

Analysis of Challenges and Opportunities of Online Learning for Islamic Religious Education Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of online learning in recent years has significantly influenced the teaching of Islamic Religious Education (IRE). This study analyzes the challenges and opportunities faced by Islamic Religious Education teachers in implementing online learning. The challenges include limited technological literacy among teachers and students, inadequate internet connectivity, lack of interactive media tailored to Islamic education, and difficulties in assessing students' spiritual attitudes. Conversely, online learning provides opportunities for innovation in teaching methods, the development of digital-based Islamic learning resources, and the flexibility to integrate global Islamic knowledge through virtual platforms. This research highlights that addressing these challenges requires comprehensive training for teachers, improvement of digital infrastructure, and the development of pedagogically appropriate e-learning materials. Furthermore, the adoption of blended learning models is suggested to optimize both technology and the humanistic values of Islamic education. The findings of this study contribute to formulating effective strategies for enhancing the quality of Islamic Religious Education in the digital era.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology (ICT) has brought significant changes to the world of education, including the learning process of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). This digital transformation has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced almost all educational activities to shift to online systems. The general trend shows that online learning is no longer merely an alternative but has become an integral part of the modern education system (Martin, Sun, & Westine, 2020; Susanto, Ali, & Hidayat, 2024). According to UNESCO data, more than 1.6 billion students in 190 countries were affected by school closures during the pandemic, prompting the use of digital platforms as learning tools. In the Indonesian context, the Ministry of Education and Culture also encouraged teachers to optimize

digital technology, whether through Learning Management Systems (LMS), video conferencing, or mobile applications. However, the social reality does not always align with expectations. Social facts on the ground indicate inequality in access to and utilization of technology, particularly among Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. Most PAI teachers are located in areas with limited internet infrastructure, a lack of technological devices, and low digital literacy. This creates a gap in the quality of learning that should be equally accessible. Furthermore, PAI teachers have a unique responsibility: instilling religious values, morals, and spirituality, which are inherently more effective through face-to-face interaction. Online learning is considered unable to fully replace the emotional closeness required in Islamic education (**Herdianti, Janah, & Susanto, 2025; Siswanto & Soeharno, 2024**).

The main issue that arises is how Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers can implement online learning effectively without compromising the essential Islamic values that must be instilled. These challenges include: limited teacher competency in operating technology, low interactivity between teachers and students, limited internet connectivity, and a lack of contextual digital teaching materials. Furthermore, the nature of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material, which is heavily influenced by affective and psychomotor dimensions, makes online learning emphasize cognitive aspects, often neglecting other dimensions. Consequently, online learning has the potential to become merely a formality without providing a meaningful learning experience. As a solution, innovative strategies are needed to integrate technology with religious values. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers must be equipped with digital literacy and pedagogical skills that are adaptive to changing times (**Bahrissalim & Fauzan, 2018**). Utilizing interactive platforms like Google Classroom, Zoom, or gamification-based applications can be one way to increase student participation. Furthermore, developing creative video-based learning media, Islamic preaching podcasts, and virtual communities can support the creation of a fun and spiritual learning environment. The government, educational institutions, and Islamic boarding schools also need ongoing support to ensure Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are able to adapt to changing learning paradigms.

A review of previous research shows that various studies have discussed online learning during the pandemic, but most have focused on general aspects of education, not specifically on Islamic Religious Education teachers. Research by Effendi et al. (**Muhammad Nur Effendi, Suriagiri, & Mudhiah, 2025**) emphasizes the challenges of e-learning in higher education, while research by Qomariyah and Magfiroh (**Qomariyah & Maghfiroh, 2022**) highlights the concept of emergency remote teaching during the pandemic. In Indonesia, several studies have revealed teachers' difficulties in adapting to technology, but studies focusing on Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are still limited. Research by Faqih and Sinta (**Faqihuddin & Sinta, 2024**) revealed that Islamic Religious Education teachers face obstacles in internalizing moral values through online media. However, the solutions offered are still normative and do not provide an empirical overview of teachers' innovative practices. This presents a research gap that needs further exploration.

