

THE TEACHERS' STRATEGIES USED IN DISTANCE LEARNING DURING PANDEMIC COVID – 19 MTSN 2 KOTA KEDIRI

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ABSTRACT

Due to the arrival of COVID-19 in Indonesia, offline learning shifted to online learning, creating new challenges for both teachers and students. They began using new online platforms for their lessons, including an online meeting platform and WhatsApp groups for sharing information. A qualitative study was conducted by the researcher, who used interviews and documentation to gather data from English teachers at MTs Negeri 2 Kota Kediri. The study involved five teachers as participants. Another research tool used was documentation. The findings showed that ELMA was the main app supporting the learning process, as it allowed for activities like explaining materials, assigning tasks, recording attendance, and assessments. During the pandemic, teachers used ELMA and integrated it with other apps, which proved effective for distance learning. However, despite technology's help in the learning process, the study found that its use was not fully optimized due to issues with network connections and students' comprehension. Nevertheless, teachers were aware of these challenges and implemented strategies to address them, one of which included offering free weekly consultations for students who struggled with lessons. The teachers also applied various strategies to ensure the teaching and learning process ran smoothly.

Keywords:

Distance Learning, Online Platform, Strategy, Teaching Strategy

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Introduction

Learning is the process where students interact with educators and resources in a learning environment, which includes both teachers and students exchanging information. According to Smith, learning is the acquisition of new behavior or the modification of old behavior due to experience. David (1996) also describes learning as the process in which an organism changes its behavior as a result of experience. Through learning, students gain knowledge and skills that are important for their lives.

A method is a procedure or approach taken to achieve specific goals. A closely related term to both "method" and "learning" is technique, which refers to a specific way of solving problems in carrying out procedures. However, the learning process today faces significant challenges due to the ongoing pandemic. As we know, Indonesia and the world are grappling with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, a global epidemic. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a pandemic is declared when a new disease spreads worldwide. The term "pandemic" is also understood as an outbreak of a contagious disease affecting a wide geographical area. In the classical sense, a pandemic occurs when an epidemic spreads to several countries or regions. Pandemic outbreaks typically involve infectious diseases that continue to spread.

The negative impacts of pandemics are severe. They have infected millions of people, leading to widespread illness and thousands of deaths, posing a significant threat not only to the global population but also to the economy. Economic losses from pandemics can result in instability, including direct costs, long-term burdens, and indirect costs. The social impacts are also significant, including restrictions on travel, school closures, and the closing of markets and sports venues.

Pandemics impact various sectors, including healthcare, agriculture, education, transportation, tourism, and finance. In short, a pandemic threatens all aspects of the economy and social fabric (Drage, 2015). For instance, the education system is currently hindered by the pandemic, requiring everyone to switch to distance learning, even though some subjects can be taught remotely. As a result, teachers need a distance learning system to support education during the pandemic. In distance learning, teachers must consider different methods to facilitate indirect learning.

According to Clay (1999), distance learning refers to institution-based formal education where students and instructors are in separate locations, requiring an interactive telecommunications system to connect them. Perry and Rumble define "distance education" as an instructional activity that does not require students to be physically present in the classroom. Distance learning has seen significant development in research and practice over the past two decades since the first online class was launched in 1994. Research in the 1990s focused on emerging technologies, cyberspace-based learning communities, and support for instructors.

Supporting this research on education, the researcher reviewed several previous studies to validate the authenticity of the current study. The first study, conducted by Zainab, examined students' perspectives on distance learning in Pakistan. The second research, by Kevin, titled *Teachers Prepare to Make the Most of Distance Learning Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic*, indicated that fifth-grade teachers at Lanei Klondike Elementary School incorporated online tools such as Google Classroom into daily lessons. Additionally, teachers translated videos to help students understand the material and applied learning applications like BrainPOP in their lesson plans.

Another study explored the implementation of distance learning by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic at SMP Negeri 3 Bringin. The results showed that media use by teachers was based on students' conditions that day. The research suggested that using strategies and media during the pandemic could assist in implementing distance learning. Expectations include returning to the traditional face-to-face learning process once the pandemic ends.

Method

Qualitative research is a method used in the social sciences that involves collecting and analyzing data in the form of words (both verbal and written) and human actions. Researchers do not attempt to calculate or quantify qualitative data, but instead focus on understanding and analyzing it in its natural context. In qualitative research, data is analyzed through the words and behaviors of humans (Afrizal, 2016). In this study, the researcher analyzes data in the form of words. The goal is to describe the research field as accurately and factually as possible. In other words, to obtain the most accurate results from real phenomena, the researcher used a case study approach. A case study is one type of qualitative research method.

