

Influence of COVID in Digitizing and Collective Endeavor in Indonesia

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Abstract:

Digitalization of the education system in Indonesia became an important topic in the country's ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology during the period of COVID as all the schools in the country were closed indefinitely. Online classrooms were adopted nationally to ensure that learning persisted despite the shutdown, with teachers and students communicating digitally on instruction, assessment, reporting, and conversations. After the pandemic, the country has not dropped the technology but rather, has taken several steps towards completely digitizing the education system. A literature review was conducted in this paper to understand how COVID pandemic has been instrumental in bringing digital transformations in Indonesia's education system. It was found that the country has carried forward, as well as introducing further actions in the efforts to digitize the country's education system. Intriguingly, Indonesia highlights some of the ways that covid-19 has revitalized the tradition of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) within the current setting, in addition to the influence of digitalization on life. *Gotong royong* is a technique that is frequently employed to raise public awareness of the harm that results from breaking through social barriers, even in the name of getting back together with families to observe a religious holiday. The idea has given rise to a new view of collectivism that does not require physical proximity for us to keep each other safe in this situation.

Introduction

COVID has widened the education system of Indonesia. Following the reported escalation of the COVID cases in 2020, 530,000 schools were closed in Indonesia leading to a rapid shift to distance learning for 58 million students. Many digital learning innovations and investments in the educational technology (EdTech) were brought forward by the digital transformation in the system. For instance, digital blackboard was introduced where teachers and learners would interact freely regardless of the differences in distance and time. Similarly, administration of examinations was also digitalized more than it has ever been in the history of Indonesia's education system.

An example of a lecture teaching students online is shown in the image below;



Figure 1. Online Learning¹

Despite the challenges reported from the use of digital technologies in education especially by the middle- and low-income families and teachers, the government has discovered the necessity of incorporating both physical and digital classrooms in the education system as a way of elevating the quality of education in

the country.² Even after the decline of the COVID cases nearly to the zero mark in the country, use of digital technologies in the education system of the country has not been dropped. Rather, more innovations are being brought forward by the researchers and policy makers as well as the close educational stakeholders to transform the system of education in the country to include a higher capacity of technology use.³

Some of the challenges that have been reported and that the country has been shedding light on to mitigate include challenges in acquiring the digital devices that operate as instructional tools; this challenge is very common especially amongst the middle and low income families, problems in understanding how to use the digital devices and other related technologies such as broadband set-up at home, poor network coverage for the families living in remote areas, and low student activity in learning following the distance from the teacher; this problem has been reported as common among the children aged below 12 years whose concentration declines in the absence of the physical teacher. With the government addressing these among other challenges, the country's future in its education system will be rich in digital technologies.⁴

Sukarno, the first president of the country, described *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) as the capacity to strive together in a speech. Channeling the spirit of *gotong royong* essentially entails putting aside differences in terms of race, religion, and other factors in order to unite the country and face its issues as a whole. This has evolved

into one of Indonesia's distinctive characteristics as the largest archipelago in the world with more than 1000 ethnic groupings. In actuality, Indonesians haven't always been on the same page. Locals have recently been further divided by ongoing political disputes, instances of discrimination, and religious intolerance. As modern society progresses, the notion that Indonesia was founded on the principles of *gotong royong* slowly fades.

Thesis Statement

With COVID having brought in digital transformations in the Indonesia's education system following the closure of schools as a way of mitigating the spread of the virus among the public, the country has realized the need to put into action the vision of digitalizing the education system. The COVID problem has demonstrated that Indonesians have never truly given up the *gotong royong* mentality, but how the idea occasionally manifests itself in local society may depend on the frequently shifting cultural situations.

Methodology

In order to find out the impact that COVID has had on the education system and social value of Indonesia pertaining digital transformation of the system and the resulting realization by the government on the need to adopt the digital technologies into its education system and the tradition of *gotong royong*, several articles were reviewed. The articles entailed previous work that researchers have conducted on the aforementioned area in the last 3 years.