The method used in this research is qualitative with a descriptive approach (**Huberman & Jhonny, 2014**). This method was chosen based on the need to explore the real-life experiences of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in facing challenges and utilizing opportunities for online learning. Through in-depth interviews, virtual observations, and document analysis, researchers will gain a holistic understanding of the dynamics that occur. A qualitative approach allows researchers to identify the adaptation strategies employed by teachers, the obstacles they

encounter, and the innovations that arise from limitations. This study aims to analyze the challenges faced by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in implementing online learning, identify opportunities that can be exploited, and formulate strategic recommendations to improve the effectiveness of technology-based learning. This research also aims to provide a practical contribution to the development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning models that are appropriate for the digital era without losing the essence of spiritual values.

The urgency of this research lies in the vital role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in shaping students' character. In the era of digital disruption, Islamic Religious Education teachers function not only as instructors but also as spiritual guides who must be able to utilize technology without sacrificing the substance of religious values. If this challenge is not anticipated, religious education will lose its relevance in an increasingly digitalized society. Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for the government and educational institutions in formulating technology-based teacher training policies. The novelty of this research is its focus on integrating the challenges and opportunities of online learning for Islamic Religious Education teachers, emphasizing contextual adaptation strategies. While previous research has focused more on technical constraints or only highlighted obstacles, this study seeks to uncover how Islamic Religious Education teachers can creatively utilize technology to instill Islamic values. This research also highlights the perspective of teachers as key actors in the digital transformation of Islamic education, not merely as objects of policy. Thus, this research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of technology-based religious education literature.

2. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type (Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2015). This approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring in depth the experiences of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in facing challenges and utilizing opportunities for online learning. The focus of the research is to describe phenomena that occur naturally without manipulation, so that the data obtained is contextual and in-depth. The research subjects were PAI teachers who teach at the junior high and senior high school levels in several regions who have experience in implementing online learning. The determination of informants was carried out using purposive sampling, namely the deliberate selection of informants based on certain criteria, including: (1) status as an active PAI teacher, (2) having experience teaching online for at least one semester, and (3) being willing to provide the necessary information. The number of informants was adjusted to the principle of saturation or until the data obtained was considered saturated.

Data collection techniques include three main methods, namely: (1) in-depth interviews using semi-structured guidelines to explore the experiences, obstacles, and strategies of Islamic Religious Education teachers in online learning; (2) virtual observation through an online learning platform to observe teacher and student interactions; and (3) document analysis in the form of lesson plans, digital learning media, and online learning activity records. Data analysis was carried out using the Miles & Huberman interactive model which includes three stages (Miles & Huberman, A, 1994): (1) data reduction to sort out relevant information, (2) presentation of data in narrative form, and (3) drawing conclusions through repeated verification. Data validity is maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques so that the research results can be trusted. This approach was chosen because it is able to provide a deep

understanding of the social realities experienced by Islamic Religious Education teachers, as well as identify opportunities and innovative strategies that can be applied in online learning.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges for Islamic Education Teachers in Online Learning

The rapid development of information technology should present opportunities for the world of education, including Islamic Religious Education (PAI). However, the reality on the ground shows that the implementation of online learning presents various challenges, particularly for PAI teachers. This is due to the different characteristics of PAI learning compared to other subjects, which tend to be more easily transferred to online media. PAI is not only oriented towards mastery of cognitive aspects, but also the development of attitudes (affective) and worship skills (psychomotor) (Setiadji, 2020). Therefore, the sudden shift to online learning has resulted in a variety of complex obstacles. Some of the main challenges faced by Islamic Religious Education teachers in online learning include limited access to technology, low digital literacy, difficulty in instilling moral values, and minimal social interaction.

The first and most dominant challenge faced by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers is limited access to technology and internet connections. In online learning, technological devices such as laptops, smartphones, and a stable internet connection are essential. However, not all teachers have these facilities. Many teachers, especially those in rural or remote areas, face a lack of adequate devices. Some teachers still use simple mobile phones with limited capacity, making it difficult to access video conferencing-based learning applications like Zoom or Google Meet. In addition to devices, the cost of internet data is also a burden. Teachers must pay additional fees each month to support smooth online learning, while some teachers have relatively limited incomes. Furthermore, internet network conditions in some areas are still far from stable. Signal disruptions often occur, especially in remote areas, hindering the smooth running of online learning. As a result, teachers cannot conduct virtual meetings optimally, and students lose the opportunity to interact in real time. These limitations have an impact on the quality of learning, which tends to decline (Sahroni, Furqoni, & Martoyo, 2025; Siswanto & Soeharno, 2024).

