

Challenges of Online Learning Management of Al-Quran and Fardhu Ain Class (Kafa) During the Covid-19

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Abstrak: The challenges of living in a diverse society requires the administrator to coordinate the delivery of this fundamental islamic knowledge through the Al-Quran and Fardhu Ain Class (KAFA). KAFA, which is usually executed face-to-face in islamic schools, had to go through changes and carried out online due to the Movement Control Order (MCO) to curb the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic. Thus, this article aims to discuss the challenges of managing KAFA online during the Covid-19 pandemic phase. This study is qualitative in nature. Data were collected based on interviews of 2 respondents from Nahdhah Al Islam Integrated Kafa. The data analysis was done by narrative analysis using the coding method. The results of this study indicate that there are changes in the implementation of the management of KAFA when executed online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Challenges include infrastructure, technological skills, finances as well as time and workload. Therefore, all parties need to play their respective roles in order to address the challenges and ensure more effective learning sessions.

Keywords: Challenges; *Al-Quran and Fardhu Ain Class (KAFA)*; *Online Learning*; *Pandemic*

INTRODUCTION

The Al- Quran and Fardhu Ain Class (KAFA) is one of the religious demands in the framework of the formation of Muslim students in accordance with the requirements of Al-Quran and As-Sunnah (JAKIM, 2006). This formal education class focuses on students in the National Primary School (Hadi, Abd Latif & Rahman, 2018) and strengthens the fundamentals of Islamic Education to produce individuals of noble character, virtuous, and pious (Zainal Abidin, Zain & Hamzah, 2017) in the face of current challenges. The Covid-19 pandemic had affected the whole world and caused a profound impact on the education level of Malaysians (Adnan & Adnan, 2020) including KAFA. The pandemic has changed the national education landscape towards virtual learning (e-learning) through the Home-Based Learning (HBL) approach (Azizan & Nasri, 2020). Virtual learning can be done either through television, radio or online learning. Online teaching and learning is the most widespread medium used during the Movement Control Order (MCO) resulting in teachers and students to be unable to face each other in the classroom (Hairia'an & Dzainudin, 2020).

In implementing online education, various challenges must be faced by administrators, teachers, parents and students. According to the Parents Action Group for Education (PAGE), teachers and students are not physically and mentally prepared to face the new learning environment at home (Aiman, 2020). Norul 'Azmi & Zakaria (2019) added the low technological literacy among religious teachers as a measure of unpreparedness, especially for KAFA teachers to face the new era of Teaching and learning. However, Tunku Munawirah, Putra's Honorary Secretary stated that the success of the learning sessions depends on the cooperation and individual efforts of teachers (Aiman, 2020), parents and students. When adapting to online learning, the cooperation of different parties is closely related to the accessibility of essential infrastructures such as devices, reliable internet speed and also the budget to subscribe to an internet plan. Consistent with the Khazanah Research Institute (KRI) report which states that the capacity and capability of schools, teachers and parents in providing the essential infrastructures can have an impact on online Teaching and learning sessions (Aiman, 2020).

Therefore, based on the issues and problems presented, this study aims to look at the challenges of implementing the KAFA online learning management in Nahdhah Al Islam Integrated Kafa during the Covid-19 Pandemic phase. Among the aspects surveyed are the challenges related to teachers, students and how well equipped the school infrastructure is.

LITERATURE RESEARCH

Background of Al-Quran and Fardu 'Ain Class (KAFA) in Malaysia

Al-Quran and Fardu Ain are part of the basic knowledge in Islamic studies that are traditionally studied in Malaysia in line with the arrival and development of Islam in the Malay world. The teaching of the basic knowledge of Islam began informally through the usage of Jawi books that were written by the local scholars and scholars from the archipelago, and was implemented in educational centres such as in huts, mosques and madrasahs.

