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The challenges faced by primary school students in Jordan in learning Islamic education online

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Abstract--Background: Jordan is an Islamic country with a substantial percentage of its population belonging to the Muslim community. It teaches the younger generation Islamic knowledge (Malkawi, 2020). Islamic teaching consists of the preaching of the Quran, Sunnah, and Islamic history to the students. In Jordan, the three basics of Islamic education are given to children. However, with the surge of the COVID wave, the lockdown was imposed all around the country and education was made online. Online education did not satisfy teachers and students because of different issues including technical issues and social issues. Results: Analysing the response from the interview conducted, it can be said that mainly the technical issues faced by the teachers and students of Jordanian primary schools were mostly related to lagging and troubleshooting issues of the Dark application used by them to conduct online classes. Some of the difficulties were caused by distraction in a home environment, difficulty in accurate assessments of the students, no or less physical interaction, absence of practice-based learning and the lack of digital literacy. Conclusion: Since COVID-19 online education has been on the verge to rise in different parts of the world, including Jordan. However, online education has not been as effective as conventional modes of education. Particularly, in the delivery of Islamic education, different kinds of struggles were faced by the teachers and the students.

Keywords--COVID-19, online education, Islamic education, primary school, education, Jordan.

Introduction

Background

Jordan is an Islamic country, it teaches the younger generation Islamic knowledge. Islamic teaching consists of the preaching of the Quran, Sunnah, and Islamic history. However, with the surge of the COVID wave, the lockdown was imposed all around Jordan and education was made online. Online teaching restricted the teachers and students in their homes and thus caused a distance that shifted the practical approach to Islamic education into a more theoretical approach. Consequently, both the teachers and students faced struggles.

Problem Statement

With the surge of the COVID wave, online education had gained more fame and many teaching practices are shifting from a traditional approach to an online approach. Most students face struggles in learning through online teaching. Islamic studies should be conveyed in an effective way (Alkhawaja and Abd Halim, 2019). It is important to understand the struggles faced by smaller children since they are in their early years of education to eradicate those struggles and effectively gain knowledge.

Aims and Objectives

The study aims to identify the challenges faced by primary school students in Jordan in learning Islamic education online. To complete the aim, certain objectives must be fulfilled:

- To analyse the challenges faced in online education by primary school students in Jordan
- To examine the curriculum of Islamic studies in primary schools in Jordan.
- To analyse the challenges faced in Islamic education by primary school students in Jordan
- To analyse the perspective of students and teachers regarding online education

Significance of Study

The concept of primary schools and the perspective of younger children is very rare in the existing literature (Saihu and Islamy, 2019). It is important to understand the struggles faced by smaller children since they are in their early years of education which has a crucial impact on their career and future development. Hence this study delves into the perspective and challenges faced by the students.

Literature Review

Islamic Education in Jordan

Jordan is an Islamic country where 97.2% of its population are Muslims (Malkawi, 2020), Figure (1).

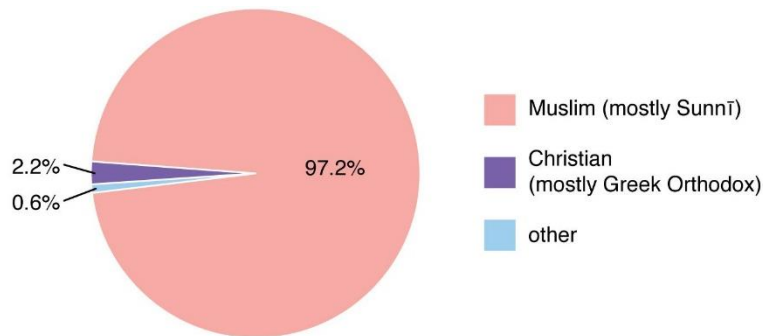


Figure 1. 97.2% of the population of Jordan consists of Muslims

Jordan includes Islamic studies in its curriculum. In a study conducted by Benson (2020), it was found that Jordan teaches and follows traditional Islamic law. Islamic teaching consists of the preaching of the Quran, Sunnah, and Islamic history to the students. In Jordan, the three basics of Islamic education are given to children. Children, in primary school, are also made to learn certain Quranic ayah and recitations of the prayers as a part of their curriculum. Also it teaches the basics of the Arabic language to young children (Al-Hassan, 2019). As mentioned, the textbooks of Islamic education in primary schools in Jordan view traditional Arabic learning from a modern perspective and teach the same principle to the children (Alkhawaja and Abd Halim, 2019).

