



## Research Article

# Analysis of Islamic Religious Education Learning Policy During the Pandemic: Opportunities and Challenges

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## Abstract

This study aims to determine the impact of the distance learning policy during the pandemic on Islamic religious education teaching, as well as the opportunities and challenges faced by Islamic religious education lecturers at Alma Ata University. The study uses weekly evaluations of online learning sessions. The impact of the distance learning policy led lecturers to better understand and master technology for online media in each lesson, recognize the obstacles faced by students in online learning, and provide solutions for them. Alma Ata University has implemented e-learning for students, which can be accessed through the web using the internet. The results of this study show that in order to implement distance learning effectively, lecturers must be responsive and innovative to ensure that the teaching process runs smoothly.

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## Introduction

Currently, Indonesian education is faced with the policy of distance learning after the Minister of Education and Culture's decree to anticipate the spread of COVID-19. This is based on the Minister of Education and Culture's circular letter Number 36962/MPK/HK/2020 regarding online learning and working from home to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As a consequence of this policy, educational institutions replaced face-to-face learning with online learning (Arora & Srinivasan, 2020). The circular also suggests the use of technology as a tool for teaching and learning. This use of technology is necessary because learning is conducted remotely. Distance learning refers to a learning process where the teacher and students do not meet in person but interact through media to conduct the teaching and learning activities (Prawiyogi et al., 2020).

The distance learning policy presents its own challenges for Islamic religious education educators, who are required to use technology effectively for teaching. Educators are expected to be ready to deliver online lessons efficiently and be creative in the teaching process. Distance learning teaches teachers to respond quickly and be prepared for change, as well as to understand the conditions and situations of students and taking appropriate actions to provide effective teaching and support. Therefore, lecturers are presented with both challenges and opportunities to learn and apply both visual and audiovisual technology.

Innovations in information technology should encourage lecturers to develop their competencies and insights, particularly for Islamic Religious Education lecturers. Challenges for students include unstable internet connections, areas prone to natural disasters, limited data quotas causing slow responses to lecturers, late submission of assignments, and sometimes difficulty in understanding the material

provided by the lecturers. These issues are important topics for research, as they provide insights for evaluating Islamic religious education learning in the future, especially if similar distance learning policies are implemented again. This study aims to provide knowledge about the challenges and opportunities in Islamic religious education teaching under the distance learning policy.

This research will be conducted by Alma Ata University, focusing on distance learning in Islamic religious education. This learning at Alma Ata University uses e-learning that can be accessed via the web and the internet. Additionally, Islamic religious education learning utilizes applications such as WhatsApp and Google Meet. This needs to be analyzed to understand the opportunities and challenges faced by Islamic religious education lecturers in innovating their teaching methods and improving their technological expertise.

## Methodology

In this study, a qualitative research approach was used. The data collection techniques employed in this study were interviews and observations. The interviews were conducted by the researcher to gather information related to distance learning in the Islamic religious education subject with teachers at Alma Ata University, through direct analysis. In the observation phase, the researcher was directly involved in the implementation of distance learning conducted by Alma Ata University in the educational process.

## Result

### *The Impact of Distance Learning Policy During the Pandemic*

The policy of distance learning during the pandemic has brought changes, particularly in the field of education. The process of face-to-face teaching and learning has shifted to online learning. This transition aligns with the policy set to

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prevent the spread of COVID-19. With the implementation of distance learning, schools must act swiftly to ensure that the learning process can continue effectively. For example, the Alma Ata University responded to the distance learning policy by providing workshops for teachers on learning media. This initiative was participated in by all faculty members, including the lecturers of Islamic Religious Education. Distance learning can be seen as the implementation of learning in the 4.0 era, where the interaction between teachers and students takes place using learning applications connected to the internet.

Distance learning is defined as formal education based on institutions where learning groups are separated, and telecommunication systems are used to connect learners, learning resources, and instructors. With the introduction of distance learning, lecturers are automatically required to learn technology. Since teachers and lecturers are at the forefront of education, they must be able to adapt and utilize technology in teaching.

In theory, learning in the 4.0 era makes teaching and learning easier for both educators and learners through interactive methods. However, Alma Ata University is still in the process of adjusting to this system. The university has made efforts to ensure that online teaching activities run smoothly, allowing students to engage in learning. The university's administration first held a discussion with the rector to decide which application would be used for online learning. The decision was made to create an e-learning platform.

