



Challenges and Best Practices of Teaching and Learning among Islamic Education Teachers during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Online learning (e-learning) has become a norm since the Covid-19 pandemic struck the world. The global health crisis has forced teachers and students to drastically adapt to a new method of teaching and facilitation (PDPC), i.e. online. However, teachers living in rural areas face various challenges teaching online due to poor Internet access. There are still many teachers who are less skilled in information technology to deliver teaching materials online. This study uses a qualitative approach by interviewing three secondary school Islamic Education teachers as the study participants. The findings reveal that the teachers utilise social media such as WhatsApp and Telegram to convey various information, instructions and training. The learning mediums used also vary, from the Zoom app to Google Meet and video calls. In addition, teachers employ other online learning tools such as Google Classroom. Teachers also employ flexible online teaching and learning schedules to overcome issues such as parents who have many school-going children but lack the funds to purchase gadgets for each child. A flexible schedule enhances online learning as the school-going children in each household can use devices but not simultaneously. Other major challenges include students' lack of cooperation (whether in an online or offline class) and the failure of parents to monitor their children's progress. As a result, educators need to be more creative and ready to acquire new skills to meet the current challenges. Educators need to adapt online teaching and learning methods in line with the concept of 21st Century Learning (PAK21). Therefore, the use of appropriate and creative technology in a remote learning environment encourages students to focus on learning and prevents dropouts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the global outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic due to the spread of the novel coronavirus. Around the globe, various sectors faced closure, including the education sector. The closure of schools and higher learning institutions was crucial to breaking the deadly virus's chain of transmission. In Malaysia, the conventional face-to-face teaching and learning process came to a halt during the time of the Movement Control Order (MCO).

To ensure students did not fall behind, educators conducted classes online. However, various challenges arose when implementing online teaching and learning. Some students did not have personal gadgets or smartphones, while others lacked sufficient Internet data or direct Internet access. Educators were also doubtful as to the suitability of different online tools and used trial and error to determine the appropriate method for online teaching and learning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Online Learning

Various theories on online learning have defined it as learning by utilising the facilities of the Internet with the help of various technologies. A survey by Fauzi and Khusuma (2020) found that 82.6% of the teachers questioned stated that online learning helped them a lot. Online learning can take place in either a synchronous or asynchronous mode. Synchronous mode means that the teacher conducts the online learning at a specific time of the week while the asynchronous mode refers to online learning that occurs over a longer period (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). In both cases, teacher-student interaction forms the basis of the learning process. However, the mode of interaction differs from conventional teaching, i.e. it takes

place through online media (Fitriyani, Febriyeni, & Kamsi, 2020). As such, online learning that is synergised with the appropriate foundation can provide more optimal learning effects (Arizona, Abidin, & Rumansyah, 2020).

Challenges of Online Learning

Recent studies have shown that teachers consider online learning to be ineffective within the learning process (Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020). Studies have also stated that students perceive online learning to be unimportant due to the misconceptions they hold about it. They can assume that online learning is informal and just like a vacation, meaning they are too relaxed (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020).

Other problems with online learning have included the availability of facilities, the use of networks and the Internet, planning, implementation and evaluation. For example, 25% of teachers argued that not all students have electronic devices for online learning (Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). The unprecedented transition from face-to-face or traditional teaching to distance learning that is conducted within students' and teachers' homes demonstrates the need for adequate Internet access. It was found that a majority of teachers living in rural areas lacked knowledge of the complex technology that was required for use in the teaching and learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic (Habibi et al., 2021). The lack of electronic gadgets and funds among students, along with issues around Internet access, also affected the implementation of online learning (Arizona et al., 2020; Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020).

Generally, many students have low literacy, let alone digital literacy. Some students were not punctual for online classes as scheduled by the school while others submitted work after the deadline. Another problem concerned students' different levels of mastery of the subject based on their diverse cognition and learning styles. As a result, students complained that the time allocated for understanding and completing their work resulted in a stressful and traumatising experience (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Fitriyani et al., 2020).

Basilaia and Kavadze (2020) explained that teachers also had technical problems related to personal computers, video/voice configurations or the misuse of functionality. The apparent challenges required ICT integration among teachers, such as online teaching and online assessment mastered at a lower level (König, Jäger-Biela, & Glutsch, 2020). In addition, the remote environment was more challenging than the classroom environment because the conditions at home were not suitable for teaching (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). This was coupled with financial circumstances that prevented some teachers from participating in teaching and learning during the pandemic. All of this made it difficult for teachers to work from home (Habibi et al., 2021). Financial barriers such as salary cuts and limited financial subsidies for the purchase of Internet credit were another dilemma that teachers faced. Ultimately, teachers had only limited funds with which to supplement their Internet credit (Habibi et al., 2021).