The Challenges of Online Education in Jordan

During the year 2020, the coronavirus pandemic spread, the region of Jordan also become a victim of the virus. Consequently, the government of Jordan took certain measures to control the virus. Of these measures included educational measures taken by the Ministry of Education (Haider and Al-Salman, 2020). The government imposed a lockdown and the Ministry of Education ordered to shift of the modes of teaching from conventional to online (Yulia, 2020). Platforms like Darsak were mostly used by primary school students (Yulia, 2020). However, the shift from traditional to online mode of education was not easy and disturbed the flow of knowledge. The challenges faced by online education were educational, technical challenges, interactive challenges, organisational as well as psychological challenges. For instance, the online delivery of knowledge was disturbed by the low internet connection of either party which caused lagging and thus loss of concentration (Alkhawaja and Abd Halim, 2019).

Moreover, the disturbances in the homes of students and teachers' also lead to subsequent distraction and ineffective learning. Disturbances, like noise, from the background, caused distractions. Learning from home also caused a change in the educational environment. Cardullo et al. (2021), in their study, concluded that the environment of the school provided physical interaction among the students and between the students and the teacher. Such kind of interaction played a vital part in the active learning of the students. Coronavirus had a significant impact on the psychological health of both children and adults (Al Salman, Alkathiri and Khaled Bawaneh, 2021). Students and teachers both were

a victim of the psychological stress which was affecting their learning and teaching process. Moreover, there were issues with the effective assessment of the students which made the teachers unable to recognise the level each student stood on (Al-Balas et al., 2020; Jordan et al., 2021), Figure (2).

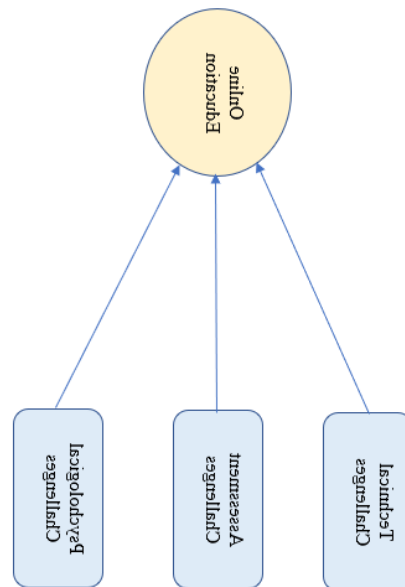


Figure 2. The challenges of online education in Jordan
Source: Author

The Challenges of online Islamic Education in Jordan

In Islam, the role of the teacher is an influencer. This mode of teaching is also present in the Sunnah of the Prophet S.A.W, who taught his peers and colleagues by depicting Islamic behaviour (Al-Salkhi., 2019; Saat, Ibrahim, and Rahman, 2021). According to scientific theories of behaviourism and social learning theory, this kind of teaching method is highly effective. Islamic education requires active learning (Saihu and Islamy, 2019). In a study conducted by Retnawati et al. (2021), the participants revealed that the basic struggle faced by children in learning Islamic knowledge was learning the recitation. However, in the same study, a teacher answered that such struggles in Islamiat classes are overcome by group interactive sessions and group discussions in which students interact with each other to learn and transfer skills. Moreover, the distance of online education proved a hindrance to the learning of Quranic recitation. It was because of a slow internet connection and/or poor screen results that did not allow the students to visualise the movement of lips and tongue during the pronunciation of an Arabic word. Also, Islamic learning is such a sacred subject, that the distractions caused during online education and the domestic environment were considered disrespectful to education.

