

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Discretion in education services: Explaining teaching-learning models of learning from home during Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyze government policies in education during the Covid-19 pandemic and how teachers exercised discretion in dealing with limitations in policy implementation. This research work used the desk review method to obtain data on government policies in the field of education during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, interviews were conducted to determine the discretion taken in implementing the learning-from-home policy. There were three learning models during the pandemic: face-to-face learning in turns (shifts), online learning, and home visits. Online learning policies did not work well at the pandemic's beginning due to limited infrastructure and human resources. To overcome various limitations, the government provided internet quota assistance and curriculum adjustments and improved online learning infrastructure. The discretion taken by the teachers in implementing the learning-from-home policy was very dependent on the student's condition and the availability of the internet network. The practical implication of this research is that street-level bureaucrats need to pay attention to discretionary standards when deciding to provide satisfaction to the people they serve.

Keywords: *street-level bureaucrats; digital infrastructure; online learning; education services; Covid-19; Indonesia*

1. Introduction

The ability to respond quickly and accurately is the key to getting through a crisis well. The coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic had significant implications on the development in terms of the scale (Kharas, 2021) of human life, one of which is the field of education. Several countries closed schools, and the learning activities of at least 290.5 million students worldwide were disrupted because their schools were closed by their government (Mastura and Santaria, 2020). The Government of Indonesia implemented various policies to reduce the spread of Covid-19, one of which was the Minister of Health Regulation No. 9 of 2020 concerning the Guidelines for Large-Scale Social Restrictions in the Context of Accelerating the Handling of Corona Virus Disease 2019. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of Indonesians infected was 1,505,775 people, the total number of patients who recovered was 1,342,695, while the number of people who died reached 40,754 people (Covid19.go.id, 2020).

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Discretion as a form of decision-making requires professionalism and prudence to positively impact the organization and provide satisfaction for the people it serves. In this article, principals and teachers in direct contact with the communities they serve are called street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1971, 1980, 2010). Because their duties are in direct contact with the community, street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) as “moral agents” (Zacka, 2017), and the ability to respond quickly will open up great opportunities for discretionary by the SLBs.

The success of public policies depends on the SLBs’ capacity to act as sensible moral agents. However, they must work in a bureaucratic environment that tends to truncate that moral agency (Zacka, 2017). Besides that, collaboration between various stakeholders is needed, especially in overcoming problems of an emergency nature (Guidotti et al., 2016). People expect SLBs to be role models and follow applicable laws and regulations. During the fast dynamics of educational services, only some things in the field can accommodate the regulations issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia and the regulations made by local governments related to the education sector during the Covid-19 pandemic. The regulations provided discretionary opportunities for all SLBs serving in education services in Indonesia.

Discretion is an essential issue in public services, including education services. However, several studies conducted in Indonesia showed that public services in Indonesia have yet to show a high level of discretion. The low ability of SLBs to exercise discretion indicates the low level of responsiveness in understanding the community’s aspirations and needs, which continue to develop and change according to environmental dynamics (Dwiyanto and Kusumasari, 2001; Sevä, 2015). The bureaucratic apparatus carry out discretion in public services by providing service allowances to the service-user community, whose concessions are still in line with the vision and mission of the organization. Discretion is essential in public services in line with the community’s demands for efficient, responsive, and accountable public services.

Discretionary policymakers must pay attention to the law, have good intentions, and be able to produce innovations to improve public services. The “payment gateway” program in Indonesia is an example of discretion in passport services. It aims to improve public services, especially passport payments, so that they can be changed more quickly from manual to network- and technology-based, for instance, the creation of new counters or the use of queuing machines and system innovation in the network in the registration for public services, such as outpatient registration.

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Since the beginning of the 20th century, the desire to make bureaucrats public servants or SLBs, and not masters, has received much attention from experts. Osborne and Gaebler (1992), in the idea of reinventing government, suggested that the bureaucracy must have a “community-owned” nature, that is, it belongs to the community. Thus, SLBs should be able to exercise discretion in the form of breakthroughs or innovations to realize good governance in order to achieve accountability, effectiveness, and efficiency in public services. Discretion in the form of innovative breakthroughs is very much needed for SLBs to support bureaucratic reform in Indonesia. Awareness as a community service needs to be owned by every SLB.