Digital Search

To identify the most relevant articles for this project, a digital search was carried out in PubMed database. The search terms used to locate the articles included; "COVID and digital transformation in Indonesian education system", "towards a permanent digital shift of the Indonesian education system post corona", and "COVID impact on adoption of digital technology in Indonesian education system". Each of these search terms was keyed in individually with the results from each search recorded down. In total, 35 articles were identified following the digital search; however, a narrowing down was performed to ensure that the most appropriate articles were used in the project.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The table below illustrates the methods used to select the most appropriate articles from the list of 35 articles identified after the digital search. After singling out articles, 12 articles remained as the most appropriate for the project.

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <p>Inclusion Criteria</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Only the English articles ➤ Articles published in the last 3 years ➤ Articles that researched specifically on digital technologies in the education system of Indonesia during and after the COVID. ➤ Articles whose research involved more than 100 participants for more reliable results. |
| <p>Exclusion Criteria</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Articles outside the Indonesian education system. ➤ Articles whose research participants had no informed consent. |

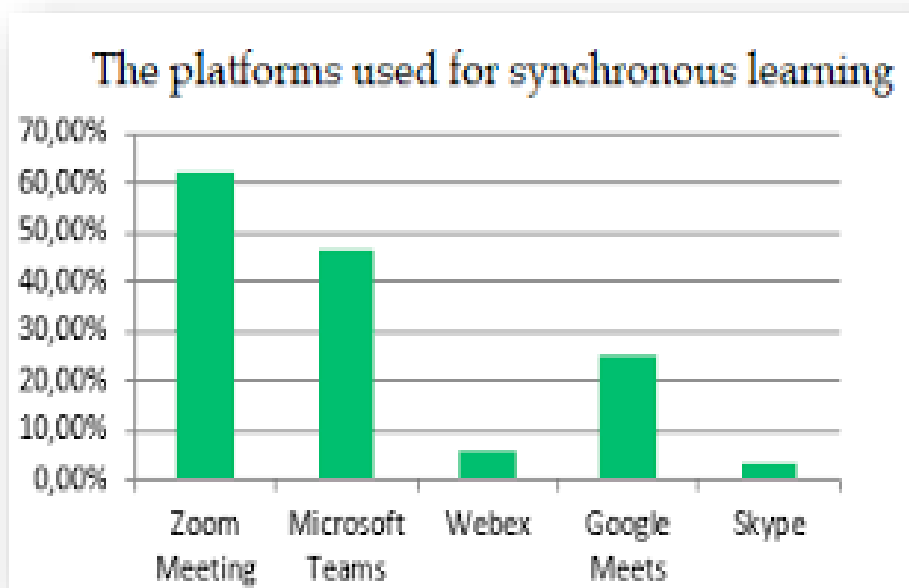
Literature Review

The Indonesian government projected in 2021 that by 2023, the revenue in the Online Learning Platform would be \$466.90 billion. This revenue is expected to show an annual growth rate (CAGR 2023-2026) of 8.49%, resulting in a projected market volume of US\$596.20m by 2026.⁴ By 2026, the government also predicted that the number of Online Learning Platform would rise up to approximately 19 million; reflecting a 6.6% user penetration in the year rising from 5.3% in 2023. Annually, the average revenue per user (ARPU) is expected to hit \$31 by the end of 2023.⁵

The Indonesian education system is the fourth largest in the world with 3 million teachers and over 300,000 schools according to Supriyatno T, Kurniawan F.³ The two researchers claim that there is a high completion rate of the primary school education in the country following the fact that the primary and middle school is free while a small fee is charged for the high school level of learning. In Indonesia, all citizens must undertake twelve years of [compulsory education](#) which consists of six years at elementary level and three each at middle and high school levels. [Islamic,](#)

[Christian, Catholic,](#) and Buddhist Schools are under the responsibility of the [Ministry of Religious Affairs.](#)⁶

As Padmo et al,⁴ notes, the education system in Indonesia has seen great changes brought by the COVID especially on the use of technologies. After the escalation of the COVID cases was noted in the early 2020, the ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology announced nationwide closure of schools. The closure appeared indefinite as there was no tangible forecast on when the virus would subside. Firmansyah et al,⁷ points out that the unpredictability of the pandemic growth curve called for the necessity by the ministry to think of ways through which students would continue receiving education from the comfort of their homes. As a result, according to Hermanto YB, Srimulyani VA,⁸ digital technologies were considered as the right plan for the problem. Through use of the digital technologies, teachers were able to establish virtual classrooms to keep in touch with their students.