Accordingly, teachers were unable to maximise the use of technology in online learning. Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) found that teachers faced difficulties creating materials for use in an online learning environment because they only used low-tech applications. Their research also revealed a lack of experience and knowledge among teachers in conducting online classes. Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) went on to show that teachers had problems giving personal feedback and teaching moral values to students due to time constraints. Aside from the lack of quality content delivery and limited social interaction, teachers found it challenging to engage their less motivated and passive students in an online learning environment. According to Habibi et al. (2021), problems arose when teachers encountered the new challenges posed by online teaching as they had trouble understanding classroom conditions, the mood of their students and the dynamics of content delivery. Teachers also faced difficulties in organising learning activities due to their limited knowledge of technology integration.

Online Platforms and Mediums Utilised by Teachers

There are many types of online learning platforms available in Malaysia; for example, learning management systems with various features such as chat and messaging, video conferencing, online marking and assessments, video streaming and sharing, learning tools and additional resources. Generally, teachers use platforms like Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom, Skype and Edmodo to conduct online teaching and learning. In this context, teachers make short video clips consisting of specific content aimed at increasing interaction and effective learning (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020).

Applications such as Autodesk SketchBook, TEDEd, FastStone Capture, Google Forms, Quizizz and Kahoot enabled teachers to create online quizzes for students in the form of multiple-choice questions, essays and true

or false alternatives. Teachers also used YouTube to provide visual material in the form of videos and animation, and many YouTubers uploaded a range of teaching and learning methods on online learning platforms (Arizona et al., 2020).

According to Atmojo and Nugroho (2020), teachers used or created teaching materials including videos, pictures, PowerPoint slides, Word documents and PDF documents that they then shared through messaging apps such as WhatsApp. Fauzi and Khusuma (2020) found that 66.7% of teachers modified teaching materials from various sources for their students, while 44.4% often made audiovisuals to deliver engaging content to students.

However, the most widely used messaging platform, WhatsApp, was viewed as an inappropriate medium. It only served as a communication tool and was unsuitable for distance learning as it rendered such learning less meaningful. Previous studies have recommended the use of low-quota applications such as E-Knows for online learning. In this regard, the material should be delivered fairly quickly without exceeding the total quotas of such applications (Fitriyani et al., 2020).

Challenges Faced by Parents

Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) highlighted that teachers face difficulties in collaborating with parents. Undoubtedly, parents have a crucial role to play in helping to implement effective online learning. However, many parents often end up completing their children's assignments on their behalf. Another problem is the lack of parental supervision. Some parents are unable to monitor their children's progress because they are busy with their own jobs and businesses. Nevertheless, 90% of teachers reported regular communication with students and parents. As long as students and parents had access to digital devices such as mobile phones, effective communication was possible. On the other hand, families' socio-cultural context posed a further challenge that affected the learning process. Accordingly, teachers became more proactive in considering their students' social and cultural backgrounds when devising and implementing teaching methods (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020).

Parents also faced financial difficulties in purchasing electronic devices due to their high prices. Purchasing the requisite data packages or Internet quotas posed a further challenge. Online classes and the delivery of content to students were disrupted by unstable reception or signals. Furthermore, a combination of parents' own low educational backgrounds and teachers' lack of expertise meant that parents did not always understand the content or teach their children. The absence of a close and harmonious relationship between parents and teachers created difficulties in terms of parents completing their children's tasks (Cankar, Deutsch, & Sentočnik, 2012). Online learning can also be challenging due to an inadequate understanding of the instructions conveyed by teachers. Therefore, parents who were unable to understand the teacher's instructions through electronic devices could not assist their children.

Role of Teachers

The role of teachers in building online learning adaptability is the key to a successful learning process (Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020). Teachers provide personalised feedback aimed at helping students to progress in their learning. The effectiveness of group learning can be increased by reviewing assignments individually and returning feedback to students (König et al., 2020). Teachers should also be creative and innovative in planning activities for students in an online learning environment. According to Atmojo and Nugroho (2020), teachers must be knowledgeable and skilled to teach online by mastering the content. In addition, teachers should use a mix of online activities to clear doubts, provide feedback on students' learning progress and set out instructions for weekly work.