Based on the researcher's observation, the e-learning system is accessed via the Google web, by visiting the link "elearning.almaata.sch.id". Lecturers and students can log in to the e-learning platform using their usernames and passwords (NIM). Through e-learning, lecturers can organize classes that students can follow based on class names and course subjects, share materials, assignments, and check attendance. Students can follow the courses according to the class they are enrolled in, access the materials provided by the lecturer, complete assignments, and fill in the attendance list. E-learning is a learning process that utilizes electronic media, particularly the internet.

The implementation of distance learning at Alma Ata University has both positive and negative impacts. The positive aspect is that online learning can be accessed anywhere. However, there are challenges, particularly regarding the infrastructure and resources available to students. Despite efforts, distance learning still faces weaknesses, such as:

1. Poor internet access, which causes students to be unable to complete attendance on time and delays in assignment submissions.
2. Students are slow in their learning activities
3. Students are inconsistent with their study schedules

Online learning is expected to be a solution to current educational challenges. It represents one of the innovations in education, addressing the problems faced today. However, the reality is that online learning cannot be uniformly applied in all parts of Indonesia due to varying conditions in different regions and the different challenges they face.

Currently, the focus is on making learning engaging for students, ensuring that the content is understood, and that students are receptive to the material. There are both pros and cons, with the cons outweighing the pros. The positive side is that teachers are required to master IT skills, while the negative aspects include issues such as poor signal quality, limited

access to smartphones, limited data plans, and students relying on chatting data packages. These factors hinder the online learning process.

Based on the interviews, Alma Ata University decided to adopt online learning in response to these issues. This decision was a contribution from the university to help students navigate the challenges of distance learning. The combination of online learning and face-to-face methods became a democratic decision to bridge the gap for students facing difficulties. The shift in learning methods significantly impacts the effectiveness of learning.

Online learning requires teachers to evaluate its effectiveness and adjust to the needs of students. However, in practice, online learning can hinder the effectiveness of education due to the limited technological skills of both teachers and students, insufficient infrastructure, limited internet access, and the lack of initial budgeting for such a shift. This shows that not all stakeholders are fully ready to accept the decision to implement online learning.

### *Challenges of Distance Learning*

Distance learning presents a challenge for both teachers and students to adapt to new methods. For teachers of Islamic religious education at Alma Ata University, the main challenge is transitioning from face-to-face to online teaching. They were accustomed to in-person teaching where they could observe students' reactions during lessons. With face-to-face learning, teachers can assess students' understanding of the material more effectively. However, in online learning, it becomes difficult to gauge students' reactions, which makes it challenging for teachers to know whether students are following the lesson and comprehending the material.

Students also face challenges in accessing learning activities due to issues with infrastructure and resources. These challenges make it difficult for Islamic religious education teachers to understand students' difficulties and provide solutions. As a result, Islamic Religious Education classes at Alma Ata University use e-learning, Google Meet, and WhatsApp as teaching platforms.

Through these applications, special WhatsApp groups are created for Islamic religious education classes, coordinated by academic lecturers and the subject lecturers. This is done to make it easier for students to engage in learning activities. WhatsApp is still used because students often face difficulties logging into e-learning due to limited data plans, and WhatsApp is the only platform they can access. Therefore, learning activities begin with attendance through WhatsApp class groups, after which the teacher shares links to materials uploaded on e-learning. The teacher also explains the material via Google Meet in the form of a presentation, and assignments are given through Google Forms.

For students who are able to log into e-learning, they can mark attendance, access the material, and complete assignments through the platform. WhatsApp-based learning is a form of synchronous communication via chat, where communication is done through written messages, so students cannot see their teachers or peers directly. Some lecturers also use WhatsApp for online teaching. In online learning, teachers must provide clear instructions through written communication.

Teachers also need to regularly check students' attendance and assignment submissions at the end of each lesson. Furthermore, teachers must actively inquire about any

difficulty's students may face and provide alternatives for those encountering barriers.

### ***Opportunities for Developing Islamic Religious Education Teaching Method***

In response to the distance learning policy prompted by the pandemic, Alma Ata University has been proactive in providing workshops for teachers on learning media, particularly e-learning platforms. These training sessions offer an opportunity to develop teachers' competencies and teach them to utilize technology effectively. Besides technological skills, teachers must also be able to innovate in their teaching methods, strategies, models, and media, tailored to the needs and characteristics of students. This presents an opportunity for Islamic religious education teachers to enhance their methods for distance learning. Teachers need to be more creative and innovative in exploring teaching activities. Additionally, teachers' competencies in distance learning are key to ensuring the success of the learning process. Therefore, teachers must continuously enrich their skills and improve their competencies.