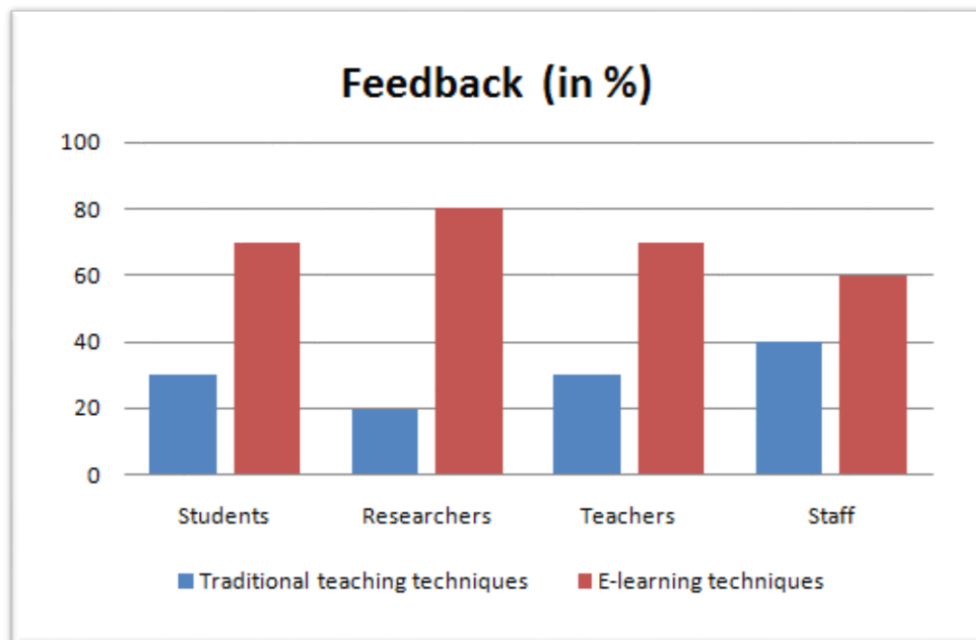


Graph 1. The platforms used for online learning during the COVID period in Indonesia⁴

In their survey on the digitalization of the education system in Indonesia, Hidayati D, Saputra WA⁵ define education digitalization as the use of computers, mobile devices, the internet, software applications and other types of digital technology to teach students of all ages. It entails and is not limited to test taking using computers, online universities, eBooks and edutainment among other education activities linked to artificial intelligence and virtual reality.⁴

Similarly, the time gaps between the teachers and the students were also overcome by the technologies, with learners able to follow up classes taught in their absentia.

Adoption of digital technologies in the education system led to the realization of the vast opportunities that come with the online programs such broadening of the learning opportunities for the learners. In this case, as highlighted by Hidayati D, Saputra WA,⁵ digitalizing education enables the learners to access education regardless of the physical distance between them and their teachers.



Graph 2. Comparison of the traditional and e-learning techniques in terms of feedback (in Indonesia)⁹

Lestari PAS, Gunawan G¹⁰ outlines that digital technology in education has extended the breadth of information for the Indonesian children. During the COVID period, the children were able to access the free and wide information in the internet at their disposal at any given time. with the information being updated constantly, the internet was considered as one of the crucial sources of knowledge for the learners following the closure of the schools.¹¹

As reported by Sujarwo et al¹⁰ in their article, it was also noted that digitalized learning has made it possible for the shy and uncomfortable students to comment, ask questions as well as correct or add noted on the forums as they interact with teachers and fellow students through online learning platforms. This may not be possible for such learners in a physical classroom.⁵

In one of their interviews with the officials from the ministry of Education in Indonesia, Thongbunma et al² pointed out in their article that the official claimed that one of the greatest benefits they noted during the COVID period pertaining digitizing education is that it gave teachers the ability to offer tailored learning plans and curricula to a single student instructional strategies and methodologies in the past were more or less designed with whole classes in mind.