In addition to limited facilities, the low digital literacy of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers is also a major challenge. Not all PAI teachers have the technical skills to operate various online learning platforms. Before the pandemic, most teachers were more accustomed to using conventional methods such as lectures, discussions, and live Q&A sessions in class. The sudden shift to online learning requires teachers to master various applications such as Zoom, Google Classroom, WhatsApp Groups, and Learning Management Systems (LMS). However, in practice, many PAI teachers experience confusion when preparing digital materials, creating interactive presentations, or uploading student assignments through online platforms. These technical difficulties result in the learning process not going according to plan. In fact, some teachers end up resorting to simpler methods, such as sending materials in PDF files via WhatsApp without active interaction. This makes learning passive and less engaging for students. Low digital literacy also impacts teachers' creativity in developing learning media that are appropriate to the characteristics of PAI. For example, teachers still struggle to create engaging learning videos or utilize gamification-based applications to enhance student understanding. As a result, online PAI learning becomes monotonous and unable to capture students' attention. (Achmat, 2018).

The Islamic Religious Education (PAI)'s emphasis on developing noble morals makes online learning challenging. Religious education encompasses not only theory but also the practice of worship and exemplary behavior. In face-to-face learning, teachers can provide direct examples

of how to pray, perform ablution, or recite the Quran correctly. Teachers can also monitor student behavior, provide advice, and build emotional bonds, which are key to character formation. However, in online learning, all of this is difficult. Teachers cannot ensure that students are performing prayers on time, reciting the Quran with correct tajwid, or practicing moral values in their daily lives. In fact, monitoring student attitudes and behavior becomes nearly impossible. As a result, the affective and psychomotor dimensions of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning are neglected, while the primary focus is solely on cognitive aspects such as memorizing verses or understanding Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). Furthermore, the process of internalizing moral values requires ongoing personal interaction and role modeling. When interactions occur solely through a screen, the moral messages conveyed by teachers often fail to reach their full potential. This condition raises concerns about moral degradation among students due to weak supervision and instillation of religious values during online learning (Wahyu, Susanto, & Deden, 2023; Yahuda, Susanto, Widodo, Kolis, & Abdillah, 2023).

Another equally significant challenge is the reduced social interaction between teachers and students. In religious education, personal interaction is essential for building strong emotional bonds, enabling the instilling of spiritual values. However, online learning limits this interaction. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers frequently complain about the lack of student responsiveness during online learning. Many students merely attend virtual meetings without actively participating. Some students don't even turn on their cameras, preventing teachers from directly monitoring their engagement. This creates a rigid and non-interactive learning environment. Social interactions that typically occur through discussions, Q&A sessions, or religious practices at school are almost impossible to achieve. Furthermore, the emotional connection that has traditionally been a strength for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in guiding students is weakened. This emotional closeness is crucial for motivating students to practice religious teachings. With limited interaction, character building through role models and spiritual dialogue is difficult to achieve.

Taken together, these challenges demonstrate that online learning for Islamic Religious Education teachers is not merely a technical issue, but also a matter of the substance of religious education. Limited access to technology, low digital literacy, difficulties in instilling moral values, and minimal social interaction are issues that must be addressed immediately to ensure Islamic Religious Education remains relevant and meaningful in the digital age.

Opportunities and Potential of Online Learning for Islamic Education Teachers

While online learning presents significant challenges, it is undeniable that this learning model also offers numerous opportunities and positive potential that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers can capitalize on. The digital era has brought innovation to education, opening access to vast sources of knowledge, creating flexibility in the learning process, and encouraging teachers to develop new competencies. The following discussion outlines four key opportunities that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers can capitalize on in the face of changing learning paradigms (Aziz & Zakir, 2022).

One of the main advantages of online learning is the unlimited availability of learning resources. While Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers previously relied on printed textbooks and conventional materials, they now have access to a variety of digital content to enrich the learning process. For example, teachers can use Islamic preaching videos available on platforms like YouTube to explain topics such as aqidah (faith), fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), or morals in a more engaging way. Videos with visual illustrations, animations, and in-depth

explanations can help students more easily grasp abstract religious concepts. Furthermore, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers can utilize e-books and journal articles, available both for free and for a fee, to enrich their teaching resources. This access allows teachers to present more up-to-date and relevant information. Teaching materials are no longer limited to textbooks, which are sometimes difficult to update, but can instead be adapted to contemporary issues, such as Islamic social media ethics or moral challenges in the digital age. Teachers can also use digital Quran applications and interactive interpretations to provide students with in-depth understanding. This opens up opportunities for students to learn independently through technology, so that learning does not solely depend on virtual face-to-face meetings. Thus, access to extensive learning resources makes Islamic Education learning richer, more varied, and contextual (Afifatun, 2025).