Discretion in government administration in Indonesia has been regulated in Law No. 30/2014 on Government Administration. This law aims to create an orderly administration of government, create legal certainty, prevent abuse of authority, guarantee the accountability of government agencies and officials, provide legal protection to citizens and government officials, implement the provisions of laws and regulations, and apply the principles of law and order.

Discretion is a decision and action determined and/or carried out by government officials to overcome concrete problems faced in the administration of the government in terms of regulations that provide choices, do not regulate, are incomplete or unclear, and/or have government stagnation. Thus, discretion is the right of government officials. The rights referred to are as follows:

1. Carry out the authority possessed based on the provisions of laws and regulations and the general principles of good governance
2. Organizing government activities based on the authority they have
3. Determine written or electronic decisions and/or determine actions
4. Issuing or not issuing, changing, replacing, revoking, postponing, and/or canceling decisions and/or actions
5. Use discretion by its objectives
6. Delegate and give the mandate to other government officials
7. Appoint daily executor or duty executors to carry out duties if the definitive official is unable to attend
8. Issuing permits, dispensations, and/or concessions
9. Obtain legal protection and security guarantees in carrying out duties
10. Obtain legal assistance in carrying out duties
11. Resolve disputes over authority in the environment or area of the authority
12. Completing administrative efforts proposed by the community for the decisions and/or actions made
13. Imposing administrative sanctions on subordinates who commit violations

The research on discretion has been of interest to researchers since the ‘80s. We can see this

in a book written by Michael Lipsky, which was first published in 1980. The theory developed in this book is based on observations in the social field. Lipsky noted that public service workers have a function as policy decision-makers, as they wield considerable discretion in the day-to-day implementation of public programs. Although Lipsky's theory of street-level bureaucracy is in the American context, Lipsky (1980) believed that his theoretical framework can be applied to any public service organization, including education in Indonesia, as long as the public service has direct contact with the community in policy implementation (Lipsky, 2010; Tummers and Bekkers, 2014). What is interesting in Lipsky's (1980) argument is that unequal distribution of available resources leads to unequal service outcomes (Lipsky, 1980). Although Lipsky (1971) understood his framework more than fifty years ago, and the American public service is the focus of the investigation, his unique conceptualization of street-level bureaucracy has been widely used by researchers interested in policy implementation and public service. On the other hand, the research in the UK is more concentrated in the social field (Baldwin, 2000; Sullivan, 2009; Evans, 2011) by focusing on the professionalism and ethics of street-level bureaucrats in taking discretion in the social field.

Three decades later, the need to bolster the availability and effectiveness of healthcare, social services, education, and law enforcement is as urgent as ever. Several other studies examined the use of discretion in the government sector that is associated with discretionary authority, accountability, management, regulation, and motivation (Yilmaz and Guner, 2013; Evans, 2015). Along with technological developments, the focus of discretionary studies in Indonesia is directed to forms of innovation carried out by SLBs as creative solutions to overcome various problems in government, especially in public services (Subadi and Toersina, 2018).

This study examined the discretion exercised by teachers in implementing learning-from-home policies during the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia with a focus on teachers' creativity in overcoming various obstacles in implementing the learning-from-home policy. Policies to reduce the spread of Covid-19 included lockdown policies in various places, social distancing, and physical distancing, all of which limited people's social interaction with others and reduced their activities outside their home, keeping most activities confined at home, and so the policies had a significant impact on learning methods. Schools, teachers, and students could no longer hold face-to-face meetings in the classroom for the learning process. Every teacher must carry out the teaching process online, and teachers needed skills in information technology (Mastura and Santaria, 2020). The learning-from-home policy raised various pros and cons, as well as problems, among students and teachers. The result of research work conducted by Sari, Tussyantari, and Suswandari (2020) concluded that online learning methods were ineffective for teachers and students. Online or distance learning at home made the teaching staff less than optimal in providing learning materials to primary school students. The material was not thoroughly discussed, and so school students could not understand it correctly. In addition, the online learning media gave the students a sense of saturation because they could not meet their friends.

Other problems faced in online learning were the lack of availability of computers and internet network and the problem of signal interference, especially in remote areas where the internet network had not reached. Not all students and teachers live in areas that have an adequate internet network or signal. Likewise, the ability to purchase internet quota is not evenly distributed among Indonesians. In terms of using information technology for online learning, not all students and

teachers had adequate skills in using computers and online learning applications (digital media).