In 1980, a study conducted by the Cabinet Committee coordinated by the Malaysian Administrative Capital and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU) found that many Muslim children could not read the Quran well and did not practice the basics of Fardhu Ain. So, in 1988, the Malaysian Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) or the Islamic Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Department at the time, submitted a proposal to the government to implement the KAFA Program to curb illiteracy among Muslim children and adolescents in the country. Looking at the importance of Islamic Education, the Islamic Affairs Development Committee Meeting on 17 January 1989 had agreed that the KAFA Program be implemented nationwide for children aged from 7 to 12 years old. Finally, in the early 1990s, the Federal Government through JAKIM, in collaboration with the state government and the Ministry of Education Malaysia, launched the KAFA Program to enrich Muslim students to be able to recite the Quran well and become excellent students in this world and the hereafter (Abu Bakar & Che Noh, 2019). Now, the main agency that manages and coordinates the implementation of the KAFA Program is JAKIM. The objectives of the establishment of the KAFA Program are to:

- a) Establish an organised, uniformed and integrated Al-Quran and Fardu Ain class system throughout Malaysia.
- b) Ensure that all Muslim children aged seven to twelve years old in the country can learn and master the recitation of the Al-Quran.
- c) Ensure that all Muslim children in the country can learn and practice the basics of Fardu Ain.
- d) Strengthen the foundation of Islamic religious education for Muslim children in Al-Quran and Fardu Ain. (JAKIM, 2016)

The Challenges of Implementing the KAFA Online

Several studies have shown that the biggest challenge in the implementation of online learning is the lack of access to devices and internet causing difficulties for students and parents (Department of Skills Development, 2020). According to Kulai Member of Parliament, Teo Nie Ching in a debate in the Dewan Rakyat, almost 37 per cent of students under the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) do not have access to any device during online learning sessions. This figure shows that as many as 1.7 million students do not have either a smartphone or a laptop which is the basic necessity when learning online (Daily News, 2020). This issue is exacerbated when Ahmad Johnie Zawawi, Member of Parliament for Igan explained that apart from the lack of access to devices, the issue of internet accessibility should also be given attention especially in rural and remote areas to ensure the effectiveness and continuity of online education. It is estimated that more than 40 percent, which is equivalent to 1.8 million students in Malaysia, do not have internet access (Mahfuz & Azmi, 2021). Former Education Minister, Maszlee Malik said this situation could result in almost 4.7 million students not being able access online schooling as well as students who are categorized as digitally poor to drop out of their studies (Mahfuz & Azmi, 2021).

Therefore, to ensure the effectiveness of KAFA online learning, solid management and strong cooperation from all parties are needed. Effective management involves the responsibility of making decisions individually and collaboratively to ensure that the online KAFA learning system achieves its desired goals (Othman & Ishak, 2017). An organized and planned implementation is also able to deliver a more effective teaching and learning (Ahmad Mohamed, 2003). This is in line with the Philosophy of Islamic Education to produce students who are competitive, high in moral and successful in terms of physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative method (Kothari, 2004) through case study to obtain information on the challenges of managing online learning of KAFA in Nahdhah Al Islam Integrated Kafa, Selangor during the Covid-19 Pandemic. An interview was conducted with parties related to the Kafa school to obtain in-depth information (Rubin and Rubin, 2011). The sampling framework of the study was taken from Nahdhah Al Islam Integrated Kafa, Selangor (refer to Table 1). Through interviews, important data were obtained in exploring the perceptions, experiences, and challenges (Forman & Damschroder, 2007) faced by the related parties when conducting KAFA online during the pandemic.

The interview session was conducted face-to-face on 12th March 2021 at the Nahdhah Al Islam Integrated Kafa with the management and teachers because they would know better of the challenges of managing KAFA program online. The interview process was done for 40 - 60 minutes according on the interview protocol. The interview questions were validated by three academics who are experts in the field of education. The interview questions are divided into three parts as follows:

A. KAFA Co-Curriculum Management during the pandemic period.

What is the minimum teaching and learning time of Al-Quran and Fardu Ain KAFA online in Malaysia during the Covid-19 Pandemic?