Teachers are encouraged to prepare short discussions as a stimulus for students through WhatsApp groups, Google Classroom or other applications with more efficient quotas (Fitriyani et al., 2020). In a study by Basilaia and Kvavadze (2020), 55% of the participants agreed that the online learning experience presented an opportunity to move outside their comfort zone by learning new technologies. The participants also recognised their ability to adapt to uncertain and new scenarios, and solve emerging problems. However, a lack of communication and cooperation affected the teaching process in such a way that it caused anxiety and a decline in motivation levels. In general, the teacher's self-efficacy is fundamental in assigning tasks to students in different ways and providing feedback on online learning (König et al., 2020).

A webinar is a useful way for teachers to teach writing techniques while also providing ongoing assistance to students. Teachers can monitor and discuss mistakes in composing words or sentences. However, teachers must be skilled and competent in working with online mediums as part of the coaching process. In addition, regular discussions between teachers are one of the best ways of improving competency and providing suggestions to the problems faced by students. The availability of guidance in managing online learning platforms is another fundamental factor in developing competencies among teachers (Febriani, Safutri, Yusnawati, & Anasrudin, 2020).

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. Explore the challenges faced by Islamic Education teachers in implementing online teaching.
2. Explore the current teaching methods and approaches of Islamic Education teachers for online learning.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study used descriptive qualitative analysis to investigate the issues in detail while maintaining their originality holistically (Patton, 2014). Using this approach, the researchers are able to examine the actual situation experienced in the remote learning environment (Yin, 2017).

This study aims to explain and deepen understanding of the challenges faced by Islamic Education teachers in online learning, analyse findings from various sources, triangulate data for information validity and provide extensive data for future research. Repetition of the same study in separate places using similar protocols aids validation and replication (Ginsburg & Rhett, 2003). The researchers collected information through a multi-source interview process and were supported with observational data and data from documents to analyse and make interpretations about this phenomenon. Next, the researchers compiled a description of all the information obtained, undertook analyses by making interpretations, before moving to categorisation and the construction of concepts from various sources supported by diverse methods.

The informants or study participants focused on facts based on interview questions that required a person to actively reconstruct the experiences in the given context (Seidman, 2006). The selection of the study participants ensured that an overview was obtained from various angles of the phenomenon examined. For this study, the researchers interviewed three Islamic Education teachers from secondary schools in Selangor and Negeri Sembilan.

Based on recommendations by Mills and Gay (2019), the purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the study participants. This purposeful selection of study participants enables information about a phenomenon to be conveyed holistically and meaningfully (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Seidman, 2006).

In this study, the participants satisfied the following criteria:

1. Islamic Education teachers who teach daily in secondary schools based on the standard secondary school curriculum (KSSM) of the Ministry of Education Malaysia;
2. Teachers who have undertaken training or courses related to online learning; and
3. Willingness to be a study participant and permission granted by the school management.

For the data collection, the researchers obtained permission from the study participants to observe, conduct and record interviews, and then store, examine and use materials related to the research questions (Yusoff, 1996). This study used software from the ATLAS.ti 8.5 program for its data collection by coding themes, then categorising and analysing each item of data obtained. In addition, continuous analysis ensured that the next item of data collected was not repetitive. In this way, the information derived from the initial analysis process enabled the researchers to avoid collecting the same data. This was efficient in terms of time and energy costs. Data piles were avoided by conducting an ongoing analysis of the data throughout the collection period. This enabled the researchers to organise and store data systematically to facilitate its efficient analysis.

5. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The first objective of this study is to explore the challenges faced by Islamic Education teachers in implementing online teaching. Based on the findings of the first research question, the themes identified

concern the Internet, student involvement, knowledge and skills, facilities, emotional disorders, and time constraints.

Table 1 summarises the problems faced by Islamic Education teachers in the context of the integration of science and the Quran in Islamic Education. The findings of this study were obtained through in-depth interview with the Islamic Education Teachers.

Table 1. Summary of themes and sub-themes for the challenges faced by the Islamic Education Teachers

Category	Theme	Sub-theme
Challenges	Internet	Unstable
		Student attendance too low
	Student involvement	Lack of parental monitoring
		Disruption at home, students switch off camera
		Students' attitude – no response from students to teacher
		Lack of exposure, insufficient training
Knowledge and skills	Insufficient facilities	
Facilities	Less stable	
Emotional disorders	Too much work, multitasking	
Time constraints		

Table 1 shows the findings of the challenges faced by the study participants across six themes: i) Internet, ii) student involvement, iii) knowledge and skills, iv) facilities, v) emotional disorders, and vi) time constraints. Each of these will be addressed in turn.

