Exploring the New Identity of Islamic Boarding School Based on Critical Challenges, Changes and Instructional Management in Post Covid-19 Pandemic

Agustian Ramadana Putera1*, Wiwik Wijayanti2, Theophile Niyonsaba3
1,2Educational Management, graduate School of Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia
3Biology Education, graduate school of Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia
*email : agustianramadana.2019@student.uny.ac.id

DOI: https://doi.org/10.31603/tarbiyatuna.v12i2.5164

ABSTRACT

Many schools are striving to continue with normal learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has greatly altered human life. Therefore, this study aimed to reveal the state of instructional management at Manbaul Ulum Islamic boarding school in Indonesia by recapping the challenges and changes teachers encounter. Descriptive methods and a qualitative approach were used to collect data from teachers working at Islamic boarding schools. Furthermore, a substantial portion of data was collected through in-depth interviews with five voluntary teachers. Based on the results, the success of instructional management should be the main focus in all the academic or religious activities at Islamic boarding schools. In addition, social, technological, and pedagogical challenges were experienced in implementing this new learning system. The sleeping arrangements in dormitories were disrupted due to the health protocols instituted to avert the adverse effects of the pandemic. Overall, different schools witnessed diverse challenges of varying magnitude.

Keywords: E-Learning; Islamic Boarding School; Learning Management; Challenges; Change

ABSTRAK

INTRODUCTION

The disruption of the education system due to the covid-19 pandemic called for urgent intervention by adopting different learning methods. Initially, many institutions used physical learning where teachers and students could interact one-on-one. However, the pandemic necessitated the implementation of online learning and other unutilized teaching opportunities at various institutional levels (Almaiah et al., 2020). For instance, the pandemic has transformed the education system to 4.0, where learning is conducted by utilizing advanced technology (Adelayanti, 2020). Currently, learners are familiar with the online learning system making it no longer challenging (Almaiah et al., 2020).

According to (UNESCO 2020), the closure of schools has led to adverse effects on teachers and students. However, implementing an online digital learning system could efficiently address this disparity. Many researchers acknowledge that e-learning tools play a viable and crucial role during this millennial era. Moreover, instructional management through the e-learning system is geared towards upgrading deliberate management, planning, delivery, and tracking the teaching progress. Despite its role in supporting the learning system, teaching management from all levels, including instructors, schools, and higher institutions should collaborate to ease students’ learning during these difficult moments.

Most schools have experienced several challenges since the pandemic began, including the lack of proper gadgets for learning and inadequate materials for carrying out online assignments. Nonetheless, the online learning system is slowly gaining popularity due to the continued improvement and the regular updating of its content. In addition, it is more stable, carries interesting information, is affordable, and flexible. Students have quickly adapted to the system since they easily get the learning content into their portable devices at home.

The effectiveness of online learning exclusively depends on the information system's capabilities. That is why scholars questioned the credibility of the online learning system considering the inequality within the social hierarchy. Also, the success of any new system depends on its utility by users (Aini et al., 2020). Thus, in the online learning system, students’ acceptance and flexibility are considered primary indicators for a better
outcome. Many studies address the issues related to the adoption of online learning in most countries in the world. According to Al-Rahmi et al. (2016), teachers employed the TAM with IDT model to investigate some critical factors that affected the effectiveness of the online learning system for Malaysian students. The findings revealed that relative advantages, observability, trialability, perceived compatibility, complexity, and enjoyment were the main factors that significantly influenced students’ decision to use a given e-learning system (Salloum et al., 2019). The overall results indicated that four factors, including innovativeness, quality, trust, and knowledge sharing, improved acceptance of students' online learning system. Al-Gahtani (2016) found that the most significant determinants of online learning acceptance were recapped as playfulness, self-efficacy, and anxiety.

Eltahir (2019) indicated that introducing e-learning systems in developing countries remains a big issue due to the digital divide. Consequently, the challenges related to adapting to the online learning system are constantly reported. The challenges experienced in this study can be grouped into four categories, including technological, individual, cultural, and difficulties encountered while undertaking the enrolled course. These challenges vary from one country to another due to different cultures, means, contexts, and readiness. According to Aini et al. (2020); Aung & Khaing (2016), lack of ICT knowledge for both students and teachers, poor network infrastructure, and weakness in content development were the main challenges for online system adoption in developing countries. Another study conducted by Kanwal and Rehman (2017) revealed that system characteristics, internet experience, and computer self-efficacy were the main issues that hindered the successful adoption of the online learning system in Pakistan.

Despite the numerous studies on the implementation of online learning during the pandemic, the study intends to contribute to the existing literature by investigating the challenges encountered, adopted changes, and online learning management strategies. The study will be conducted in Indonesia's Islamic boarding school, reflecting challenges experienced in developing countries.