Another opportunity emerging from online learning is innovation in media and learning methods. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers now have the opportunity to be creative in developing engaging and interactive digital learning media. For example, teachers can create learning videos with simple animations, use interactive PowerPoint presentations combined with audio, or even create Islamic education podcasts that students can listen to anytime. Furthermore, teachers can utilize gamification-based applications such as Kahoot, Quizizz, or Wordwall to package learning evaluations in the form of games. This approach not only makes the learning process more enjoyable but also increases students' motivation to actively participate. In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), quizzes on hadiths, Quranic verses, or Islamic history can be packaged in a game format, so students feel challenged and enthusiastic about learning. Utilizing social media also presents a significant opportunity for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube can be used to disseminate light-hearted yet meaningful educational content. For example, teachers can create short videos about Islamic etiquette, tips for maintaining morals online, or creatively packaged spiritual motivation. Social media allows religious messages to reach students in a way that aligns with their habits in the digital age. This innovative learning media not only helps deliver material effectively but also enhances the image of Islamic Religious Education teachers as technology-adaptive educators. This is crucial for Islamic Religious Education teachers to remain relevant amidst the changing learning patterns of millennials and Gen Z, who are familiar with the digital world (Qomarudin & Zuhri, 2025; Susanto, Widodo, & Kolis, 2023).

Online learning offers flexibility previously difficult to achieve in face-to-face learning. Teachers and students are no longer tied to a physical classroom, allowing learning to take place anytime and anywhere. For Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, this flexibility allows them to organize their teaching schedules more efficiently, especially those with teaching loads at multiple schools. This flexibility also benefits students. They can access learning materials at their own pace. For example, when teachers upload video recordings of lectures or explanations on platforms like Google Classroom or YouTube, students can watch them repeatedly until they fully understand. This greatly assists students with limited capacity to grasp the material quickly. Furthermore, the flexibility of time also facilitates the implementation of religious activities online. For example, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers can hold online religious studies, tafsir discussions, or Quranic recitation classes via Zoom at a mutually agreed-upon time. This flexibility allows students to continue receiving spiritual guidance even while at home. Thus, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning continues even without face-to-face sessions (Satriani & Putra, 2021).

Online learning forces teachers to step out of their comfort zones and develop new competencies, particularly in digital literacy and modern pedagogy. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, who previously relied solely on conventional methods, are now encouraged to master various learning technologies. This opportunity is crucial because it aligns with the demands of 21st-century competencies, which emphasize mastery of information technology. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers can take advantage of various online training courses offered by the government, educational institutions, or teacher communities. For example, training on creating instructional videos, using a Learning Management System (LMS), or strategies for managing virtual classrooms. Furthermore, teachers can learn independently through online tutorials available on YouTube or learning platforms like Coursera and Udemy. This increased competency impacts not only the quality of teaching but also teachers' professional development. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers who master technology will be more confident, highly competitive, and able to adapt to changing times. In the long term, this will improve the overall quality of Islamic religious education.

Overall, online learning not only presents challenges but also opens up significant opportunities for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to innovate, broaden their horizons, and improve their competencies. Access to extensive learning resources, innovative learning media, flexibility in time and place, and opportunities to develop digital skills are essential assets for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to create relevant, engaging, and meaningful learning in the digital age. By capitalizing on these opportunities, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are not only able to overcome existing limitations but also contribute to strengthening religious education that is adaptive to technological developments.

Islamic Education Teachers' Adaptation Strategies in Facing the Digital Era

The digital era has brought significant changes to the world of education, including Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching. The transformation from face-to-face to online learning requires Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to adapt quickly. This adaptation goes beyond technical changes, but also demands innovation in learning approaches to remain relevant to students' needs. In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers require effective strategies to face the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities of the digital era. Some strategies include training and improving digital competencies, developing technology-based learning media, collaborating with parents and communities, and strengthening spiritual values through digital platforms (Budiman, 2017; Paduli, 2025).