What are the policies & guidelines provided by the Administrators for teachers in running the KAFA online in Malaysia during the Covid-19 Pandemic?

B. Teachers' Challenges

What are the main challenges faced by teachers in conducting KAFA online in Malaysia during the Covid-19 Pandemic?

What is the approach taken by the Administrator if the teachers do not have access to suitable device or internet at home for running the KAFA online in Malaysia during the Covid-19 Pandemic?

Did the teachers succeed in mastering the skills in using technological equipment?

What is the form of training or skills provided to teachers to hone their expertise in using technology and innovation tools while conducting KAFA online in Malaysia during the Covid-19 Pandemic?

How are steps taken to address the problems that occur while conducting KAFA online in Malaysia during the Covid-19 Pandemic?

C. Students' Challenges

What are the main challenges faced by students in having KAFA online in Malaysia during the Covid-19 Pandemic?

How are steps taken to address the problems that occur while conducting KAFA online in Malaysia during the Covid-19 Pandemic?

In obtaining more accurate conclusions, interview data were analysed using narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). This method collects and analyses information from each interview and codes it according to the objectives of the study. Then, comparative analysis was performed to obtain interpretations that were able to answer the objectives of the study (Lieblich, TuvalMashiach, & Zilber, 1998). The following are the details of the respondents:

Table 1: Details of Respondents

Respondent	Position
A	Headmaster of Nahdhah Al Islam Integrated Kafa
B	Teacher of Nahdhah Al Islam Integrated Kafa

Source: Author

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

Background of Nahdhah Al Islam Integrated Kafa

Nahdhah Al Islam Integrated Kafa was established in 1988 and was known as the People's Islamic School (SAR) before being taken over by the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS). The school has 23 teachers, a general assistant and 2 clerks. A total of 798 students have registered covering the morning and afternoon sessions. The morning session is reserved for students in years 1, 2 and 3 while the afternoon session is for students in years 4, 5 and 6. Initially, this school uses a syllabus made by JAKIM and JAIS. Now, it only uses the syllabus from JAIS with permission from JAKIM. According to Respondent A:

"Before this, we used two syllabi. The titles for the JAKIM and JAIS syllabi are the same. So, the JAIS syllabus are used for teaching and learning, and in their fifth grade, we focus on JAKIM's books which are related to the UPKK examination. But now, we only use the syllabus from JAIS." Respondent A

Al-Quran And Fardu 'Ain (Kafa) Classes Online at Nahdhah Al Islam Integrated Kafa During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Following the outbreak of Covid-19, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) referring to the Malaysian Education Development Plan (2013-2025) stipulates that every student must have access to education to achieve their potential to face the future. Therefore, students are entitled to the opportunity to follow Education including KAFA even if they are unable to attend school. The online teaching and learning delivery process is done using a variety of platforms. However, there are some changes that need to be made to accommodate online learning sessions such as the reduction of subjects in a day. According to Respondent A:

"A normal learning session is 30 minutes per subject and each day, there are 5 subjects. During MCO, the learning time is still 30 minutes per subject, but the total number of subjects are reduced from 5 to only 3 subjects." Respondent A.

In addition to that, to help teachers implement Teaching and Learning at Home as an alternative to the new learning norms, the Islamic Education Division (BPI) at the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS) reorganized the Teaching and Learning at Home Manual developed by KPM dated 2 October 2020 to suit the operations of Selangor State Religious (SAN) Schools. According to Respondent A:

"JAIS provided guidelines for Teaching and Learning at Home during the MCO period. It was a total of 24 pages. To guide teachers on what they need to do, the platforms that can be used and the teaching ethics..."