The researcher focused on Mts Negeri 2 Kota Kediri, a school located in Kota Kediri, which has been implementing distance learning for about a year. The participants chosen for the research are the English teachers involved in distance learning at the school. The researcher selected five teachers from MTs Negeri 2 Kediri: Mr. I, Mr. MJ, Mr. AZ, Mrs. PJ, and Mrs. HMI, who were involved in the study.

The techniques used to collect data in this research are interviews and documentation. Dornyei (2007) states that qualitative research involves working with a wide range of data, including recorded interviews, various texts, and images. During data processing, most of the data is transformed into textual form (for example, interview recordings are transcribed), as most qualitative data analysis is conducted through words. Documentation refers to a wide range of written, physical, and visual materials, including what other authors may term artifacts (2010). The purpose of documentation is to record the process of interviews with participants.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Teaching Preparation

According to the research, all the teachers create their lesson plans based on previous ones. However, they also adapt these plans to fit the unique conditions they face in the classroom. In conclusion, while the core lesson plan remains the same, it is adjusted to suit the specific situation at hand.

Use of Media in Teaching

Based on the research, all the teachers agreed that Elma is the primary app supporting the learning process at their madrasah. Elma offers many functions, including a video conferencing feature that helps clearly present the material. However, teachers also use other applications like Google Classroom, Google Meet, Zoom, and WhatsApp to enhance their teaching performance. Despite this, they all strive to provide the best possible teaching using these tools.

Regarding teaching materials during distance learning, all teachers follow a similar approach. They gather information from various sources and summarize it clearly, using language appropriate for their students' English proficiency. They don't rely solely on the module but also incorporate resources like YouTube videos. However, some teachers employ different methods. For example, Mr. Imam and Mrs. Humadida said, "Students are given assignments with a few days to submit, and academic consultations are held every Sunday, once a week, with health protocols in place."

Teaching Strategies for Online Learning

From the research findings, it was observed that some strategies employed by English teachers in online learning include:

- a. **Using Video Materials:** Teachers use video content relevant to the lesson. Some create their own videos, summarizing them before sharing with students. Others source videos from platforms like Google, asking students to interpret the vocabulary related to the content. This strategy is intended to engage students and hold their attention during online lessons.
- b. **Accepting Assignments Anytime:** Teachers do not impose strict deadlines for assignment submissions, recognizing that many students live outside the city and face network limitations. Students are allowed to submit their tasks anytime, either through digital platforms or by bringing them to school.

Classroom Procedures

- a. **Starting the Class:** As shown in the research, teachers typically remind students about the lesson before starting. They share materials through pictures and voice notes, and all teachers follow similar procedures. However, some teachers prefer to directly use Elma without sharing materials through platforms like WhatsApp groups.
- b. **Checking Attendance:** Based on the interviews, teachers ensure students fill out an attendance list before the lesson begins. The Elma app has a built-in attendance feature that helps track student participation.

- c. **Explaining the Material:** Teaching online requires different methods compared to traditional classroom teaching. Teachers use various techniques to explain the material, ensuring that students still understand the content despite the lack of face-to-face interaction.

Teaching Strategy

In terms of teaching strategies, teachers strive to find effective ways to ensure that students understand the material. They use a mix of lectures, discussions, and problem-solving techniques to facilitate learning.

Challenges in Media Usage

Online learning presents various challenges, such as poor connectivity, low participation in online forums, difficulty understanding materials and exercises, and problems with online exams. These issues are detailed in the research. To address these problems, teachers have provided solutions like academic consultations, where students attend school once a week, following health protocols. For students unable to complete online exams, they can take exams at school.

In conclusion, the research shows that the effectiveness of media use in online learning is less than that of in-person meetings, and the main challenge for teachers is poor internet connectivity. To overcome these issues, teachers often collaborate with other applications and sometimes conduct academic consultations.

Solutions to Problems

To address students' problems with media usage, teachers have implemented various solutions. They find the right times to hold online sessions for students with connectivity issues, conduct limited offline meetings for academic consultations, and provide additional support via WhatsApp groups for students who need help with the material.

Students' Problems

Students face challenges during online learning, such as arriving late to lessons or failing to submit assignments. Teachers address these issues by asking students for reasons behind their lateness or lack of participation and finding solutions, such as offering one-on-one sessions to explain the material.

For students who do not submit assignments, teachers use reminders via WhatsApp groups before the submission deadline. If necessary, teachers will follow up with the parents and homeroom teachers to ensure students submit their tasks on time.

Evaluation

Evaluation plays a crucial role in the teaching-learning process as it helps assess students' understanding of the material. The research divided evaluation into two topics: students' tasks and students' performance evaluations.

1. **Students' Tasks:** Teachers assign tasks after completing a lesson. The approach to task assignment is similar to in-person classes, but for Q&A sessions, teachers answer students' questions individually via online platforms.