Research Framework

The research framework is illustrated in figure 3 which represents that apart from the basic challenges of online education and online learning of Islam comes with more challenges including the absence of a practical approach to learning.

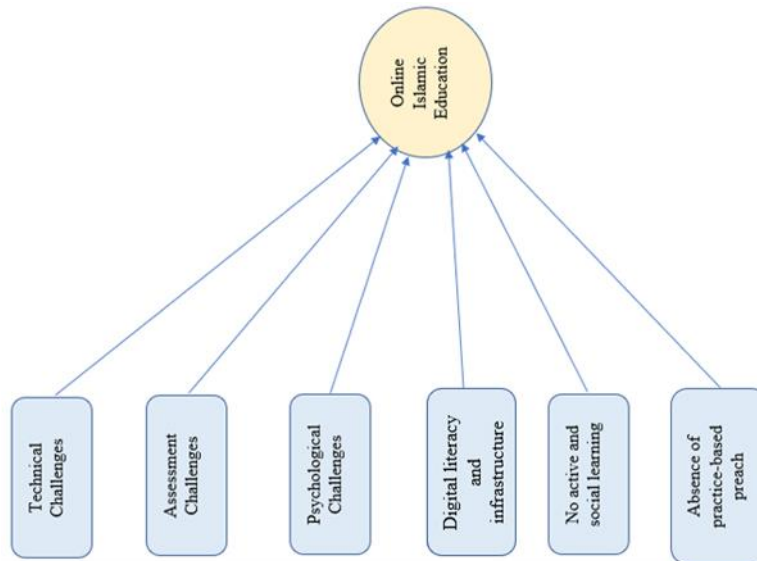


Figure 3. Research Framework
Source: Author

Literature Gap

Existing literature in this area is vivid. There are a lot of studies available that illustrate and discuss the struggles of online education. A few studies are qualitative; however, a significant number of quantitative studies are also available (Al-Balas, 2019). The studies conducted are mostly targeted university education or the idea of education in general. The concept of primary schools and the perspective of younger children is very rare in the existing literature (Saihu and Islamy, 2019). It is important to understand the struggles faced by smaller children since they are in their early years of education which has a crucial impact on their career and future development. The literature also lacks any study that specifically discusses the challenges faced by online Islamic education. Moreover, mostly the studies are directed toward the experience of teachers. The present study aims to cover the extant literature gap by identifying the challenges faced by primary school students in teaching Islamic education online.

Methodology

Research Philosophy

The adopted philosophy is interpretivism. It places significant importance on the attainment of in-depth knowledge (Kironko and Odoyo, 2020).

Research Design

The methodology is the most significant element or part of any research (Žukauskas et al., 2018). There are three different designs for research; quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodology (Kironko and Odoyo, 2020). Qualitative research gives a deeper insight into the problem but the results obtained are more biased. In this study, the adopted method is qualitative so that in-depth answers can be collected and evaluated.

Data Collection

There are two types of data in research; primary or secondary data (Žukauskas et al., 2018). For the present research, primary data was collected from 20 participants, 10 female and 10 male Islamiat teachers teaching in a Jordanian primary school, using an interview questionnaire. The participants were aged above 25 and have at least 2 years of teaching experience. The questions were previously in Arabic language and the interview was also conducted in the Arabic language for the ease of the participants. The response to the interview was then translated into English. It was because the NVivo software, used for data analysis does not deal with the Arabic language.

Data Analysis

The response collected from the participants analysed through the thematic analysis based on analysing patterns in the data.

Ethical Consideration

The consent was taken from the participants and their identity was kept anonymous.