The administrators takes measures to hold information coordination meetings and plan the class schedules taking into account the number of classes operating and the readiness of teachers and students, review the Annual Teaching Plan (RPT) to restructure teaching and learning planning, implement teaching and learning monitoring, motivate teachers to ensure the teachers remain

enthusiastic despite having to go through a new norm in their teaching in order for learning sessions to be run effectively.

The Challenges of Online Al-Quran and Fardu 'Ain (Kafa) Classes During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Online teaching and learning is a major change that took place in the country's education in the 21st century. The Covid-19 pandemic demanded the style of educational delivery to be adapted and adopted by all parties as a whole including the management, teachers, students, as well as parents. Based on the interviews conducted, the challenges faced in implementing online learning can be classified into several aspects such as challenges in terms of infrastructure and facilities, finance, time constraints and workload, as well as technological skills. The challenges can be seen in Figure 1 below.

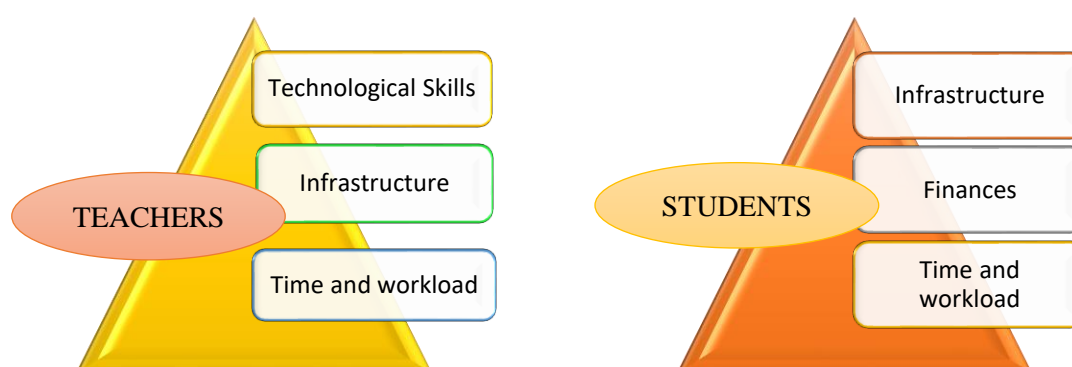


Figure 1: Online Learning Challenges for Al-Quran and Fardu Ain (KAFA) Classes in Selangor during the Covid-19 Pandemic.
Source: author

a. Challenges in terms of infrastructure and facilities

Challenges in terms of infrastructure and facilities are often faced by teachers when running online lessons. Readiness for both aspects plays an important role in meeting the needs of teachers to perform their daily tasks (Mohamad, 2020). According to the respondents, the teachers faced the problem of poor internet connectivity to conduct online learning sessions.

"The challenge for teachers is the poor internet because most teachers only use their personal data." Respondent A.

Respondent B added that KAFA teachers who have problems in terms of having their own devices or internet accessibility will go to school to use the resources provided by the school. But they would have to take turns using it due to the limited number of equipment such as computers.

"If the teachers do not have laptops or computers, they will go to school to use the computer. But based on first-come-first-serve basis because there are only three computers in school.

Teachers also have problems in terms of internet access because most teachers only use their own personal data.” Respondent B.

Most schools do not have adequate technological equipment such as computers. Without complete infrastructure, teachers and students face problems in conducting online learning according in the 21st century (Subramaniam & Hamzah, 2020). This challenge is also faced by KAFA students. Students face internet access problems and limitations in device. These two are the main factors for conducting effective online learning (Iftakhar, 2016). According to respondents:

“Students' challenges include the lack of devices. Students have to share with other siblings ” (Respondent A).

“Some students face internet problems, especially those who are less able financially. There are also those who have many siblings and have to share one phone to join KAFA online.” Respondent B.