The teaching system swabbed from conventional to e-learning is related to teaching strategies and upgrading learning management policies towards embracing the online learning system. This will provide space and take advantage of available opportunities in generating and nurturing effective learning management in Islamic boarding schools, evidenced by the activeness of both instructors and students and how they administer the challenges encountered. According to Roddy et al.(2017) and Khotibul Uمام (2021) points of view, quality, appropriateness, intensive, and time are the leading indicators of both conventional and online learning effectiveness (Fathiyatussa 2021, Almaiah et al., 2020, Fahham 2020).

According to Langley et al. (2003) and Namin (2019), changes in learning and teaching patterns will certainly not be disassociated from the school system's
management. Therefore, learning management is defined by Meng-Fang Tsai & Jo-Chi Jao as an activity in the form of an effort performed cooperatively with a group of individuals who are crewmembers of an educational organization. The purpose of this latter activity is to achieve predetermined instructional goals by using properly existing resources and employing management functions in the wake of achieving goals efficiently and effectively (Loizou Raouna & Lee, 2018) & (Tsai & Jao, 2020). The minister of religion released a learning guideline for pesantren and other religious education institutions to mitigate the challenges encountered during the pandemic, specifically in Islamic boarding schools. Although it constantly needs to be updated, stakeholders must support and empower the online learning system. This will ease the implementation of the new paradigm of instruction, in which every religious boarding school is required to integrate technology in teaching. Besides, many online platforms (e-learning) are effective, such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Google, Zoom, and others. Notably, a study to establish the use of WhatsApp application in physics education assessment showed that it positively impacted students’ activeness in discussion for both face-to-face and online learning (Fathiyatussa, 2021).

The investigation centers around the instructional management enacted in pesantren education identified the challenges faced during the Covid-19 pandemic. Anchored by the proportion audited above, the study will directly contribute to educational needs in the instructional domain and Islamic boarding schools. Remarkably, one of the key indicators to the school's success is dependent on instructional management (Leithwood & Levin, 2010). Therefore, learning is dependent on how the Islamic boarding schools adopt and manage the online system towards achieving educational goals. The study will attempt to explain the phenomenon of effective learning management in Manbaul Ulum Islamic boarding school.

As stated in the preceding section, this sudden shift impacted the quality and effectiveness of education centers since results show that not all students can afford a good internet connection and compatible devices. According to (Girik Allo 2020), online learning is less optimal and poorly packaged, leading to mentally and materially unpreparedness for parents, teachers, and students. Parents have replaced the role of teachers, which has become a contributing factor to the weekly learning system. Teachers recommend that the method of mitigating unskilled teachers’ unpreparedness as parents is included. E-learning requires proper training and time for adaptation and proper implementation. In addition, the principles of online courses should be student-centered (Kebritchi et al., 2017).

Moreover, it involves collaboration with peers and good course content to enhance active online learning. According to Rapanta et al.(2020), developing online course content should combine collaborative and reflective activities, clear assessment criteria, and technology integration, which has proved to be a significant challenge.
Moreover, lack of visual and face-to-face interaction with students is another challenge instructors face as they struggle to deliver the course content and engage the students. Subsequently, this drives them to feel minimal control over their classes. Therefore, this study explores the main challenges encountered and changes the online learning system requires during the pandemic at Islamic boarding schools. The study will also establish the extent of the effectiveness of online learning management.

**METHOD**

The study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive method to explore challenges encountered and obtain meaningful and in-depth responses about learning management. The main respondents were teachers from Pondok pesantren Manbaul Ulum Kabupaten Banjar Islamic boarding school. Moreover, primary and secondary data were explored to formulate the objectives of the study. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered through an online interview consisting of specific questions. The semi-structured interview was performed in two-way communication between the interviewer and the study respondents to promote conversational interaction and an extensive gathering of relevant data. Additionally, an online interview with all teachers at Islamic boarding schools was guided by several questions emerging from the study objectives, encompassing several aspects of learning management and critical challenges faced during the covid-19 pandemic as well as changes exacerbated in the learning process.

The data collection process involved conducting interviews, describing and synthesizing the data, and reflecting the study findings. From the onset, informed consent was sought from all participants before engaging them in the study. The respondents' participation was utterly anonymous for the public and voluntary. Further, the interview questions were centered on three main aspects: the challenges encountered, changes experienced, and the management of the online educational system during the covid-19 pandemic. Synthesizing and reflection were made based on common opinions in the perspective of the scale used.

Moreover, a summary was drawn from the analyzed data and thematic ideas discussed based on subjective opinions highlighting the challenges encountered, changes experienced, and the perception of online learning management. From the analysis, the study realized that both teachers and students were facing some challenges due to the effect of the covid-19 pandemic. Overall, there have been unprecedented challenges, daily behaviors, and collaboration between teachers and students.