The various problems mentioned above require attention from the government, principals, and teachers so that the implementation of the teaching and learning processes can continue to run well. To avoid deadlock and dysfunction in the delivery of educational services, SLBs must be able to take discretion to solve problems related to online learning implementation. Exercising discretion during the Covid-19 pandemic was challenging and depended on the professionalism, morals, and ethics of each SLB (Zacka, 2017; Gambrill, 2010). Teachers may need to carry out their duties properly because teaching from home has a weakness in terms of supervision, as principals and education supervisors are not able to supervise teachers carrying out their duties.

What Zacka and Gambrill stated above is interesting to study, especially regarding the implementation of education policies in Indonesia during the Covid-19 pandemic. The issues addressed in this study are as follows: 1) what policies were taken by the government and school principals in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic in the field of education, and 2) what forms of discretion were taken by the teachers in implementing the learning-from-home policy.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theory of street-level bureaucrats

Lipsky (1971) coined the term “street-level bureaucrats”, referring to those who are at the frontline of implementing policies (implementors) and, in carrying out their daily tasks, often translate (interpret) policies because the policies are ambiguous (Lipsky, 1980). What SLBs do is often judged in a negative light, even though what they do is aimed at helping service users because they are equipped with inadequate tools to do so (Lipsky, 1980). As such, SLBs sometimes implement policies in ways that are flawed or discriminatory when carrying out their roles (Lipsky, 1971). The ability to carry out policies appropriately by policy objectives needs to be accompanied by clear and unambiguous instructions (Lipsky, 1980).

Lipsky recognized that street-level bureaucracies employ a range of SLBs with different occupational statuses: “[T]ypical SLBs are teachers, police officers and other law enforcement personnel, social workers, judges, public lawyers, and other court officials and many other public officials who grant access to government programs and provide services within them” (Lipsky, 1980, p. 3). But Lipsky did not engage with the complexities, suggesting instead for an understanding of discretion and its management (Evans, 2011), and did not pay attention to the professionalism of frontline bureaucrats in exercising discretion and its impact on the quality of public services.

2.2. Theory of discretion

The idea of discretion was first put forward by the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates in his attempt to lay the foundation for philosophical ethics. Socrates determined the general ranking of “moral universals” to collect certain criteria that can test what action should be taken in an urgent situation. He assigned an order of values, as well as certain “means to ends”, that would define alternatives to ethical philosophical generalizations. Thus, Socrates created the first basic type of discretion.

The term discretion has so far been associated with decisions made by public officials, such

as governors, mayors, regents, and other public officials, which aim to expedite government administration, fill legal voids, or respond to the dynamics in society. But basically, discretion can also be taken by frontline workers who interact directly with the community they serve, such as police, doctors, teachers, judges, social workers, nurses, sub-district office employees, and other public employees (Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Evans, 2010).

Discretion is the authorized public officials' freedom to act or make decisions based on their own opinions. Discretion is needed as a complement to the principle of legality, namely, the legal principle that states that every act of state administration must be based on the provisions of the laws. The problem is that not everything in the carrying out of the duties of public officials is regulated by laws. Therefore, it is necessary for SLBs to have the freedom to make decisions (discretion) in carrying out their main tasks and functions.

In Indonesia, discretion is regulated in Law No. 30 Year 2014 on Government Administration. This law aims to create an orderly administration of government, create legal certainty, prevent abuse of authority, guarantee the accountability of government agencies and/or officials, provide legal protection to citizens and government officials, implement the provisions of laws and regulations by applying the principles of law and order and the general principles of good governance, and provide the best possible service to citizens.

In the Republic of Indonesia's Law No. 30 Year 2014 on Government Administration, we can find the definition of discretion in Article 1 Number 9, namely, discretion is a decision and/or action that is determined and/or carried out by the government officials to overcome concrete problems faced in the administration of the government in terms of regulations that provide options, do not regulate, are incomplete or unclear, and/or have the stagnation of the government. Using discretion to achieve Law No. 30/2014's objectives is one of the rights possessed by government officials in making decisions and/or actions.

From some of the definitions above, discretion can be interpreted as the art of adjusting actions or decisions to overcome any problems or situations faced by public officials or public servants. Therefore, to realize responsible discretion, a government official or public servant needs to use conscience and careful consideration in exercising discretion. Those in positions of power are most often able to exercise discretion on how they use their authority. The ability to make decisions that represent responsible choices with an understanding of what is legal, right, or wise needs to be mastered well. This is where the professionalism of frontline bureaucrats is needed in implementing discretionary decisions (Evans, 2011).