Results and Discussion

Technical and Psychological Struggles during Online Education

Technical Struggles during Online Education

One of the most common difficulties faced by both students and teachers during an online class comes from technical issues (Aliyyah et al., 2020; Sanga, 2019). The results of Boyer Davis (2020) study revealed that even though the students appreciated the flexibility of online classes, a substantial percentage of students faced different technical errors and the most common technical error was associated with connectivity issues. Most participants in the study exhibited the same concern about technical issues that can present hindrances in the effective delivery of online education. When asked, one of the respondents agreed that they mostly use the Dark Android applications for online education. *“We use the Darsak app for holding online classes,”* she says. Upon asking if the application was user-friendly and understandable she mentioned *“you can say, it is not that difficult to understand. But I must mention, that there are some serious issues with the app. Many students complain that when they open the app, a black screen appears and the app crashes. You know, it then takes a few whiles to load which*

kind of makes the students late for class". This highlighted that even though the application is understandable by the teachers and the students, the application contains certain troubleshooting issues which impede the efficiency of teaching and learning. Another participant also mentioned the same issue, *"Yeah the app is easy to operate, provided that you're guided, but my class is interrupted by these, I don't know what to call it- black screen issues"*.

Because of these frequently occurring issues, most participants also mentioned that online classes can be more effective by understanding technology. As one of the participants mentioned, *"Not only Islamiat, but I guess, for every subject teachers and student must be given an understanding of technology."* Hargittai, Piper, and Morris (2019) mentioned that the older generation is less aware of technology as compared to the younger ones, due to which teachers can face a problem in the online delivery of lectures. *"My students know more about technology than me and they do help me understand it, which I think is necessary for online classes"* Due to these technical issues a participant mentioned in her response *"In comparison to traditional Islamiat classes, I'd say online ones are quite difficult "*. Online education has less participation than traditional ones (Sanga, 2019). In a response a teacher mentioned, *"Students have a lot of distractions in their home and I would not blame them. But because of this distraction, they are not able to participate as much as they normally would"*.

Psychological Struggles during Online Education

Distractions are a common problem in online classes (Hasan and Bao, 2020). *"Noises of their siblings, guests coming to student's home. How can keep your interest and focus on Islamiat classes with that?"* Another teacher mentioned, *"Students lose interest very often"*. The rising interference of domestic chaos with learning activities often makes students lose interest in studies (Chiu, 2022). Moreover, during Islamiat classes, one must constantly pay attention to Quranic recitation. *"Reciting Quran gets very difficult in online classes. Distractions and distance, all of that just makes it more difficult", "Learning Quran means you have to be attentive. Each word and each symbol has its role in pronunciation. Obviously in online classes, the technical issues, connection issues, plus distractions. It is very difficult to teach Quran, let alone learn it"*.

Most students face mental pressure during online classes. This pressure can come from ineffective delivery of education, inability to understand or the physical distance from one's peers (Tomasik, Helbling, and Moser, 2021). A teacher mentioned, *"Yes, students are stressed. Most of them are always panicking about how will we learn that how will we learn this. It's understandable"*. However one of the teachers mentioned, *"No, I guess, they are enjoying it. I mean no school rules, no teacher in front of you. However, some of them may have learning concerns"*. This highlighted that students are both pleased and struggling with online education.

Assessment Struggles during Online Islamic Education

Assessment is a crucial part of both the teaching process and the learning (Baticulon et al., 2021). Assessment allows the teacher to understand the learning

behaviour and pedagogical efficiency (Shiju et al., 2022). However, the transition to online education had challenged traditional modes of assessment (Ferri, Grifoni and Guzzo, 2022). One of the participants stated, *“We cannot, uh, assess them through you know writing tests and all. We usually do it through open-book MCQs or oral tests. Then we also conduct a summative assessment at the end of every session. It is more like a Q&A group session”*. Another participant mentioned *“MCQs, mostly. But we also give them an essay-based question to write during the class. Because afterwards, they might just, you know, take help and we had to make them keep their cameras and mics on”*.