The first strategy Islamic Religious Education teachers must implement is to improve their digital competency through various training programs. The technological transformation in education demands that teachers master learning tools and applications such as Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom, Edmodo, and other Learning Management Systems (LMS). However, not all teachers possess these skills. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education teachers need to actively participate in workshops, webinars, or digital literacy training programs organized by the government, educational organizations, and teacher communities. In addition to technical expertise, Islamic Religious Education teachers must also understand the concepts of blended learning, flipped classrooms, and gamification. For example, teachers can learn how to create interactive videos with Canva, Powtoon, or Animaker, as well as how to upload and share materials through platforms like YouTube. By improving their digital competency, Islamic Religious Education teachers will not only be able to overcome technical barriers but also

leverage technology to create engaging and meaningful learning experiences for their students (Simamora & Farid, 2024; Supriyanti, Kurniawati, & Susanto, 2025).

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning has unique characteristics because it emphasizes not only cognitive aspects but also affective and psychomotor aspects. In the digital era, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers must be able to develop learning media that is not only informative but also inspiring and interactive. One concrete step is to create learning videos that present material on faith, morals, or worship with engaging visuals. These videos can be uploaded to YouTube, Google Classroom, or class WhatsApp groups. In addition to videos, teachers can also utilize Islamic preaching podcasts as a means of conveying religious messages. These podcasts can contain short studies, Islamic motivation, or questions and answers about religious issues. The use of podcasts provides flexibility for students because they can be listened to anytime and anywhere. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers can also create interactive digital-based modules, such as e-books equipped with video links, interactive quizzes, and supplementary reading materials. By utilizing technology, teachers can integrate gamification elements, for example, awarding badges or points to students who actively complete assignments or participate in online discussions. This innovation in technology-based learning media is one of the keys to the successful adaptation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in the digital era.

The next strategy is to strengthen collaboration with parents and the community. In online learning, teachers cannot fully supervise student activities. Therefore, the role of parents is crucial, especially in supporting children while studying at home. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers can maintain intensive communication with parents through WhatsApp or Telegram groups, providing guidance on how to support religious learning, and conveying information regarding assignments and worship activities. In addition to parents, teachers can also collaborate with religious communities, youth organizations, or religious study groups to create online programs to promote worship. For example, holding online tadarus (recitation of the Koran), group prayers, or regular study sessions via Zoom. This collaboration not only strengthens students' spiritual values but also creates an atmosphere of togetherness that is a hallmark of Islamic education.

The biggest challenge in online Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is instilling moral values and shaping students' character. To address this, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers must utilize digital platforms as a means of spiritual empowerment. One effective way is to create religious discussion groups on WhatsApp, Telegram, or other social media platforms. These groups can be used to share Islamic motivation, provide short sermons, or remind students of prayer times and sunnah acts of worship. Furthermore, teachers can hold prayer challenges, such as reading the Quran daily, memorizing prayers, or performing prayers on time, which are then reported through photos or videos in the group. This strategy not only fosters good habits but also fosters healthy competition among students. Thus, even though face-to-face interaction is limited, spiritual values can still be effectively instilled through digital innovation..

4. CONCLUSION

Online learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) presents challenges and opportunities that teachers must respond to adaptively. The main challenges include limited access to technology, low digital literacy, difficulties in instilling moral values, and reduced social interaction between teachers and students. This situation tends to emphasize the cognitive aspect

of online learning, neglecting the affective and psychomotor dimensions. However, online learning also offers significant opportunities, such as broad access to digital learning resources, opportunities for innovative learning media, flexibility in time and place, and encouragement for teachers to improve digital competencies. By capitalizing on these opportunities, PAI teachers can develop innovative strategies such as participating in digital literacy training, developing technology-based learning media, collaborating with parents and the community, and utilizing digital platforms to strengthen spiritual values. Therefore, the success of PAI learning in the digital era depends heavily on teachers' creativity in overcoming limitations and utilizing technology to support valuable and meaningful education. Future researchers are advised to examine the effectiveness of strategies implemented by teachers using quantitative or mixed-method approaches to obtain empirical data on the influence of these strategies on student learning outcomes. In addition, research needs to be conducted at different levels of education or in areas with diverse social characteristics to provide a broader comparative picture and generalization of findings.

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