In the development of the public administration theory, discretion or often referred to as administrative discretion is the ability of administrators to choose among alternatives and decide how a government policy should be implemented in certain situations (Astuti, 2009). Street-level bureaucrats have the authority to exercise discretion in their daily activities, but over time, these agencies often abuse this authority.

Discretion is needed for the public interest, but it can be very dangerous when SLBs use it arbitrarily, which can destroy the basic principles of administrative law (Vaishnav and Marwaha, 2015). Therefore, discretion in public services carried out solely to fulfill public interest must not conflict with the laws and the wider public interest. Thus, in using discretionary authority,

SLBs should not be arbitrary and what they do must be reasonable to fulfill the principles of good governance.

In line with Lipsky, the concept of discretion has received widespread attention in the policy implementation literature (Tummers and Bekkers, 2014; Hupe and Hill, 2007). While several studies stated that the discretion exercised by SLBs has a beneficial effect, discretion also restricts the local government from monitoring frontline workers. Principals and teachers have flexibility because what is done in the teaching and learning processes will be difficult to determine beforehand (Batley and Mcloughlin, 2015; Gauri, 2013). Moreover, during the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers will be difficult to monitor when teaching from their home.

A small number of experts argued that the theory of street-level bureaucracy is no longer valid because of managerial developments and the associated impetus for researching the public sector (Howe, 1991; Taylor and Kelly, 2006; Evans, 2011). Lipsky (2010) reviewed his original work and concluded that changes in managerial aspects have restructured local governments. However, it has been argued that while increased oversight can stem flagrant abuse of the policy, it does not reduce the discretion exercised in the implementation of laws (Hudson, 1989). Experts agreed that many factors cause discretionary practices to violate the law. Moreover, most of them believed that this is mainly due to the organization's leadership, and individual values that are the basis for decision-making are also believed to have been shaped in the organization where they work (Taylor and Kelly, 2006).

Discretion and interpretation of policies are carried out by SLBs to respond to challenges and demands from various backgrounds of the people served, from the uneducated to the educated. Conditions such as these require special treatment in policy implementation, even though a policy is usually general and with general rules. This is where discretion and the interpretation of a policy become a must for SLBs. As noted above, SLBs can exercise discretion when faced with difficult situations. SLBs have a strategic value and, at the same time, are vulnerable to the abuse of authority. For proper discretion, an organization must have a free and open hierarchical form within the organization (Harris, 2019) and the supervision provided by the leadership must not restrict individual freedom in making discretion (Maravelias, 2003). This provides opportunities for SLBs to take creative solutions in dealing with their daily work problems. SLBs working in the public sector must innovate and have new ideas and must manage innovation as a process, shift the risk equation, and experiment (Stewart-Weeks and Kastle, 2015).

2.3. Discretion and quality of public service

A government is obliged to provide quality public services in an efficient, effective, and equitable manner. Leaders of government and non-profit organizations need to manage, measure, develop, and adapt to meet the needs of citizens, especially during crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. On the other hand, SLBs need to develop themselves to take the best solutions in dealing with crisis situations to provide satisfactory services to the community. SLBs have the discretionary authority to develop effective and efficient ways of providing public services. It is true that in any intensive form of government, the government cannot function without the exercise of some discretion by the officials and it is evident that most of the activities are being left to the administrative authorities (Vaishnav and Marwaha, 2015).

From the literature, it was found that several studies tried to explain the relationship between discretion and the quality of public services (Subagio, 2020; Bauhr and Carlitz, 2019). In particular, Subagio (2020) examined the effects of participation and discretion on the quality of public services. He proved that the higher the performances of participation and discretionary, the higher is the quality of public services. Bauhr and Carlitz (2019) examined the effects of transparency and discretion on the quality of health services. The results of the research work by Bauhr and Carlitz (2019) show that high transparency and greater discretion can improve the quality of education and health services. This means that when SLBs have a greater and transparent discretionary authority, the quality of public services improves.