Online education is a struggle for most teachers and students because it is quite different from traditional modes of education (Almusharraf and Khahro, 2020). *“Yes, online assessments are difficult. I mean, it had to be, we are all new to it”*. Another response highlighted *“Assessing students online is a mess. But it will get better with time, I am sure.”*. The responses highlighted the basic reason online assessments are difficult is that the mentioned method is new to both the teachers and the students. However, with time as familiarity with online methods and tools increases, the teachers mentioned that it will get easier. *“At first students scored very low. But I told you it gets easier with time. They also improved”*. A teacher mentioned that at the beginning of online assessments students scored low, but as they become more comfortable with the method it got easier. *“Compared to traditional ones, they do score low”*. Many teachers assumed that low scores in online classes were attributed to the environment during assessment and the inefficiency of learning during online classes. *“They score low, you know, students cannot concentrate on their tests in the chaotic environments of their home. I mean one cannot quite down one’s hungry crying baby brother because one has a test going on”*.

The Absence of Active and Social Learning during Islamic Online Education

Online education does not offer active or practice-based learning (Seo et al., 2021; Retnawati et al., 2020). This means that online education is restrictive and does not allow for physical interaction between students and the teacher, which is considered important for Islamic education (Xue, Li and Xu, 2018). *“Yeah, we do not interact the way we do in a traditional setting of a school. There are no pats on the back or handshakes. So, students cannot interact with us like the way they do”*. Another reason for limited interaction was limited understanding of the topic *“My students have always frequently asked me questions during lectures, but during online classes, it has declined. Probably because they are in some sort of confusion, or the learning environment is not that suitable”*. *“Students themselves admitted that ma’am we cannot discuss things and interact as much as we did in normal conventional classes”*.

The responses highlighted that there were difficulties faced by the students in interaction, mostly because they were confused, less focused and not used to virtual modes of interaction. However, it is important to note that no matter how much colleagues and friends can cause distraction in the class, they are one of the most important learning sources for any student. Group sessions, group activities, and even the small personal discussion on the topic at the end of the class exhibit effective results that enhance learning (Jena, 2020; Alawamleh, Al-

Twait and Al-Saht, 2020). A teacher admits *“Most of the time, when my students- I am talking about the shy ones you know- when they didn’t understand any topic in Islamiat, they’d just turn to their friend and ask her to repeat. The same thing happened when they could not see something I was writing on the board, or listen to what I was speaking, they always had their friends to back them up. I doubt they do that in online lectures. I mean no child of primary school would pick up their phones to text and ask their friend ‘Hey what was ma’am teaching?’”*. Another teacher responded *“Yes, they do complain they miss their friends. They hardly interact during class with their friends”*. The responses highlighted that students had limited interaction with their teachers and friends during online lectures, and it harmed their studies and learning process. One of the teachers mentioned, *“Interaction is necessary for active learning. With no interaction, obviously learning will become slow”*.

The Absence of Practice-based Preach in Islamic Online Education

Practice-based learning enhances the results and effectiveness of learning more than its theoretical counterpart (Jena, 2020). Online, class if not abolished, hinder the delivery of practice-based preaching during Islamiat classes. *“I wouldn’t say the practice-based approach is impossible in online teaching, but it is not as effective”*. Islam is a practice-based religion, it goes beyond preaching to the application of knowledge in one’s practical life (Alawamleh, Al-Twait and Al-Saht, 2020). Hence teaching some aspects of Islam in a practical environment with a practical approach would be more efficient. *“You know Islam is a way of life. You cannot expect any teacher to teach a way of life using only a theoretical approach”*. Another respondent mentions *“Like, for example, we are teaching namaz to a student. We can tell them theoretically how to do sujud but unless you show them and you make them do it in front of you, I cannot guarantee anyone they are doing it right”*. Upon asking, if they think that the students practice what they learn a teacher said *“Most of them would not. Children obey less and imitate more. Unless they are not seeing their teachers and their friends doing an Islamic thing, I’d hardly say they do it on their own”*. The responses highlighted that Islam, as a religion, needs a practice-based approach to learning. The phenomenon is also explained by social learning theory which suggests individuals imitate the behaviour of their surroundings.

