aspirations.

Evidence from this study indicates that most parents were unprepared for their children to engage in learning during the pandemic. Educational activities with online mediums were not widely regarded as serious real learning. Parents and students often viewed gadgets largely as tools for communication and leisure activities. This perception contributes to the belief that online distance learning has a limited impact on children's education (Alharbi et al., 2023; Aquami et al., 2024; Azzahra et al., 2022).

The implications of this research suggest the need for further exploration of home as learning environments and children's adaptive strategies. Understanding these aspects can inform educational policies and practices, particularly in prolonged disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the findings emphasize the importance of parental perspectives and support in designing effective home-based learning programs.

CONCLUSION

Over time, there has been a shift toward more realistic aspirations among parents, informed by their direct experiences with distance learning. While some parents initially perceived distance learning as less effective, there has been a growing acceptance of it. This acceptance has led some parents to adapt by allocating more time and effort to support their children's education at home. However, parents who feel they lack the necessary resources—such as adequate teaching skills, time, or technological facilities—prefer face-to-face learning at schools. This preference underscores the challenges and disparities in access to educational resources.

This study has several limitations. The analysis relies solely on information from online media sources. While these sources provide a wealth of information, this reliance limits the depth and breadth of understanding that could be gained through direct interactions with informants. Direct interviews with parents could improve the researchers' ability to delve deeper into the context and nuances of their aspirations. The data collected from media sources are shaped by the

specific questions posed to fit the needs of news coverage. This approach limits the responses to those particular queries, potentially omitting broader or more diverse viewpoints.

Future research should consider expanding the breadth of data collection from diverse sources over extended periods. Exploring the effects of home-based learning on the home environment's suitability as a conducive learning space would provide valuable insights. Additionally, investigating children's adaptation to distance learning processes and potential shifts in learning aspirations or vocational choices post-pandemic would enrich our understanding of the subject matter. These avenues of inquiry hold promise for informing educational policies and practices effectively.

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