As Herwiana S, Laili EN¹² outline in their article, digitalization of education in Indonesia was also noted to favor the slow-learner category of students. This was due to the fact that the teacher was able to create an individualized online program with the students after the class to interact with the learner, reinforcing what they failed to understand better during the class time. With

most slow learner students having low self-esteem, online learning offers them the chance to sound their problems to the teacher without fear as it is for the physical classrooms. Such learners were also able to get a quick access to online tutors in case they needed them. On the same note, Thongbunma et al² point out at the ability of a student to replay a lesson several times to understand it better as opposed to physical classrooms whereby they have to keep a fast track of the teacher who is always under a strict time schedule.

The aforementioned benefits associated with digitalization of education system in Indonesia made the government not to drop the online learning systems even after the end of the pandemic. As a way of making the education system in the country even cheaper, online system has been identified as a suitable weapon as it is cheaper than a physical classroom with lesser costs involved on commuter, testing, and tuition.⁴

According to Herwiana S, Laili EN,¹² however, digital learning has widened the existing inequalities in education for many children. Before the introduction of the online learning systems during the COVID period, acquisition of education in the country was reported to be faced by disparities following the differences in income levels and regional development among the citizens. This disparity was reported to be even wider at the high school level where some considerable amounts of fees, though subsidized, are payable. Most of the children from middle- and low-income families failed to finish the high school system for lack of funds.³

Digital technologies introduce extra costs that are not involved in a physical classroom and which further cripple the ability of the children from middle- and low-income families to acquire education. Some of these costs include purchase and maintenance of digital learning devices such as the computer and the software.¹³ The families in middle- and low-income levels struggle to afford housing, food, clothing, healthcare and other basic needs; acquisition of these devices may be difficult for most of them.¹⁴

The government has also been faced by another challenge of ensuring that the remote areas are connected to electricity and broadband access. This is because the online learning cannot take place in the absence of these two. Which are mostly absent in the remote regions of the country. Although it is seen as a game changer in the education system of the country, much is still to be done to ensure that there is equality in the access of education by all the country's children.⁵

Use of the technology is also a challenge to not only some teachers, but also to the learners who are not well versed with digital technologies. Before full adoption of the system in any school during the COVID period, it was ensured that teachers and students have a significant knowledge and skills in using the technologies to connect with the rest of the classmates virtually.¹⁴ Teachers and students need to have skills on how to troubleshoot the common online learning problems to ensure immediate continuity of the lesson without having to call technicians to fix the problems. Ability to manage the

devices at home without assistance will boost the success of the system.¹³

As Herwiana S, Laili EN¹² reports, the government has begun national training of the teachers in a phased program to ensure that they understand how to handle the online instruction tools effectively including identifying problems and errors and troubleshooting the issues before and during the lessons. Teachers are also being trained on how to manage the students more effectively virtually, ensuring their motivation to engage and activity during the virtual lessons is optimized.³

In his research, Rulandari N¹³ found that even though there is a widespread use of digital learning even after the COVID era, some teachers are forced to purchase the digital instructional tools with their personal income following the inability by some of the schools to provide such tools to every classroom. In this research, some teachers also pointed out that their classes have adopted digital learning systems using the schools outdated computers some of which have not been updated for over 4 years. Use of outdated software slows down the learning process due to consistent breakdowns, errors and other problems during a lesson.¹⁴

Overcoming Covid-19 in Indonesia

Overcoming COVID in Indonesia was not solely a responsibility of the government but rather; saw a major cooperation of all the bodies across the country in the fight against the virus. Similarly, the cultural beliefs and social values were impactful in fighting the virus. Collectively, all the aforementioned

systems were able to mitigate the spread of the virus and consequently, eliminate the pandemic in the country.¹⁴

Terms like "solidarity," "togetherness," and "community support" are part of a new pandemic lingo that emphasizes a group approach to overcoming and surviving the current crisis without necessarily being present with one another. The collectivist structure of Indonesian society makes this a significant difficulty. Locals who are used to attending recitations and *arisan* (a social gathering where a group of primarily female friends save money by organizing a monthly rotating lottery), meeting up with friends in the famous megamalls, or going to the movies and karaoke joints now have to work on rearranging their social interactions and adjusting to new forms of spending time together, are now required to do so.