2. **Student Evaluation:** Teachers evaluate students' understanding after the lesson is finished. They use various evaluation methods at the end of the semester to assess the effectiveness of their teaching strategies.
3. **Teachers' Self-Evaluation:** Finally, teachers evaluate their own performance at the end of each semester. They ask students for feedback on the effectiveness of their teaching methods after completing a chapter.

Discussion

In discussing the strategies employed by teachers at MTsN 2 Kota Kediri during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential to ground these strategies in the work of educational theorists whose research emphasizes the importance of engagement, flexibility, and interactive learning in online environments. One of the key strategies used by the teachers at MTsN 2 Kota Kediri is the integration of video materials to enhance learning. This method is supported by Richard Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which asserts that learning is most effective when both visual and auditory channels are used in tandem (Mayer, 2005). Mayer's research indicates that when students engage with content presented in multiple formats—such as videos—cognitive load is reduced, and comprehension is increased because the brain processes visual and verbal information simultaneously. The teachers at MTsN 2 Kota Kediri effectively utilize videos to convey complex English language concepts, making lessons more engaging and accessible. For example, teachers not only use videos as a medium for delivering content but also encourage students to create their own videos, a practice that aligns with Mayer's Multimedia Principles. This approach promotes active learning, as students must apply their language skills in a creative format, further reinforcing the lesson's objectives. In this way, video materials are not just passive content delivery tools but active instruments that engage students in the learning process, enhancing their language acquisition and communication skills.

In addition, the teachers' use of video materials supports Mayer's principle of coherence, which emphasizes the importance of eliminating unnecessary information to keep lessons focused and clear (Mayer, 2009). By carefully selecting and editing video content, teachers avoid overwhelming students with extraneous details, ensuring that the material remains concise and relevant. This method mirrors best practices in multimedia learning, where content is carefully structured to facilitate maximum cognitive processing without causing cognitive overload. By pairing videos with follow-up assignments and asking students to create their own videos, teachers at MTsN 2 Kota Kediri create a more immersive and interactive learning experience that adheres to Mayer's guidelines for effective multimedia use.

Another significant strategy discussed in the research is the allowance for flexible assignment submission. This approach is rooted in Carol Ann Tomlinson's work on differentiated instruction, which emphasizes that effective teaching must cater to the diverse needs of students (Tomlinson, 2001). Tomlinson's research shows that when teachers provide flexible learning opportunities, they account for differences in students' backgrounds, abilities, and circumstances, ensuring that all learners have the opportunity to succeed. At MTsN 2 Kota Kediri, this strategy was implemented by allowing students to submit assignments at flexible times, particularly for those facing difficulties with internet connectivity. Given that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted students' access to traditional

learning resources, this flexibility proved essential for maintaining equity in the learning process. Students with unstable internet connections or those with access to fewer technological devices could still complete and submit their assignments without the pressure of strict deadlines. Tomlinson's work on differentiated instruction underscores the importance of flexibility in accommodating the varied needs of students, especially in a time when external factors like technology access and home environments significantly affect students' ability to engage with online learning. By embracing flexibility, teachers at MTsN 2 Kota Kediri not only supported students academically but also showed empathy for their individual circumstances, thereby promoting an inclusive learning environment.

Furthermore, the teachers' practice of providing concise material through group chats aligns with John Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory, which suggests that learners can only effectively process a limited amount of information at one time (Sweller, 1988). By summarizing key points from the lesson and distributing them via group chats, teachers reduce the amount of cognitive load required from students, helping them focus on essential content. Sweller's theory highlights the importance of breaking down complex information into smaller, more digestible parts, especially in online learning contexts where distractions are prevalent. This method enables students to better absorb material by focusing on the core concepts without feeling overwhelmed by excessive details. In an online learning environment, where students may struggle to maintain attention, Sweller's principles of cognitive load can be a crucial framework for creating effective and engaging lessons that optimize the learning process.

In addition to video materials and flexible assignment submission, teachers at MTsN 2 Kota Kediri also integrated educational games into their teaching strategies. This approach is supported by research on gamification, which demonstrates that incorporating game-like elements into learning activities can enhance student engagement, motivation, and retention. Deterding et al. (2011) argue that gamification taps into students' intrinsic motivation by making learning more enjoyable and interactive. In the context of MTsN 2 Kota Kediri, teachers used Kahoot!, an interactive quiz app, to review English language concepts in a fun and competitive manner. This gamified approach not only promotes participation but also encourages students to retain information through repetition in a playful environment. Gamification has been shown to increase student motivation by providing immediate feedback and rewards, which are integral components of the Kahoot! platform. The use of Kahoot! aligns with Deterding's argument that when students engage in game-like activities, they feel more motivated to participate and perform well, as the environment is perceived as less intimidating and more rewarding.