i) Internet

Participants 1 and 2 mentioned that students had limited access to the Internet because they used top-up credit services that only lasted a few days. Once their top-up credit or Internet quotas had been exhausted, students purchased more top-up credit to access the Internet. This finding was supported by responses from the interviews with the study participants – 'Not all students have Internet facilities, they use top-ups. The problem is that students do not enter the classroom, later they will apologise to the teacher due to slow Internet.' Fauzi and Khusuma (2020) and Arizona, Abidin, and Rumansyah (2020) previously found that the financial ability of students or their families to purchase Internet data, aside from the issue of ensuring adequate Internet network access, largely influenced the implementation of online learning.

ii) Student Involvement

Participant 2 observed less student participation during online classes. She said, 'Cooperation from students ... they do not participate in PdPr. Teaching using Google Meeting, from 50 people entered not up to half of the class.. only a few of them so the target was not reached... Want to be able to do reflection.. they were also the same students. We do not see them, so we do it indifferently, if it's a quiz, they do it ... but if it's a little harder....longer notes, only a few people will send.. sending them notes in video form, teaching was not the same... no. They were silent with no questions, I was dissatisfied. When everyone closes the camera as if nothing, we don't feel like talking to each other. Students themselves are less involved .. they don't face us, you can't see them.' This finding is strongly supported by previous studies as students did not perceive the importance of online learning due to their misconceptions. They assumed online learning was informal and like a vacation, so they were too relaxed (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020).

Disruptions experienced during online learning also affected student participation. Participant 3 stated that both the students and teachers faced various disruptions during online classes, with this finding evident in her response: 'The problem is in the student's house.. they live in a flat. Teachers who have small children too ... disturbance at home. If at home, it's hard to concentrate. There is indeed a 30-minute break or 1 hour before another class starts, but there is other housework to be done. Sometimes shopkeepers arrive, pick up the goods.'

iii) Knowledge and Skills

The third theme emphasised the aspects of knowledge and skills as observed from several perspectives. Firstly, from a parental perspective. Participant 2 mentioned that most parents have low knowledge of online learning, as evident in her response: 'Parents ... when the kids are in secondary school.. they just let him be, let him without any monitoring.'

Participant 3 stated that parents played a key role during online classes by monitoring their children. However, in most cases, parents have low knowledge of the implementation of online learning, as she said:

'... parents also lack knowledge, parents play a huge role in the aspect of PdPr... parents should monitor the children, we can't see our students in Google Meet, they are there but they do not respond... '

Secondly, from the students' perspective, many students simply failed to respond well to online learning. The interview with Participant 2 supported this finding where she said, '... Hafazan using video calls.. not many will do.. we assess the students from there. Islamic Education is more than just practical, learning in terms of Ibadah, bringing the students to the surau, teaching complementary prayers, now there are no practical, only theories. Hafazan if they are not ready, they do not appear in Google Meet.. students tend to run away, the same if they do not know how to read Jawi.'

Thirdly, from the teachers' perspective. Here, Participant 1 had difficulty delivering lessons online simply because, as teachers, they were trained to be educators, not content creators. She said '... the need to attract the attention of students ... The content of learning that students need to achieve ... sometimes the teachers cannot achieve... .' Prior research supports this finding as problems were found to arise when teachers experienced new challenges with online learning as they had trouble understanding the classroom conditions, student moods and the dynamics of content delivery. In addition, teachers faced difficulties in organising learning activities as they had limited knowledge of technology integration during the pandemic (Habibi et al., 2021).

Similarly, Participant 2 revealed that senior teachers lacked knowledge about online devices, applications and platforms. She said, 'we do not have skills, we lack in technology like this.. we need to look.' Participant 3 also stated that teachers lacked digital literacy, and said in her interview, '... the challenge is that we are in our 50s, and we have to study.. it's not easy, young people do not have any problems.'

iv) Facilities

The interviews were highlighted that facilities played a key role in online teaching and learning. Participant 3 stated that students are the most influential group for online learning when it comes to facilities. She said, 'challenge.. first of all, devices. If we have a device, there is Wifi.. teachers have no problem, but students.. not all students have mobile phones, there are laptops, used to share with siblings... parents have to buy tools, have to buy tables for the children to use ... This is a day school, usually the socio-economic backgrounds of students are from various classes.' Accordingly, the socio-cultural context of the students and their families posed challenges that affected the learning process (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020).

Participant 3 also said that the school lacked Wifi. However, as many teachers conducted online classes from school, the management decided to install Wifi access in the staff room: '... first, there is no Wifi at school.. then there is.. because teachers want to use their Wifi, it finishes quickly... but if many uses at the same time, the line will also be lost.'

v) Emotional Disorders

In general, Participant 1, stated that teachers who were unfamiliar with electronic devices and online learning platforms were stressed by the huge challenge – 'For a teacher who is not proficient in all applications or any method, he or she should start from scratch. If there are a lot of things to do, it will cause stress. Especially veteran teachers.'