Having adequate facilities and infrastructure can aid students and teachers to carry out Teaching and learning activities online. In the studies by Subramaniam & Hamzah (2020) and Husin (2021), the lack of complete infrastructure and unreliable internet access speed is the cause of students being less interested in online teaching and learning. Students will then begin to think that such learning sessions are a waste of time and this stifles the interest for them to learn deeper. Thus, infrastructural challenges greatly influence the effectiveness of online learning (Najib, Bakar & Othman, 2017).

The step that can be taken is for the ministry to aid teachers and students by providing whatever infrastructure and facilities needed so that these virtual Teaching and learning sessions can continue. Thereon, the desire to digitize the national education sector or e-education can be realized (Mohamad, 2020). This is evident in several countries taking extra initiatives to distribute devices to students to improve their accessibility to online classes (Wan, 2020). For example, China, Finland and the United States lent digital devices from schools to students for the purpose of making it easier for students to access online learning platforms. In fact, there are several private companies, NGOs and individuals who also work together to donate devices to students in need (Leong, 2021). The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) also introduced the MyBAIKHATI program in collaboration with telecommunication companies to create a device crowdsourcing program. Through this program, used devices such as laptops will be collected and repaired before being distributed to community Internet Centres and Community Organizations (Special Assistance Package, 2021).

In addition to that, teachers can also help each other to minimize the problems encountered by improving the online KAFA teaching system. Among the improvements that can be made are more flexible class scheduling and class recordings that are accessible at any time (Subramaniam & Hamzah, 2020). This way, students who are unable to access information due to inaccessibility to device or internet can watch the classes at a more suitable time and even replay the class recordings. Therefore, the limitations in facilities and infrastructure need to be

addressed and various parties need to play a role to reduce the digital divide that occurs, and ensure that online learning can be carried out without any obstacles.

a. Financial challenges

Financial challenges are also faced in conducting KAFA learning sessions online. This challenge is closely related to internet accessibility and infrastructure problems faced by students. Most of the students who face internet problems are from the B40 circle. In this case, Respondent A and Respondent B have given similar comments.

“So far, most students have no problems with devices and the internet. There are only a few B40 students who are limited in their use of data. The internet data provided by the government is not enough if the number of siblings in school is large.” Respondent A.

“Parents complained that their children face internet issues, especially those who are financially less able.” Respondent B.

The process of online learning indeed requires students to have sufficient internet data. They spend money to buy internet (data) to access online classes, complete their assignments, homework and so on (Battaglino, Haldeman & Laurans, 2012; Aziz et. Al, 2020).

Among the government's initiatives to control this problem is through the Internet Data Assistance program and free distribution of a 1GB high speed internet WIFI. This assistance will be enjoyed by all post-paid and prepaid customers of Digi, UMobile Malaysia, Unifi, Time Maxis and Celcom during the 2021 MCO (Special Assistance Package, 2021). This assistance should be fully utilized by teachers, students and parents for the purpose of online teaching and learning. Assistance from telecommunication providers, NGOs and all parties are much needed in facing the financial challenges and succeeding in online Teaching and learning. The MCMC also explained some special subscription packages for students offered by communication companies such as 15 GB data for as low as RM20 per month and free sim cards with 40 GB data, free contents and free telephone device for students from B40 families (Arifin, 2021).

b. Time and workload challenges

Teachers and students had to allocate more time for preparing for lessons and completing assignments given for each subject in e-learning. Before classes take place, teachers need to think of creative and engaging ways to attract the students in online classes. Furthermore, a proportion of their time is used to answer parents' questions until late at night as they mostly work during the day. This indirectly adds to the teachers' workload. According to respondent B:

“...it is one thing to complete the syllabus, they also need to learn how to implement, find ways to be creative and attract the students – all these consume time... Sometimes in the middle of the night, there are parents who messaged asking about assignments and still communicating with teachers... Teachers willingly, out of ehsan, create WhatsApp groups to allow two ways communication to make it easier for parents...” Respondent B.