One important competency for distance learning is digital competency. Digital competency is essential for utilizing digital media in online education. It involves the ability to communicate knowledge effectively, efficiently, accurately, critically, and creatively, manage information, collaborate, create content based on students' needs, and share it through the appropriate media.

The use of information technology plays a significant role in distance learning. The rapid advancement of information technology provides great opportunities to be used in the learning process. Digital-based learning has become an alternative for Islamic religious education in the digital age. Using digital learning tools is a step toward innovation and creativity, making it a valuable opportunity for developing Islamic religious education teaching methods.

Based on research, when students are given material, it is often delivered through PowerPoint presentations. The material is aligned with Islamic religious education curriculum. The research recommends using the e-learning platform to deliver material via educational videos. The e-learning platform can be an alternative since it is more accessible and can be accessed repeatedly.

Regarding online learning, a combination of WhatsApp groups, e-learning, and YouTube can be utilized. For example, the learning session can begin on WhatsApp, attendance can be taken through WhatsApp or e-learning, and students can be provided with links to the course material in the form of PowerPoint presentations uploaded to the platform, followed by an evaluation.

This approach provides opportunities to simplify the online learning process for both teachers and students, optimizing Islamic religious education learning innovation through technology. However, teachers need to learn and practice in order to apply and develop these methods. Since the success of technological innovation in teaching.

### **Discussion**

The research identifies interpersonal skills as the primary area needing development. Challenges include teachers' difficulties in effectively collaborating with parents and community members, indicating either a lack of skills or inadequate preparation. Implementing professional development programs that focus on interpersonal skills can

significantly improve teaching effectiveness. Educational policies should support continuous professional development in this area, providing resources and training opportunities for teachers. For example, workshops on communication and collaboration strategies can be integrated into teacher training programs. Additionally, schools should encourage a culture of collaboration where teachers can share best practices and learn from each other.

Work-related motivation is the second priority. Educational policies should include measures to enhance teacher motivation, such as recognizing regulation techniques, such as stress management, goal setting, and reflective practices. Schools should provide support systems, such as mentorship and counseling services, to help teachers manage their emotional and professional challenges. Policies should promote a supportive work environment that prioritizes teacher well-being.

Professional beliefs rank as the fourth priority. Teachers need to align their educational values with a commitment to student learning, but systemic and cultural barriers can hinder this alignment. Personal and institutional beliefs may conflict with broader educational goals, making it difficult for teachers to maintain a consistent and effective professional belief system. Schools can provide platforms for teachers to discuss and reflect on their educational values and practices, ensuring alignment with broader educational objectives.

The final priority is pedagogical content knowledge. Teachers' foundational pedagogical knowledge from their teaching experience supports curriculum management but requires continuous improvement. Continuous professional development is essential for maintaining and enhancing pedagogical content knowledge. Schools and educational authorities should provide regular training sessions on the latest teaching methods and technologies. Policies should promote culture of lifelong learning among teachers, encouraging to continually update skills and knowledge. These findings highlight the need for comprehensive strategies to support teachers in these areas, ultimately aiming to improve their performance and student outcomes.

Outstanding teaching practices and providing incentives for professional development. Schools can implement systems to regularly acknowledge and reward teachers' efforts and achievements. Providing opportunities for career advancement and professional growth can also help sustain teacher motivation.

The third priority involves self-regulation. Teachers face challenges in managing their own learning and emotional responses, which are crucial for effective teaching and leadership. Cultural values, societal beliefs, and personal backgrounds influence self-regulation practices, presenting a significant challenge in the Indonesian context. Professional development programs should include training on self.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The policy of distance learning has had both positive and negative impacts. While it presents new challenges for educators, particularly in mastering technology and adapting teaching methods, it also offers opportunities for Islamic religious education teachers to enhance their technological skills and apply them in the teaching process. Educators are increasingly required to improve their competencies to effectively integrate technology into teaching and learning. Innovation in Islamic religious education teaching can only be

realized if teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to make effective use of technology. To support this development, Islamic religious education teachers should receive continuous professional training that focuses on integrating technology into education, helping them adapt to online teaching methods and use various digital platforms effectively. In addition, governments and educational institutions should ensure that teachers and students have access to the necessary technological infrastructure to make distance learning more efficient and impactful. Islamic religious education teachers are also encouraged to innovate by creating engaging, interactive, and relevant learning materials that keep students interested and involved, even in a remote setting. Furthermore, collaboration with various stakeholders, including educational communities and technology experts, can provide essential support for teachers in developing better teaching methods and optimizing the use of technology in religious education. With proper guidance and support, Islamic religious education teachers can not only overcome the challenges posed by distance learning but also harness its opportunities to enhance the learning experience for their students.

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