Digital Literacy and Infrastructure

Hargittai, Piper, and Morris (2019) mentioned that the older generation is less aware of technology as compared to the younger ones, due to which teachers can face a problem in the online delivery of lectures. *“My students know more about technology than me and they do help me understand it, which I think is necessary for online classes”*. However other participants highlighted in their responses that their students also face issues regarding digital literacy. *“We are talking about primary school children. They will have difficulty in operating the app to its full extent”* and *“Half of the time I have to guide them how to join classes and how to leave them”*. Moreover, the availability of the needed infrastructure was another issue (Seo et al., 2021; Retnawati et al., 2020). Even though most of the students have cell phones and a connection, some of them did not. Some had a phone but the quality and RAM of the phone were so low they cannot run different online

learning programs. *“Our school also contain pupils coming from a low economic background. These students cannot afford these expensive technologies and who should blame them for that?”*. The response highlighted that online learning was a struggle, especially for students with low economic backgrounds who cannot afford cellphones, laptops or computers to actively participate in online learning.

Discussion

One of the most common difficulties faced by both students and teachers during an online class comes from technical issues (Aliyyah et al., 2020). Analysing the response from the interview conducted, it can be said that mainly the technical issues faced by the teachers and students at Jordanian primary schools were mostly related to lagging and troubleshooting issues of the Darsak application used by them to conduct online classes. These technical issues were a source of distractions and caused an ineffective delivery of education. Because of these frequently occurring issues, most participants also mentioned that online classes can be more effective by understanding technology. Most teachers admitted that an understanding of technology can help them understand the application and thus their class setting.

It is also seen that Islam education based on practice, and it believes in the promotion of active learning and a practice-based approach to learning (Alawamleh, Al-Twait and Al-Saht, 2020). Hence teaching some aspects of Islam in a practical environment with a practical approach would be more efficient. Practice-based learning enhances the results and effectiveness of learning more than its theoretical counterpart (Jena, 2020). Online, class if not abolished, hinder the delivery of practice-based preaching during Islamiat classes. One of our respondents also highlighted the same view *“You know Islam is a way of life. You cannot expect any teacher to teach a way of life using only a theoretical approach”*.

Online education has hampered learning in different ways. One of the ways, discussed in the responses of our study, was the distraction caused in homes that did not let the children focus on their learning. Moreover, the teachings that could have been made easy through group forums and interactive sessions were also absent in online education. The responses highlighted that there were difficulties faced by the students in interaction, mostly because they were confused, less focused and not used to virtual modes of interaction. However, it is important to note that no matter how much colleagues and friends can cause distraction in the class, they are one of the most important learning sources for students. Group sessions, group activities, and the small personal discussion on the topic at the end of the class exhibit effective results that enhance learning (Jena, 2020; Alawamleh, Al-Twait and Al-Saht, 2020).

Conclusion

Online education has not been as effective as conventional modes of education. Particularly, in the delivery of Islamic education, different kinds of struggles were faced by the teachers and the students. Some of the difficulties were caused by distraction in a home environment, difficulty in accurate assessments of the

students, physical interaction, absence of practice-based learning and the lack of digital literacy. It required the students to have cell phones with good connections in their homes, hence it was a struggle, especially for students with low economic backgrounds who cannot afford cell phones or computers to actively participate in online learning. Online education challenges were educational, technical challenges, interactive challenges, organisational as well as psychological challenges that were faced by both the teachers and the students. For instance, the online delivery of knowledge was disturbed by the low internet connection of either party which caused lagging and thus loss of concentration. The results of our study highlighted that online classes can be more effective by understanding technology. Most teachers admitted that an understanding of technology can help them understand the application and thus their class setting. The phenomenon is also explained by social learning theory which suggests individuals imitate the behaviour of their surroundings. However, online education did not allow for the practice of practice-based learning.

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