Apart from that, teachers received complaints from parents stating that the students' learning time collided with their National School class schedule, causing students' attendance to KAFA to decrease due to them putting more emphasis on National Schooling. Both respondents reported similar situations.

"...Students face problems because the schedule clashes with their national schools. And working parents contribute to students not being able to attend class and complete their school work because the device is being used by the parents. Only when parents finished working that students can start doing their homework..." Respondent A.

"...Parents complained that the class schedule collides with their national schools, so, students' attendance to KAFA is less and they are also more focused on their national school class assignments..." Respondent B.

Before starting a teaching and learning session, it is important for the school to arrange a well-planned class schedule with flexibility considering the constraints that students would face. Teachers, on the other hand, need to have a lesson plan to be more focused in preparing the required teaching materials. Other than that, think of assignments that are appropriate and easy for students to do as well as easy for teachers to review online. As a result, time can be better organized and the teaching and learning sessions would be better prioritised accordingly to avoid excessive workload.

c. Technological literacy challenges

Technological literacy is an important element for the success of online KAFA. Most teachers are not mentally nor physically ready to conduct Teaching and learning online due to lack of technological literacy. This was acknowledged by both respondents in the light of the Teaching and Learning at Home phase during the pandemic.

"On the initiative of the teachers themselves, they learn from each other to use technology. Senior teachers learn from their younger peers slowly..." Respondent A

"I'm just getting used to the internet and technology. I don't really understand them and I'm not really good at those things. So, I learned from my friends. Coincidentally, there are 2 teachers who are good at IT and we consulted them. And this initiative is our own effort, not from superiors or the management. Usually on the day that the IT teacher comes to work, we would also come to school to learn and consult him. On that day, teachers who are free and would like to join will come (to school)... And there are also teachers who are skilled and learned from their own children. Their children who are in high school already know how to use YouTube, do audio recordings and how to upload on YouTube..." Respondent B

Amala & Geetha (2020) in their study, stated that many less skilled teachers would face challenges to use technology in their lessons effectively. The low level of technological literacy among educators causes the delivery of online classes to students to be less satisfactory

(Rusdiana et al, 2020) including in KAFA schools. This is in contrast to students who have no difficulty adapting to technology and online learning methods.

Nevertheless, teachers are highly prepared to implement online classes (Kuppusamy & Norman, 2021). Challenges in terms of skills can be overcome when teachers have high motivation to learn about technology to conduct their online lessons. According to Kuppusamy & Norman (2021) the technological literacy of teachers' can be improved through online teaching skills workshops. In addition, the practice of helping each other and sharing skills, especially among young teachers is highly commendable. In an effort to support the government's efforts to conduct online learning, IT-literate teachers provide guidance to other teachers, including what happened to the KAFA teachers.

Therefore, in order to increase the technological literacy level of teachers, the management needs to provide online teaching skills courses in addition to pedagogy courses. This is in line with the implementation of the Digital Education Policy recently announced by the Prime Minister, to enhance the competency and professional development of stakeholders related to the leadership and the integration of digital technology in education (Office of the Prime Minister of Malaysia, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Education is the right and need of society for a better life. Islamic education that emphasizes the fundamentals of Quranic knowledge and Fardhu 'Ain is important for Muslims. In general, it has gone through a long period of growth and development, and the government plays a role ensuring the KAFA are carried out throughout Malaysia. The spread of Covid-19 demands efforts from all parties to provide the necessities for the Al-Quran and Fardhu 'Ain classes to all students. With the development of current technology, access to Al-Quran and Fardhu 'Ain education is easier, but current constraints such as lack of infrastructure, technological illiteracy, as well as financial and time restrictions, need to be addressed in order for learning sessions to run effectively even online. There are several problems that need to be especially addressed by policy makers like the Headmaster, the State Islamic Religious Department, the State Education Department and the Ministry of Education. All parties need to play their respective roles in order to address the problems that occur.

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