Sukarno, Indonesia's first president, discussed *gotong royong*, or the capacity to strive together, in a speech given in 1945, the year the country attained independence. Channeling the spirit of *gotong royong* essentially entails putting aside differences in terms of race, religion, and other factors in order to unite the country and face its issues as a whole. Indonesia has a *gotong royong* culture (mutual cooperation). *Gotong royong*, according to Sayidiman Suryohadiprojo,¹⁵ is the foundation of Indonesian culture. The Indonesian people may differ from one another, yet we are still one since we coexist as a single country and work together. The nation, particularly its leaders, have not made meaningful attempts to preserve this natural,

social character and behavior of reciprocal collaboration, the warrior figure also argues.

Despite this, *gotong royong* is also evident among common citizens in both urban and rural locations. For instance, they accomplish this by organizing campaigns to assist ride-hailing drivers in maintaining their income by placing more frequent online food orders and providing them with larger tips. Also, eateries and warungs (local food stands) support drivers and street vendors by providing them with complimentary lunches. Regional authorities have started building quarantine zones in tiny villages, like those in West and Central Java, to support local residents while in rural areas. In order to spread factual information on COVID-19 and combat misinformation, more information centers have been built in towns around the country.

Although the government shut down all the worship areas during the escalation of the COVID infections, the religious bodies were in the forefront in the fight through mass education, resource contributions, and adherence to the established rules. Christian and religious leaders were in the forefront educating its congregations on the safety measures to avoid contracting or spreading the virus. Further, the leaders worked with the government to provide the basic resources required for fighting the virus such as the PPEs for the front officers, sanitary provisions for sanitizing and hand wash as well as providing food and other basic resources to the vulnerable people during the closure of businesses. Most of the cultural celebrations such as weddings were mostly

postponed or otherwise, conducted in full adherence of the established COVID guidelines.¹³

During the pandemic, violation of the human rights was common with cases such as domestic violence and unruly riots common. The violation of human rights reversed the efforts of fighting the virus through exposing the victims to situations that increased their vulnerability to contracting the virus. Human rights bodies, the government authorities and the religious organizations come out to fight the violence. Cases of domestic violence, for instance, were reported to double during the period when compared with the previous reports. To ensure that the victims were protected from abuse and exposure to infections, toll free lines were introduced for the public to report such cases. Similarly, the police and religious bodies conducted mass educational programs to ensure that the public was enlightened on the need to protect each other.⁵

It is thought that Indonesia's habit of cooperating and supporting one another rescued it from the Covid-19 pandemic. All facets of society were urged by President Joko Widodo to uphold this culture while putting in hard work, standing up, and having faith in clearing the road. President Jokowi announced the invitation while making a speech at the 2023 National Chinese New Year festivities in Banteng Plaza, Central Jakarta. There is the state of Pancasila, which is part of Indonesia. Helping each other out and cooperating with one another is what ultimately saves us.¹⁶

Results

The 12 articles selected and used for this project involved on-field research where researchers did a survey to understand how COVID has led to transformation of the Indonesian education system into use of digital technologies in instruction. Multiple sources^{5,10,12,14} found in their research that 45% of the children from families whose income level is above the poverty line preferred online learning to physical classroom while 91% of the children from middle- and low-income families preferred physical classrooms to online learning.

70% of the selected articles indicated that transforming the form of education in the country to increase adoption of digital technologies will increase cases of inequality in the access of education among the Indonesian children. Similarly, 80% of the articles pointed out that the key challenges affecting use of digital technologies in learning include poor access to broadband, instructional and learning tools, skills and knowledge about use of the technological devices, and reducing the motivation of learners to engage in learning.

On the benefits, 30% of the articles stressed that the slow learner category of learners are favored by system as opposed to when physical classrooms are used. The articles also argued that the cost of learning has drastically reduced in the face of online learning.