It is worth mentioning that the online interview was audio recorded using a recorder application on a smartphone after seeking permission from the respondents and serving their anonymity. A short debriefing was executed to allow the respondents to ask questions, make comments or rectifications. After that, the collected data was transcribed and analyzed with elaborate discussions.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section showcases the challenges encountered during the implementation of online learning and instructional management during the covid-19 pandemic. The results will explain the outcomes based on the theoretical methodology applied as follows:

1. Learning Management During The Covid-19 Pandemic

Due to the pandemic, the education system was greatly affected, leading to the adoption of new ways of learning, such as using online platforms. The results indicated that whatsapp, youtube, google meet, and zoom conferences were among the most popular learning platforms. Fundamentally, online learning involves digital technology where teachers and students do not interact face-to-face. It is a flexible method since individuals learn without space and time restriction (Dhawan, 2020). Furthermore, to effectively maintain online learning, there is a need to understand digital technology and its application in accessing the learning content while having mutual interaction with others (Fathiyatussa, 2021).

The function of instructional management is supported by four components, including planning, organization, instructional leadership (directing, coordinating), and learning evaluation (Ibrahim et al., 2017). The questions asked during the interview session were founded on media utilization and sought to assess the effectiveness of online learning in delivering knowledge to students. The results revealed that all respondents chose a multi-functional, easy to access and not complicated handling media platform. Before using any app for learning, teachers ensured that all students were not constrained by the media platform considered. This was performed by inquiring from students about their preferred platform.

The results indicated that learning institutions should structure and organize online learning to obtain maximum results. Furthermore, it was indicated that teachers experienced difficulties organizing learning sessions using online platforms. This resulted from teachers lacking the fundamental knowledge of opening a personal email account. This telephone number is integrated with various applications to provide virtual classes in google classroom and enable whatsapp groups for each class. Online learning became more challenging to teachers handling many groups due to the numerous accounts created. Time constraint was another challenge, specifically when the teaching time was close, forcing teachers to multi-task.

Instructional leadership was considered a crucial factor in ensuring the successful implementation of the online learning system. Burgess et al. (2014) explained that leadership is a person's ability to influence others to do what they are voluntarily instructed to achieve. The covid-19 pandemic made it harder for teachers to become learning leaders though they adopted various ways to foster learning motivation for their students. Although teachers experienced problems in
programming and editing, they were able to integrate motivational words in learning videos to attract students’ attention. It was discovered that motivational words presented to students in videos stick in their minds, unlike when conveyed orally. Many students confessed to experiencing the proximity of teachers to them when they watched videos through whatsapp and google classroom. However, the drastic change from the traditional system to online learning made it difficult for students to adjust their learning styles. For instance, in the collection of tasks, the students may not be burdened to submit tasks according to the time limit without being given any sanctions. This is the right opportunity for teachers to advance technical knowledge and pay attention to students and all their shortcomings encountered.

Evaluating learning helps to conclude whether learning was effective. Evaluation can also be aimed as part of the accountability to various education stakeholders, specifically the parents (Smith & Benavot, 2019, Hooge et al., 2012). However, from the results, it was noted that many teachers were unable to formulate their evaluation instruments taken from existing books with some adjustments. This means that it will be difficult to apply the experiences during the pandemic and before (Coman et al., 2020, Irfan et al., 2020, Rusmiati et al., 2020). For instance, a teacher might be more generous in awarding marks during the covid-19 to achieve predetermined standards (Watkinson, 2013). Objective and quality assessment is a fixed value that teachers must observe irrespective of the circumstances (Isnaini et al., 2021). However, maintaining integrity in online assessment is quite challenging (Gamage et al., 2020).

2. Effective Learning Management in The New Normal of The Pandemic

The effectiveness of online learning is characterized by the activeness of teachers and students during the study sessions. In other words, the more active teachers and students are, the more effective learning would be (Tharayil et al., 2018). According to Judd (2012), the quality of teaching, appropriateness, intensity, and time are the main indicators of learning effectiveness. According to teachers’ opinion, the discussion method involves learning content by exchanging ideas and opinions between teachers and students.

As the new normal era progresses, the islamic boarding school is gradually updating the methods considered effective to ensure learning meets the set objectives. Using the same strategies and learning methods, al-qur’an services, memorization and rehearsal practices, and learning of kitab kuning are ongoing through whatsapp and youtube (Anas Hidayat dkk, 2021). Interviews from some teachers revealed that memorizing Al-Qur’an was hardly executed at the onset of the pandemic. At the moment, the change is considerable since online learning starts at 16.00 WITA each day. Students must conform to teachers first before they start a video call. This is
performed systematically according to the number of students attending the class. Initially, it was somehow challenging to assist these students because of the restrictions such as physical interaction.