3. Methodology

This study was conducted using the desk research method to find out the policies taken by the Indonesian government regarding the learning process during the March 2020–October 2021 period. The study of discretion in primary and secondary education services used the case study method. Discretionary cases in primary and secondary schools were selected based on several considerations: (1) very high dynamics, especially regarding the delivery of educational services during the Covid-19 pandemic, so the opportunity for teachers to take discretion was very large; (2) elementary and junior high schools are generally in very remote places in Indonesia, in contrast to senior high schools and universities which are generally located in urban areas; (3) the age of elementary school students was 7–13 years old and junior high school students were between 13–16 years old, and they generally have low digital literacy skills, and so getting online education services created various obstacles in the use of information technology.

Data collection was done in two ways. First, interviews were conducted with several participants related to case studies of discretion in the provision of educational services at the elementary and junior high school levels. The participants consisted of teachers, elementary students, junior high school students, and parents of students. Second, documentary analysis (desk research) was used to investigate documents related to the central government's policies in education; the number of schools, teachers, elementary and junior high school students; school locations; and the availability of supporting infrastructure for online learning. These documents were obtained directly from the Provincial Education Office, District/City Education Office, or other relevant sources, including desktop studies.

4. Results

4.1. Education service policy during Covid-19 pandemic and challenges for schools

Public policy is an action taken by a government to address public problems. To overcome various kinds of problems caused by the transmission of Covid-19, the Indonesian government implemented a policy of limiting community activities to reduce human interaction and the spread of the coronavirus. One of the areas targeted by the policy of limiting activities to reduce direct interaction was education.

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit Indonesia, there were at least two policies in the education sector that influenced the implementation of the teaching and learning processes in schools, namely

the Circular Letter of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia No. 3 of 2020 concerning Prevention of Corona Virus Diseases (Covid-19). Education Unit, and the Circular Letter of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia No. 4 of 2020 concerning the Implementation of Education Policies in the Emergency Period for the Spread of Corona Virus Disease 2019 (Covid-19). From these policies, all schools in Indonesia were required to carry out the teaching and learning processes from home. The policy of teaching and learning from home that was carried out online is a new thing in the world of education, especially at the elementary and junior high school levels. As something new, of course, the policy experienced various problems and challenges in its implementation.

The challenges came from two directions, namely, from the internal side of the school (e.g., online learning facilities and teachers' ability) and from external factors (e.g., the students' environment). From the results of interviews with several school principals, information was obtained that at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic that hit Indonesia, the government instructed that all learning and teaching activities be carried out from home (online learning). At that time, various problems and challenges began to emerge. The most significant internal problems and challenges are (1) the lack of available online learning facilities, where online learning facilities still needed to be improved and were not even owned by elementary and junior high schools because, so far, they only implemented face-to-face learning in the classroom (offline), and (2) the lack of digital literacy skills of teachers and students, as digital literacy is the main prerequisite for optimizing the use of digital media for learning.

The responses from educational institutions (schools and teachers) to government regulations in education varied according to their ability to respond. The ability to respond was strongly influenced by the availability of resources, such as online learning facilities and infrastructure, internet access, and the quality of the teachers they have.

In the western, central, and eastern regions of Indonesia, there are gaps in two things, namely (1) the availability of access and (2) human resources, which include the ability of users of information and communication technology (ICT). **Table 1** shows the inequity of infrastructure distribution, which has an impact on public access to information and communication technology infrastructure. The concept of these gaps was adopted by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) as the basis for measuring the ICT Development Index. In this index, Indonesia is ranked 111th out of 176 countries. The growth of Indonesia's telecommunications access development is very significant, with the total penetration rate in 2009 reaching 86.1%, or growing more than three times compared with the rate in 2005. In 2009, Indonesia's cellular penetration rate (71.0%) exceeded the worldwide average (68.3%).

Table 1. Availability of access and human resources in regions of western Indonesia, central Indonesia, and eastern Indonesia

Aspect	Western region	Central region	Eastern region
Access availability (infrastructure)	High	Average	Low
Digital literacy (HR)	High	Average	Low

Source: Author

On the other hand, the imbalance in the provision of communication and information technology infrastructure is still a problem. In 2009, more than 80% of the infrastructure was located in western Indonesia, and only 2% of the blank spot villages targeted by the Universal Service Obligation (USO) program had internet access (digitalregulation.org, 2020).

The challenges faced by Indonesia in the use of digital media for learning can generally be grouped into three, namely:

- 1) Teachers need to have adequate digital literacy and skills in using distance learning media. Otherwise, as a result, online schools may become an obstacle and learning may become less effective.
- 2) Teachers' ability to be creative and innovative in creating online learning content still needs to improve. Otherwise, as a result, students may get bored when studying.
- 3) Uneven internet access: 1) teachers and students in disadvantaged areas were constrained by network problems, and 2) not all students had the ability to access the internet (inability to buy internet data due to economic problems or being poor), but this was successfully overcome by providing quota assistance for teachers and students.

