

Utilization of Online Learning for Islamic Religious Education Subjects During the Covid-19 Pandemic at SMP N Kelumbayan Barat Tanggamus

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ABSTRACT

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The use of online learning media for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects at SMP N 1 Kelumbayan Barat is the focus of this study. The aim of this research is to explore the implementation of E-learning or online learning for PAI during the pandemic and assess the effectiveness of online learning media on student performance at SMP N 1 Kelumbayan Barat. The background of this study is related to the shift to online learning during the pandemic and the role of advanced technology, particularly the internet, in creating a learning medium known as e-learning or online learning. E-learning is applied in PAI instruction to facilitate the learning process for both teachers and students at SMP N 1 Kelumbayan Barat. The main issue addressed in this study is to examine the online applications used in the learning process, the teaching materials delivered by PAI teachers, and the online teaching methods utilized by instructors during the Covid-19 pandemic. This research is a field study, and data collection involves observations, interviews, and documentation. The data is systematically reduced, presented in a detailed descriptive form, and concluded at the end of the study.

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic that has hit the world since early 2020 has had a major impact on various aspects of life, including the education sector. In Indonesia, the government imposed a distance learning (PJJ) policy to prevent the spread of the virus, so that the entire teaching and learning process was transferred to online media (Kemendikbud, 2020). This sudden change demands readiness and quick adaptation, especially in the subject of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) which not only conveys cognitive material, but also aims to shape students' moral and spiritual values.

Online learning in the context of PAI presents complex challenges. Previous research reveals that although platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and WhatsApp are widely used during the pandemic, their effectiveness is highly dependent on teacher readiness and supporting facilities (Riyanto & Puspitasari, 2021). In addition, limited internet access, especially in rural areas, and the lack of technology training among educators are serious obstacles (Munir, 2021). In areas such as West Kelumbayan Subdistrict, Tanggamus Regency, the geographical and economic conditions of the community are additional factors that complicate the implementation of PJJ, especially in PAI subjects.

The limited digital devices and low digital literacy of teachers and students in the area also affect learning outcomes. In addition, the low involvement of parents in accompanying children to study at home also affects the internalization of religious values, which is an important part of PAI learning (Sari & Fatimah, 2022). In fact, the success of religious learning is highly dependent on the emotional and spiritual engagement between teachers and students, which is quite difficult to realize in online learning.

This study aims to examine in depth the utilization of online learning for PAI subjects at SMP Negeri Kelumbayan Barat during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research focuses on the strategies used by teachers in delivering online materials, the obstacles they face, and the impact on students' understanding of Islamic values. A qualitative-descriptive approach was used in this study, with data collection techniques through interviews, observation, and documentation.

This study is expected to make an empirical contribution to the discourse of religious learning in times of crisis and offer alternative strategies for teachers in optimizing online learning in areas with limited infrastructure. The findings of this study can also provide input for policy makers in designing teacher training programs and providing learning infrastructure that is more equitable, inclusive, and in accordance with the characteristics of PAI subjects

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach because this approach allows researchers to deeply understand social phenomena that occur in the context of online learning of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects at SMP Negeri Kelumbayan Barat during the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach is very suitable for examining the interaction processes, experiences, and responses of educational actors to the educational crisis situation due to the pandemic (Creswell, 2014).

The informants in this study consisted of PAI teachers, some students, and parents of students who were purposively selected. This selection is based on the consideration that the informants have direct and relevant experience with the implementation of online learning during the pandemic (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The selection criteria include teachers who actively teach online, students who participate in the online learning process, and parents who accompany their children in the learning process from home.

Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Interviews were used to explore information about teachers' strategies, obstacles faced, and students' and parents' perceptions of online learning. Observations were made of learning activities through platforms such as WhatsApp, Google Classroom, and Zoom to see firsthand how teachers deliver materials and establish communication with students. Meanwhile, documentation includes teaching materials, screenshots of online activities, and school policies during the pandemic (Sugiyono, 2019).

Data analysis was done thematically through the process of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Each data obtained from interviews and observations were categorized into main themes such as learning methods, technical challenges, student participation, and effectiveness of learning outcomes. To increase the validity of the results, data triangulation technique was used, which is by comparing information from various sources and methods (Patton, 2002).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of online learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects at SMP Negeri Kelumbayan Barat during the COVID-19 pandemic shows complex dynamics. The results revealed that PAI teachers have tried to adapt the learning process by utilizing various digital platforms, such as WhatsApp and Google Classroom. However, the limited internet network and students' low digital literacy are the main obstacles in implementing online learning strategies effectively.

Teachers used the method of delivering materials through voice messages, texts, and images on WhatsApp as a solution to the limited access to video conferencing. Although this approach was quite helpful in delivering the material, student participation remained fluctuating, especially for those living in areas with weak signals. This is in line with previous findings by Fauzi and Khusuma (2020), who mentioned that technical and family economic constraints played a major role in the decline in student participation during online learning during the pandemic.

In addition, parents' involvement in accompanying their children to study is an important factor that influences the success of PAI learning. Interview results show that most parents in the area have jobs as farmers or day laborers, which results in limited time for child assistance. This context reinforces previous research by Adedoyin and Soykan (2020), which underlines the importance of home environment support in technology-based learning.

Despite many obstacles, teachers still try to evaluate learning outcomes through reflective tasks and memorization of short verses sent in the form of voice recordings. These evaluations are conducted periodically and compiled by the teacher to measure the achievement of learning objectives. However, the effectiveness of this evaluation cannot be optimized because not all students can submit tasks consistently. This emphasizes the opinion of Hodges et al. (2020), who distinguish between "emergency remote teaching" and systematically designed online learning; emergency situations make teaching quality more oriented towards affordability than pedagogical effectiveness.