In addition, there was a tendency for teachers to become mentally and physically fatigued while conducting online classes. Participant 3, said, 'At first, I didn't feel tired ... now I feel tired because the schedule is starting to get packed. I think we teachers need to be ready, even if we're tired of adjusting ... we also have to do Erph, we have to turn it in on time. We feel lost the first week.' In this regard, König, Jäger-Biela, and Glutsch (2020) explained that teachers had to adapt to uncertain and new scenarios to solve emerging problems. However, the lack of cooperation affected the teaching experience and was the cause of much anxiety and reduced motivation.

vi) Time Constraints

Participant 2, reported that time constraints were the most critical problem faced in online learning. For example, she stressed that '... class starts at 8 am, yet the students are still in the dream world... we open the link at 8 am.. we should wait for the students to enter until 20 minutes.' This finding supported Atmojo and Nugroho (2020), who found that teachers also encountered problems in giving personal feedback and teaching moral values to students due to time constraints.

The second objective of this study is to explore the approach used by Islamic Education teachers during online teaching. Based on the findings of the second research question, the themes identified were synchronised and asynchronised.

The study also provided an in-depth insight into the teaching and learning approaches of the participants. Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 3, started their online classes by getting to know their students and exploring some basic background information before proceeding with the lesson. – ‘... examine the student’s family background so that I can find out, any of my students who have device problems. This student I will exclude or grant leniency if he or she does not attend the Meet.’ Then, the participants would register their students’ attendance using the prescribed form – ‘... mark the attendance of students every time they attend a Meet... indicate also every task they have performed... There is a special form I made...’ The teachers would personally address any issues regarding student attendance – ‘Asked personally to the students who did not attend/did not send assignments to me.’

This study also demonstrates the online and offline approaches used by the participants. Islamic educators used various mediums such as Google Meet, Google Classroom, PowerPoint slides, video, Wordwall and Quizizz – ‘I use various methods to attract my students to attend Meet. I use slides, videos, Wordwall games, build quizzes in Quizizz, Exercises in Google Classroom.’ In addition, Participant 1 conducted interactive games during online lessons – ‘Using also the method of playing while learning, for example, after teaching one topic, before entering the next topic, I will give puzzles and so on. They will also race to complete Quizizz live.’

It was interesting to note that Participant 1 used reward techniques to keep students engaged during online classes – ‘Rewards to any of my students who complete assignments and their answers are correct. This was made since Pkp 1.’ The study also provided additional support on assessments performed during online classes. Participant 1 generally evaluated the work once students had submitted their assignments – ‘... Immediately assessed each submitted task.’ Finally, Participant 1 would record observations of the student’s behaviour in the designated system – ‘... include good behaviour in the Student Personality System (SSDM) of every student who attends the Meet.’ Meanwhile, Participants 2 and 3 from SMK Taman Semarak completed a form using Google Forms in the Delima Portal for each class conducted either online or offline.

In comparison, Participants 2 and 3 often used WhatsApp and Telegram as their communication and distance learning tools. They found these platforms easier to use and most students had access to them – ‘Or the easiest will be WhatsApp, Telegram, in PDPR we still use textbooks but relaxed.’ This is supported by previous research by Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison (2020) and Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) in which teachers were found to often used platforms for online learning, including Microsoft Teams, Zoom or Google Meet, plus Google Classroom, Skype and Edmodo. In addition, teachers made short video clips on specific content for more effective learning and interaction.

Table 2 summarises the approaches and synchronised and asynchronised themes used by Islamic Education teachers in implementing online teaching and learning.

Table 2. Summary of themes and sub-themes for the approaches used by Islamic Education Teachers to teach online

Category	Theme	Sub-theme
Medium/approach	Synchronise	Google Meet Zoom Quizizz Live FB Live
	Asynchronise	Google Classroom WhatsApp Telegram Google Forms

6. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the education sector in Malaysia. Educators such as Islamic Education teachers made special efforts to ensure that their students were not left behind. They worked extremely hard to be creative and modify conventional teaching methods by keeping abreast of technological advancements. Online learning in the new normal era requires the unwavering commitment and support of

parents to assist educators in the learning process. Parents need to understand the new normal of education, provide adequate space and time for their children to attend online classes, and monitor their learning sessions and school work. Undoubtedly, the cooperation and undivided commitment of students are critical to the success of Islamic Education online.

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