Finally, the strategy of giving praise and rewards is supported by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (2000), which emphasizes the importance of fostering a sense of competence, autonomy, and relatedness in students. According to SDT, when students receive positive feedback and rewards for their efforts, they feel more competent and motivated to continue learning. The teachers at MTsN 2 Kota Kediri used this strategy effectively by acknowledging students' accomplishments, such as early assignment submission or active participation in online discussions, and rewarding them with certificates or stickers. This recognition not only boosts students' self-esteem but also encourages them to take ownership of their learning. SDT suggests that when students are intrinsically motivated and feel recognized for their efforts, they are more likely to persist in learning activities and exhibit higher levels of engagement. The use of

praise and rewards at MTsN 2 Kota Kediri thus serves as an essential tool for maintaining motivation and creating a positive learning environment, particularly in the challenging context of online education during the pandemic.

In conclusion, the strategies used by teachers at MTsN 2 Kota Kediri are strongly supported by established educational theories and research. The integration of video materials, flexible assignment submission, concise lesson summaries, educational games, and praise and rewards are all grounded in well-researched principles that enhance student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes. By applying Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, Tomlinson's principles of differentiated instruction, Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory, Deterding's research on gamification, and Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, the teachers at MTsN 2 Kota Kediri have created an adaptable, inclusive, and engaging online learning environment. These strategies not only address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic but also demonstrate the effectiveness of research-based teaching methods in sustaining student motivation and fostering academic success in remote learning contexts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research sheds light on the strategies employed by teachers at MTsN 2 Kota Kediri during the COVID-19 pandemic to facilitate effective distance learning. The findings highlight several key aspects of the distance learning process and the use of technology in overcoming the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Firstly, the use of ELMA (E-Learning Management Application) emerged as the primary platform supporting the learning process at MTsN 2 Kota Kediri. ELMA was instrumental in facilitating various essential activities such as material explanation, assignment submissions, attendance tracking, and assessment. The platform provided a comprehensive solution that helped to streamline the learning process, making it more organized and efficient for both teachers and students. This finding is significant because it underscores the importance of selecting a versatile, user-friendly platform to manage different aspects of online learning, which contributed greatly to the overall success of the distance learning experience.

Moreover, the research found that teachers effectively combined ELMA with other digital tools and applications to optimize the learning process. This collaborative use of various apps allowed for a more engaging and dynamic online classroom. By integrating multiple technologies, teachers were able to address the diverse needs of students and create a more flexible and interactive learning environment. This finding is particularly noteworthy as it highlights the adaptability and resourcefulness of the teachers in navigating the challenges posed by the pandemic. Despite the limitations of a fully online learning system, the strategic use of ELMA in conjunction with other apps helped maintain a sense of continuity in the education process, ensuring that students were still able to receive the necessary content, assignments, and assessments.

However, the study also identified some significant challenges related to the use of technology during the pandemic. One of the main issues reported was the difficulty of maintaining a stable network connection, which affected both teachers' and students' ability to participate fully in the learning process. This technological barrier, coupled with varying levels of digital literacy among students, resulted in some students struggling to understand the material presented to them. Despite these challenges, teachers at MTsN 2 Kota Kediri were proactive in addressing these issues. They recognized the difficulties

students faced and implemented strategies to mitigate the negative effects of these technological limitations. One such strategy was offering free consultations for students who had trouble understanding the material. These weekly consultations allowed students to ask questions and receive clarification on difficult topics, ensuring that they did not fall behind in their learning. This personalized support was crucial in maintaining student engagement and academic progress, particularly for those who struggled with the technology or had limited access to resources.

The findings also emphasize the importance of teacher awareness and adaptability in addressing the diverse challenges of online learning. While technology played a crucial role in the learning process, it was clear that the teachers' efforts to support students beyond the digital platform were equally important. By providing additional resources, offering one-on-one consultations, and being flexible with deadlines and submission methods, teachers were able to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. This approach not only helped students navigate the challenges of online learning but also fostered a sense of community and connection despite the physical distance imposed by the pandemic.

In conclusion, the strategies used by teachers at MTsN 2 Kota Kediri during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring that students remained engaged and motivated in their learning. The use of ELMA, in combination with other technological tools, proved to be an effective approach to managing the complexities of distance education. At the same time, the teachers' ability to recognize and address the technological challenges faced by students, coupled with their willingness to provide personalized support, were key factors in maintaining academic continuity and student motivation. This study highlights the importance of flexibility, creativity, and empathy in teaching, particularly in times of crisis. The findings provide valuable insights for educators seeking to improve their online teaching practices, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that combines technology with individualized support to ensure equitable and effective learning for all students.

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