Another challenge faced by the learning-from-home policy was the issue of the education curriculum. Some subjects in the 2013 curriculum were unsuitable during the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, in citizenship education lessons, there were obstacles for teachers to develop knowledge and attitudes in the students. Mathematics subjects were more suitably explained on the blackboard in class. Therefore, the government recommended that the curriculum must not burden students and that the curriculum needed to be designed in such a way that students can easily understand.

4.2. Teacher discretion in education services during Covid-19 pandemic

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the government instructed all educational institutions, including at the elementary and junior high school levels, to carry out distance learning (learning from home). Schools and teachers responded to the implementation of the Distance Learning (*Pembelajaran Jarak Jauh*, or PJJ) policy with various forms of discretion to overcome problems that arose in the field. In general, there were three learning models during the pandemic: online, offline (the shift model), and home visits.

The first model was online or distance learning, which became commonplace during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the result of a survey conducted by the KPAI (*Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia*, or the Indonesian Child Protection Commission) stated that 76 percent of students did not like distance learning, 76 percent of students felt heavily burdened by the workload given by teachers, and 42 percent of students did not have quotas and technological tools, such as cellphones, as well as having difficulties using video applications and difficulties with the internet signal. This survey concluded that online learning was not conducive in the students' eyes.

The second model was the face-to-face learning model (offline). Schools that can apply the face-to-face learning model were those in the green zone (where there was no spread of the virus) and schools in very remote areas that did not have an internet network and a low level of virus spread.

Offline learning activities were carried out with rigorous health protocols (wearing masks, washing hands, and seat distance of at least one meter). Students were scheduled to come to school in turns. Some came in in the morning, afternoon, or evening. Minister of Education and Culture Nadiem Makarim no longer required teachers to fulfill class hours in a matter of 24 hours a week. The relaxation of teaching hours was regulated in the emergency curriculum as stated in the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 719/P/2020 concerning Curriculum Guidelines in Special Conditions. This rule also applied to online learning. Teachers were expected to improve interactive teaching during distance learning by relaxing teaching hours so that they can focus on providing interactive lessons without having to chase hours.

The third was the home-visit learning model. Teachers as the spearhead in implementing the distance learning policy seemed to have various kinds of discretion in overcoming the problems faced by students. At the elementary school level, a common problem in distance learning (online) was the inability of elementary students to use online (digital) media in the learning process. This was due to their young age (7–13 years), and so their digital literacy was still low. The discretion taken by teachers to overcome such problems was to go to students' homes to teach them. For subjects that have a higher level of difficulty, such as mathematics, the method used by several elementary school teachers in Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi Province, was to teach the parents of their students, and then the parents would teach their children. Many parents complained about this model for several reasons, such as the parents not having the pedagogic ability to teach and being busy with house work or office work, and so the teaching load given to them was very burdensome and inconvenient. Therefore, according to Fauzi (2020), teachers who visit students' homes should not give lessons, so that there is an impression of friendship, kinship, and togetherness. They should not teach but visit.

Another problem was that many students and their parents who did not have mobile phones for online learning activities felt confused, and so schools looked for solutions to resolve this. Some students who did not have mobile phones studied in groups with a maximum of 10 and would do learning activities together. The learning was done through video calls connected with the teacher and lesson questions being asked to the students one by one, while attendance was taken using VoiceNote. Learning materials were also provided in the form of videos that are less than two minutes long.

Based on the experience of some of these teachers, teachers must also be ready to use current technology. Teachers must be able to make models and learning strategies that fit the characters of the students in their schools. The use of several applications in online learning is very helpful for teachers in this learning process. Thus, teachers must be able to design and design online learning that is light and effective by utilizing appropriate online devices or media for the material being taught. The success of teachers in conducting online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic was the ability of teachers to innovate in designing and concocting materials, learning methods, and applications for the materials and methods.