From the results of data analysis, it can be concluded that the online PAI learning process at SMP Negeri Kelumbayan Barat still faces various obstacles, especially in technical, pedagogical, and student participation aspects. However, the adaptation and creativity of teachers in managing learning is a strength that should be appreciated. Therefore, support from the school and the government is needed, both in the form of technology training and the provision of supporting facilities, so that online learning can run more optimally in the future.

The availability of learning devices is also a serious challenge in implementing online learning. Based on observation and interview results, it is known that not all students have personal devices. Many of them have to share with other family members or rely on their parents' devices, which are only available at certain times. This condition has an impact on students' delay in accessing materials or submitting assignments on time. This situation is also echoed by the research of Rasmitadila et al. (2020), which confirms that limited internet equipment and quota are the main obstacles in implementing online learning in rural Indonesia.

In addition to technical limitations, student motivation was also identified as a crucial issue. Teachers revealed that many students lose their enthusiasm for learning due to limited direct interaction with teachers and peers. Online learning makes students feel lonely and lack emotional encouragement. This condition is in line with the findings of Aristovnik et al. (2020), who mentioned that online learning during the pandemic has

a negative impact on students' psychological well-being in various countries, especially in terms of motivation and learning engagement.

Nevertheless, PAI teachers try to apply contextual and spiritual approaches to maintain students' interest. Some teachers involve elements of students' daily lives in learning examples, as well as inserting religious messages that build spirit and spiritual awareness. This effort aims to keep religious values embedded even in limited learning situations. This approach is in line with the concept of Islamic education which emphasizes the integration of cognitive, affective and spiritual aspects (Muhaimin, 2019).

In addition, the results show that the online learning process has encouraged teachers to be more creative and adaptive. Teachers who were previously not familiar with technology are forced to learn and try various platforms for the sake of learning continuity. This process becomes a momentum to increase digital competence for educators. This phenomenon is reinforced by a study by Trust and Whalen (2020), which noted that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital transformation in education, including among teachers who were previously unfamiliar with online learning technology.

In addition, it was also found that the interaction between teachers and students during online learning tends to be one-way. Most of the communication only happens during assignment delivery or material clarification, while the space for discussion, question and answer, or further concept exploration is still very limited. This shows that although online learning still takes place, the quality of interaction is not optimal. According to Garrison and Anderson (2003), the quality of online learning depends on the existence of *teaching presence*, *social presence*, and *cognitive presence*. If these three elements are not well developed, the effectiveness of learning will decrease.

Another finding from this study shows that there are differences in adaptability between students in the lower grades (grade VII) and students in the upper grades (grade IX). Grade IX students are generally more independent in accessing and understanding materials because they are accustomed to using digital devices, while grade VII students are still very dependent on the help of parents or guardians (Yuliana, 2020). This is a concern for PAI teachers, because this difference in readiness requires a differentiation strategy in online learning.

Teachers also face challenges in terms of learning assessment. Based on interviews, many teachers find it difficult to assess students' affective and spiritual aspects only through online assignments. In the context of PAI, character building and religious attitudes are an important part of the learning process. Therefore, some teachers try to take a personal approach through WhatsApp messages or video calls to find out about students' character development at home. However, this approach is highly dependent on teachers' time and workload. In line with this, research by Hasibuan and Fachruddin (2021) emphasizes the importance of evaluating character-based learning in Islamic religious education, which is not sufficiently measured through cognitive outcomes alone.

The socio-economic condition of students' families also affects the effectiveness of online learning. Some students come from families directly affected by the pandemic, both economically and psychologically. This has an impact on learning priorities at home. Many students have to help their parents work or look after younger siblings, so their study time is limited. This data is in line with the UNESCO report (2020) which shows that the pandemic has widened the education gap, especially for students from vulnerable groups.

Nevertheless, this study also found some *best practices* from PAI teachers that can be used as examples for the development of online learning in the future. For example, there are teachers who routinely make short video lectures with a duration of 5-10 minutes and upload them to YouTube so that students can access them anytime. This practice increases the flexibility of learning access and provides a more personalized learning feel. This kind of initiative shows that PAI teachers can be agents of change in crisis situations if supported with adequate training and technological facilitation (Kim & Asbury, 2020).

Furthermore, although online learning brings many challenges, there are opportunities to develop *blended learning* models in the post-pandemic period. The combination of face-to-face and online learning can improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and accessibility of learning, including for PAI subjects. This is reinforced by the findings of Hodges et al. (2020), who stated that well-designed online learning can serve as a complement rather than a substitute for conventional learning.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research conducted, it can be concluded that the implementation of online learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects at SMP Negeri Kelumbayan Barat Tanggamus during the COVID-19 pandemic shows various dynamics. On the one hand, online learning is an alternative solution that allows the learning process to continue in the midst of social restrictions. PAI teachers try to utilize various platforms such as WhatsApp, Google Classroom, and YouTube to deliver materials and maintain communication with students. On the other hand, the implementation of online learning still faces significant challenges, such as limited internet access, lack of digital learning tools, low student motivation, and difficulties in evaluating students' affective and spiritual aspects.

Teachers are required to be more creative and adaptive in developing teaching methods and taking an individualized approach to students who experience problems. In addition, there is a digital gap between students which has the potential to cause inequality in achieving learning outcomes. These findings show the need for more responsive and inclusive education policies in dealing with emergency situations such as a pandemic.

Thus, online learning in PAI subjects during the pandemic is not only a challenge, but also opens up opportunities for the development of more flexible learning models in the future, such as blended learning. This research emphasizes the importance of increasing teacher capacity in the field of educational technology as well as the need for infrastructure and policy support from schools and the government so that online learning can run more optimally and evenly.

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