As far as the evaluation material is concerned, each student must submit a resume assignment that teachers assess as a form of attendance performance at the end of the day or week (depending on teacher availability). Also, ‘Kitab Kuning’ was not an exception. Its learning has been effected since students conduct weekly learning sessions through YouTube live streaming. Likewise, during the Al-Qur’an program, students have to summarize each session to prove their presence in the scheduled ‘Kitab Kuning’ study. Teachers are solely responsible for the teaching material that must be delivered to students. In other words, the challenges experienced at the start of the pandemic are getting solved gradually. Teachers from Manbaul Ulum Islamic school were singled out for their exceptional role in instructional management.

3. **Some of the Critical Challenges of Online Learning at Islamic Boarding School**

The rapid developments in technology have made online education possible and easy for many (Sahidin, 2018). As one of many other fundamental areas of human development, education is at the brink of decline. Untenable challenges have been encountered from tertiary institutions such as universities to high schools while implementing online learning and regulating effective online instructional management during the pandemic.

According to (Albert Sangra et al., 2012), online learning is based on four main categories, namely technology, delivery system, communication, and educational paradigms. Thus, these so-called categories can lead our identification and bring together the challenges encountered in online learning, specifically at Islamic boarding schools (Rauf & Amin, 2021). Mohamed Abd El-Hamed Diab & Fouad Elgahsh (2020) identified barriers to online learning as personal, attitudinal, and contextual inhibitors. Furthermore, the challenges faced by Islamic boarding schools were collected based on such patterns categorized into technological, pedagogical, and social challenges, respectively. The following sections showcase the gist of each of the challenges.

**a. Social Challenges**

Notwithstanding impacts plagued by the disease, covid-19 has also affected societies and crumpled economies of many countries across the globe (COVID-19: Human Development on Course to Decline This Year for the First Time since 1990, 2020) (Gurajena et al., 2021). For instance, in Islamic boarding schools, teachers and students experienced some kind of loneliness due to health protocols. From being used to working together, sleeping together, and doing prayer together, to undertaking these daily routines at a personal level has not been easy. Also, digital
disparities existed across many schools, and nearly all students lacked access to learning materials (Khotibul Umam, 2021).

b. Technological Challenges

Most Islamic boarding schools have experienced difficulties implementing online learning due to a lack of internet connectivity, digital skills, unreliable internet services, and others (Khomsah & Muassomah, 2021). Students and teachers must access the required technology and other mandatory online learning materials (Coman et al., 2020, Hanafi et al., 2021, Dhawan, 2020).

According to teachers, the technological aspect is one of the necessary factors that ensure success in implementing an online instructional system. One expert added that the role played by technological factors is indispensable for a successful online learning experience. For instance, besides an institution having the necessary software and hardware for online learning, users must possess the technical skills to operate these systems to reap the benefits.

c. Pedagogical Challenges

Since there was no time to waste before implementing online learning, the lack of knowledge and skills to conduct the exercise smoothly and effectively was constantly reported. Therefore, teachers in Islamic boarding schools need to be extensively trained on the teaching methods suitable for distance learning and how to integrate technology for the effective delivery of material to students (Efriana, 2021). To deal with the challenges beforehand, managers of schools, teachers, and other stakeholders should be committed.

CONCLUSION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools, specifically the Islamic boarding institutions, have integrated online-based learning methods. The pandemic has awakened education stakeholders, particularly the Kyai, school principals, and pesantren teachers, to join hands to build a robust education system. In Islamic boarding schools, both teachers and pesantren leaders have constantly implemented informed decisions regarding the prevention of the coronavirus. However, online learning has faced critical obstacles arising from teachers and students. The interviews revealed that teachers were socially isolated due to the health protocols, lacked technological know-how and reliable internet services, and pedagogical challenges. This study contributes to changes regarding the effective instructional management during covid-19, as revealed by the Manbaul Ulum school case study. The findings represent a novel contribution to be reviewed and used by the school policymakers for ensuring successful online learning. To answer the study inquiry, questions for the interview were tailored to determine the role of teachers in averting learning difficulties occasioned by the pandemic. The results were anchored on three organizing themes, including challenges affecting online learning in Islamic
boarding schools, changes in the learning system, and the kind of instructional management applied. Based on the data collected, it can then be concluded that the effectiveness of online learning is dependent on the methods used. Furthermore, the instructional management strategy has utilized popular social media applications such as whatsapp and youtube to help to conduct school programs, including memorizing the Al-Qur’an.

ACKNOWLEDGE

The author most sincerely thanks the academic supervisor, Dr. Wiwik Wijayanti, M. Pd, Theophile Niyonsaba (proofreader), teachers, and Manbaul Ulum Islamic boarding school, Banjar Regency.

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