The selection of applications used in learning was a form of discretion taken by teachers in distance learning to prevent greater transmission of Covid-19. In general, applications widely used in online learning were video calls and chats, such as Zoom, Google Meet, WhatsApp, Telegram, YouTube, and others. Some of the teachers interviewed said that it was easier to use Google Meet

Table 2. Applications widely used during pandemic in Indonesia

No.	Application	Reason for use
1.	Google Meet	Google Meet is a video communication service application. Online learning videos can be recorded and directly stored on the teacher's Google Drive account and teachers can easily share them with students.
2.	WhatsApp	WhatsApp is easier to use for chatting online, sharing files, exchanging photos, and more.
3.	Zoom	Using Zoom, there can be more participants, who can communicate remotely with good video and audio.
4.	<i>Rumah Belajar</i>	<i>Rumah Belajar</i> is an application created by the Ministry of Education and Culture to assist students in online learning. It can be used by students ranging from Early Childhood Education (<i>Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini</i> , or PAUD) students to high school (<i>Sekolah Menengah Atas</i> (SMA) or equivalent) students. This learning application provides learning materials and communication facilities to support interaction between communities. There are several features provided by <i>Rumah Belajar</i> , including Digital Classes, Learning Resources, Question Banks, Virtual Laboratories, and several other complementary features.
5.	<i>Ruang Guru</i>	The <i>Ruang Guru</i> (Teacher's Room) application offers a school-curriculum-based learning platform through interactive video tutorials by teachers and animations that can be accessed via smartphones.
6.	Quipper	This application provides a variety of materials made by experienced and competent teachers who are registered in the application.
7.	Zenius	Zenius is an online learning application available to students ranging from elementary school students to high school students.
8.	<i>Kelas Pintar</i>	<i>Kelas Pintar</i> (Smart Class) is designed to be an online learning solution with smart, personalized, and integrated methods designed to increase students' interest in learning and understanding of the subject matter.
9.	<i>Meja Kita</i>	This application allows students from the elementary level to the high school level throughout the archipelago to share lessons. The principle of this application is "from us to us".

Source: Author

when teaching and to use WhatsApp when communicating with their students. The selection of the right methods can impact the quality of educational services during the pandemic.

The problems that occurred were not only due to lack of proficiency in using the learning media but also the cost of quotas, which was relatively high for students and teachers. The quota purchased for internet needs soared, and many parents needed more time to be ready to increase their budget for the internet. This was also a significant issue for students in terms of the time for studying and the data (quota) they had, as their parents are from the low-income or lower-middle-income class (poor). The cost of internet quota was borne by parents who wanted their children to continue learning via online learning. The central government overcame the problem of internet quota cost by providing quota assistance to students and teachers from elementary school to tertiary education levels.

Several teachers admitted that online learning was less effective than conventional learning activities (face-to-face) because some materials had to be explained directly and more completely. In addition, the material delivered online may only be understood by some students. Based on the online teaching experience, this system was only effective for giving assignments. The assignments results may be given when students return to school, so these would likely accumulate.

In distance learning activities, one of the things to worry about is the problem of strengthening children's character. During online learning, teachers cannot directly communicate with their students, so teachers do not know the children's behavior. Therefore, teachers admitted that they must communicate well with parents and other teachers regarding the children's habits when studying at home. In discussions with several teachers, information was obtained that they still provided character education even though learning was done online. However, the teachers admitted that character education cannot be done optimally because it needed to be exemplified and practiced to become a culture. In the 2013 curriculum, the government tried to build Indonesian human character through the 5K culture: cleanliness, security, order, beauty, and kinship. These cultural values will be challenging to instill in students via online learning.

It should be acknowledged that educating primary and secondary school children needs the prioritization of character education. Forming children with morals and character from an early age is an effort to build a generation of people who have integrity so that later when they grow up, they can become responsible people and avoid the behavior of criminal acts of corruption. Such age is the basis for character building, which can be a provision for them in the following life process.

5. Discussion

When the Government of the Republic of Indonesia issued a distance learning policy to reduce the spread of Covid-19, the opportunity for discretion was wide open for street-level bureaucrats who implemented the policy (Lipsky, 2010; Tummers and Bekkers, 2014; Hupe and Hill, 2007). Discretionary opportunities were wide open because the government did not regulate in detail how to implement learning from home. Schools had the authority to set their schedule and the desired learning model according to their environment, especially the availability of infrastructure and the ability of their teachers and students. Information and communication technology infrastructure that is evenly available for all areas of Indonesia must be the government's primary concern. A government needs to invest in infrastructure that encourages innovation and, at the same time, protects the environment (Hooper et al., 2018). Inequity in infrastructure distribution will impact people's access to education services and community welfare. The high gap in the availability of infrastructure between the western and eastern regions of Indonesia is the government's responsibility to improve in the future.