2 articles; Sujarwo et al,¹¹ and Hidayati D, Saputra WA⁵ stated that the efforts put by the government to enable the adoption of digital technology in the classroom are projected to

hit the peak by the end of 2023. These articles further claimed that much investment has been put on training the teachers on digital learning technologies as well as purchase of the online digital instructional tools.

Padmo et al,⁴ and Hermanto YB, Srimulyani VA⁸ outline three benefits realized from use of digital technologies in learning and that are paramount, according to the authors, in the achievement of the academic goals. These benefits are; lowering the cost of learning, making learning process a continuous process regardless of the challenges such as whether, and finally, increasing the activity of the learners through their education online searches and management of the digital devices. This will consequently improve the learners' problem-solving skills and critical thinking.

According to Ir. Soekarno, *gotong royong* is an example of social capital and is the nation's identity; nevertheless, it needs to be updated for the modern day in order to remain relevant. To ensure that *gotong royong* lives on in the present, it must also be passed down to the younger generation. The idea of social capital relates to the social network's ownership of investment, accumulation, and exploitation like capital in the financial sense. Hence, social capital can be helpful in accomplishing the required collective ends, such as combating the COVID pandemic.

As a guiding value, Pancasila's existence cherishes the community's social life and its support. As a result, the value of mutual cooperation which has always been the guiding principle of communities in Indonesia

appear in their daily life. This virtue of mutual cooperation demonstrates how each member of the Covid Task Team and communities has values that are unintentionally ingrained in them. The concept of institutionalized mutual cooperation has emerged inside the communities. This value is crucial in the fight against the pandemic because it requires strong conviction and resiliency to carry out principles that may not be shared by all parties. In serving and performing the responsibilities of the Indonesian Government regarding the handling of the Covid, the form of the value of the *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) that serves as the foundation of the synergistic and participatory attitude of the traditional village communities who are members of this task force has undoubtedly demonstrated its own strength.

In this traditional culture, the Covid task force unit and communities' values mutual cooperation as a result of a deliberate decision to dedicate themselves to a common goal. As a result, mutual cooperation has developed into a mindset that is represented in Pancasila's civilization of everyday life, making it simple to identify in social phenomena that take place in Indonesian society. Through Pancasila, which serves as an ethical framework for performing the duty of nation and state, mutual cooperation is planned. It is evident that the Indonesian people have adopted the *gotong royong* mentality as part of their culture as a value for working together or jointly to solve an issue.

The Pancasila values, which are evident via the attitudes and actions of the people who have always been a vision of life, are projected

through the communities' mutual cooperation attitude in traditional Indonesian culture. According to Kaelan,¹⁷ one's perspective on life provides a framework for organizing their own lives as well as their interactions with others in society and the environment. As a result, value of *gotong royong*, as this style of thinking, has given the community a frame of reference for having behavior based on the nation's noble values, and has made these noble values always continue to live and work in the community.

Discussion

Based on the results from the literature review, it is evident that adoption and use of digital technology in the Indonesian education system has extended the COVID period and will definitely be part of the country's learning system. Although digital technology was in practice before the period of COVID, massive use of the digital technology in learning was realized during the pandemic period following the nationwide closure of all the learning institutions as a way of mitigating the spread of COVID. Even after the pandemic period, the government noted the benefits that were associated with the online learning and encouraged the institutions not to drop the system completely for the older physical system.¹⁴

Despite the notable issues that for instance widen the gap of inequality in excess of education between the high- and low-income earners, the benefits outperform the problems. The disparity is caused by the high cost of digital devices for learning such as the computer access to electricity and

broadband. The learners from higher income families appear to be favored by the system than the students from low-income earning learners.⁴

Online learning has made it possible to bridge the physical gap between the teacher and his/her learners to ensure that learning is a continuous process all the time. On time gap, it is also possible, under the digital technology, for learners to access the lessons taught in their absence and recover the learnt content just like the rest of the class. In a case where a student does not understand the concepts taught, he or she is able to rewind the lesson back as many times as he or she is willing.¹²

In Indonesia, the learning institutions were able to teach, test, revise, mark, analyze and report the performance of the learners all by the use of digital technology. Throughout the period, there were improvements on the various activities as aforementioned in the path to perfect transformation of the education system into a digitalized system. Some of the improvements included skills and knowledge by teachers, students and parents in handling the technological devices for instruction, selection of the right online tools for each specific sort of instruction, as well as improvement of interactivity, honesty, and motivation of the learners. These improvements have led to perfection in the use of digital technology in online learning.⁴

To avoid disparities in excess of education among the children from different backgrounds, it is paramount for the government to assist the low-income students

in acquiring the digital tools as well as the related services such as the internet and electricity. The teachers should also be well trained on how to use the digital teaching tools and aids in order to improve the quality of learning for every specific session.¹⁴

Physical classrooms should not however be completely dropped as it was during the COVID period. Rather, the learning process should include both physical and virtual classes to expose the learners to the associated benefits of every learning environment. It will also help avoid inheriting all the digital problems into the country's education system.⁴

Although this trend is not without significance, it is worth noting that mutual cooperation really grew and spread during the transformation of *gotong royong* in the digital era during COVID, as opposed to withering away. Mutual cooperation in the virtual world is accomplished through voluntary activities, such as gifts of work performed using one's abilities and philanthropy (generosity) in the form of monetary or in-kind contributions. Platform-wise, social media channels, pages, and digital applications are typically used to promote citizen involvement. Therefore, from the perspective of an actor, fundraising and support can be done by people (such as influencers, celebrities, or regular citizens), communities, or businesses (eg television, radio companies, and so on). These days, we frequently hear accounts of well-known, extremely privileged people and businesses exhibiting mutual cooperation through charitable and altruistic acts. For instance, musicians came together to hold a live

streaming fundraising concert that raised over IDR 10 billion (US\$ 619) and big brands like "Gojek" and "Wardah" (Indonesian Brand) made significant donations to those affected by the pandemic.

Although having a larger audience, *gotong royong* in the virtual world is nonetheless constrained by the social group it belongs to and cannot avoid the distinction between "us" and "them." In this context, each mutual cooperation venture in the internet realm must make an attempt to raise awareness of one group based on closeness to one another, nationality, religion, and other identity-forming factors. Due of the movement's broad reach, the donor community is unable to monitor this activity, making it simple for scammers or freeloaders to take advantage of the help. Given the lack of reciprocity in online activities involving mutual cooperation, the longevity of this movement is also in doubt.

Aside from these multiple measurements, the evolution of mutual collaboration in the digital age demonstrates that the Indonesian nation's identity is still pertinent and flexible enough to change with the changes.

Conclusion

The impact of COVID on education has been experienced not only during the period of the pandemic, but also after the era of the pandemic. The pandemic led to nationwide closure of schools in Indonesia, causing the stakeholders to implement different ways of ensuring that teachers could interact with their students in a learning environment. Digital technology was impactful in this process, with

the creation of virtual classroom adopted. This involved use of digital instructional tools such as the computer to link the teachers and their students. The government of Indonesia, through the ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology saw the necessity to transform the educations system of the country by digitalizing it. This came following the notable success from the digitalization during the pandemic period. The government projects that by 2026, the education system will have reached promising levels of digitalization, with the overall expenditure of every learner on digital technology expected to rise by over 200% by the time. Digitalization of the education system in the country has killed the gap in terms of distance and time between the learners and their teachers. Similarly, it has enabled learners to research more education content in the internet increasing their access to information. The government is however, expected to address the disparity in access to education that has been noted when education is digitalized. The low-income earners face challenges in purchasing the learning tools as well as accessing the required broadband and electricity. As the COVID issue put the nation to new tests, Indonesia vowed to enhance the *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) spirit with its people and government in order to recover more quickly and without leaving anybody behind. This demonstrates how the region effectively applies Pancasila values through the use of regional genius. The values of Pancasila, implies *gotong royong* are realized as guiding principles and worldviews for people before the epidemic, during the

pandemic, and in the future post-pandemic age through local wisdom. As a result, it is widely believed that *gotong royong* will strengthen and unite the community's social fabric as it works to conquer Covid-19 in Indonesia. In order to accomplish this,

Indonesians are finally demonstrating the strength of *gotong royong* by banding together to help resolve the current crisis, irrespective of who they are and where they are from.

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