The discretion made by schools and teachers, even though it contains freedom and independence, does not mean independence that is free from the legal framework (Ridwan, 2021; Vaishnav and Marwaha, 2015; Hudson, 1989) because discretion done by schools and teachers must still be accountable to the public. The government in this case is the local Education and Culture Office.

In implementing the distance learning (online) policy, the regional governments made discretion regarding school operational assistance funds, which so far had been used to finance school

operational activities, to purchase internet quotas and credits for teachers and students. Credit assistance worth trillions of rupiah must be managed transparently (Bauhr and Carlitz, 2019) to avoid asymmetric distribution. The data of prospective recipients must be announced so that the credit assistance is right on target. At schools, it can be written on the bulletin board so that all students can know it. In addition, the government must record which regions and schools receive credit subsidies because in Indonesia there are still many areas that have problems with electricity and internet. Other areas certainly do not need credit subsidies.

Principals as street-level leaders (Vinzant and Crothers, 1998) who implement distance learning policies are faced with situations of sudden change, but they must accept it (Astuti, 2009). They must be able to make decisions without having to consult their superiors, especially if there is a shortage or scarcity of resources (Lipsky, 2010). In conditions of limitations and lack of resources, SLBs usually carry out tactical mechanisms to cover their shortcomings. The quality of the tactical behavior taken is largely determined by professionalism (Evans, 2011) and the maturity of the street-level bureaucrats. The longer they are in their position, the easier it is to deal with problems that arise, especially when the problem is a recurring problem, as the SLBs already have a method or way to overcome it.

At the beginning of the pandemic, everyone was still confused in the face of a very fast-changing situation, but over time, everyone began to get used to the new normal. Teachers started to get used to using technology media in learning. Little by little, they learned to use digital devices for learning. And by the end of 2021, almost all teachers can use it. Likewise, students started to adapt to the changes in learning from face-to-face learning to online learning.

6. Conclusion

This paper contributes to understanding the policy implemented by the government in education services during the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia and understanding the various forms of discretion taken by teachers in implementing the learning-from-home policy, which faced many challenges, because it was necessary for teachers to pay attention to many things in order for the learning objectives to be achieved.

This study proposes a theory that SLBs need to pay attention to discretionary standards that must be met when making a discretionary decision to provide satisfaction for the people they serve. As street-level bureaucrats have a relatively high level of discretion, they must prioritize the interests of the people they serve and pay attention to the people's needs so that both parties feel comfortable in the implementation of policies.

Using data and information on the education policy in Indonesia between March 2020–October 2021, the results show that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Indonesian government enacted a policy that all schools, from elementary schools to universities, implement distance learning (from home) and provided internet quota assistance to teachers and students. However, there were still many obstacles faced in distance learning, due to infrastructure problems (internet network and students' cell phone ownership) and lack of human resources capabilities (the limited ability of teachers and students to use online media). In responding to this policy, schools and teachers exercised discretion according to their environmental condition. Three learning models were used:

online learning, offline learning, and home visits. For areas with a good internet network, generally online learning used various learning applications already available. Students who did not have cell phones studied in groups with a maximum limit of 10 people using one cell phone provided by the school. As for remote areas without a good internet network, teachers took the discretion of visiting the students' homes (home visits). In general, the implementation of learning activities went well. However, character building was considered to experience a few obstacles because the teachers cannot directly educate their students. Therefore, the role of parents is needed to shape children's character through examples in everyday life at home.

The results of this study have several important implications. First, the study provided evidence that drastic changes in the learning system require adjustments to infrastructure and human resources (teachers and students). In particular, the findings explained the various forms of discretion teachers took in implementing the distance learning policy. Teachers, in exercising discretionary authority, cannot determine for themselves the types of learning media to be used in carrying out the teaching and learning processes but must understand the condition of their students (whether they have a device or not, whether they are capable of using the online media or not, and whether they have an internet network or not). Thus, SLBs exercising discretionary authority must consider various aspects so that the decisions made can be well received by the community they serve.

Further research is needed to explore the discretion of SLBs in different areas and conditions, as well as the forms of discretion they take in dealing with the problems they face, and to understand how different services provide the appropriate solution and become the main determinant of the success of a public policy.

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