

## Interest of Students Toward Online Education: A Case Study of Religious Students

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### Abstract

*Interest of student is very Significant in open and distance learning (ODL) education because of its profound influence on pedagogical implications. Extensive research has been conducted on the interest of science students in ODL during the post-pandemic period. However, understanding religious students' interests holds particular significance because of their unique beliefs, values, and needs. Therefore, a case study was conducted to investigate the interest of religious students in online education and identify the factors influencing their interest. A total of 123 undergraduate students from the Faculty of Quranic and Sunnah Studies at the Islamic Science University of Malaysia participated in this study. All of them are third- and fourth-year students with experience in online learning. Data were collected using a structured Google form and analysed using appropriate statistical methods to gain insights into the participants' interests and opinions. The results revealed that 85.4% of students had a positive attitude toward online learning, whereas 14.6% had an unfavourable attitude. Additionally, 73.2% preferred traditional learning, while 26.8% preferred online learning. Furthermore, 44.7% believed that online learning provided the same quality as traditional education, whereas 55.3% disagreed. These findings have significant implications for the development and implementation of future online learning strategies in Islamic education.*

**Keywords:** Religion, Students, Online Learning, Interest, Education

## INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted educational institutions to shift toward Online learning, including religious education. After covid-19, online learning became more familiar among religious teachers and students. Islamic online learning platforms and courses offer various subjects, catering to learners with varying levels of knowledge and expertise. These courses cover diverse areas such as Quranic studies, Hadith studies, Islamic jurisprudence, Islamic history, and Islamic spirituality (Hoque, Yusoff, Toure, & Mohamed, 2019). Students can choose from a plethora of courses delivered by qualified Islamic scholars and educators from around the world. However, it has raised huge challenges for the religious education sector, especially Islamic education.

Therefore, based on previous research that emphasized the importance of student interest in academic achievement, this study aimed to explore religious students' interest in the implementation of online learning during the post-pandemic. In essence, by examining students' interest in online education, this study provides practical recommendations for enhancing strategies related to Islamic education in online environments.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

A student's level of interest significantly impacts educational results and overall achievement. Studies consistently show a positive link between student engagement and academic success spanning diverse subjects and education stages (Renninger et al., 2019). Students with genuine interest in a subject or topic display greater engagement, motivation, and perseverance (Ainley & Hidi, 2014). The students' inherent motivation propels

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them to seize learning opportunities, probe complex concepts, and delve deeper into subjects, culminating in superior educational results (Harackiewicz et al., 2016).

Moreover, Student interest strongly influences academic success. Students with a strong interest in a subject will dedicate considerable effort, remain resilient, and establish lofty goals (Renninger et al., 2019). Enhanced dedication and commitment result in better grades, test scores, and academic results. Student interest significantly influences career decisions and further education. Students' strong affinity towards a subject can propel them towards advanced learning and careers associated with it (Krapp, 2002). Their intense interest in the subject motivates them to pursue advanced studies, participate in related extracurricular activities, and seek mentorship, defining their educational and career trajectories.

## **OVERVIEW OF ONLINE LEARNING**

Online learning, which is also known as open distance learning (ODL), delivers education through the internet and digital technologies, providing remote learning experiences (Simonson et al., 2019). This mode of education can appear in synchronous and asynchronous online forms. Synchronous online learning includes real-time instructor-learner interactions via scheduled classes, webinars, and video conferences (Means et al., 2010), whereas asynchronous online learning enables learners to access pre-recorded content at their convenience (Picciano, 2017). In online learning, learners usually access course materials via a learning management system (LMS) or a standalone online platform. The LMS functions as a one-stop-shop for instructors to manage and distribute content, assessments, and resources, and for learners to access, submit assignments, and engage in communication (Khan, 2019). Online learning applicability extends from K-12 schools to higher education, professional development, and lifelong learning (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Online learning has risen in prominence and acceptance due to technological advancements, expanded internet accessibility, and growing demand for flexible education choices (Simonson et al., 2019). With time, location, and pace flexibility, learners can tailor their education experience through the program. Online learning accomplishes the same level of learning as classroom instruction.

## **INTEGRATION OF (ODL) IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly increased the popularity and effectiveness of online religious education. On the other hand, technology and the internet have significantly transformed religious education through online platforms (Kırşehirlioğlu & Bozkurt, 2019). Online religious education covers various subjects and caters to learners of all ages, backgrounds, and educational levels. The courses encompass Quranic studies, Hadith studies, Islamic theology, comparative religion, religious history, and spirituality (Rashid & Asabere, 2018). Digital resources including libraries, lectures, interactive modules, and forums enable users to delve deeper into religious principles and traditions (Saeed et al., 2020). The variety of subjects, resources, and collaborative tools facilitates deeper exploration and comprehension of religious principles and traditions. Online religious studies, fuelled by technological advancements, will become more significant worldwide.

## **ADVANTAGES OF ONLINE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

In religious education, online learning presents various benefits. It enhances accessibility. Online platforms extend religious education access to individuals globally. (Ali, 2019). The accessibility of online religious education is especially beneficial for individuals residing in regions with minimal availability of conventional religious learning centres. Online learning facilitates religious studies by eliminating the necessity for travel or relocation.

On the other hand, online religious education offers learners the flexibility to access materials, lectures, and assignments at their own convenience for a customized study schedule. (Mansor et al., 2021) For individuals with busy lifestyles, this flexibility holds great value. Religious education can be seamlessly integrated into their daily lives without conflicting with other responsibilities.

Online learning in religious education facilitates interactive and collaborative learning. With features such as discussion forums, live chat sessions, and video conferencing tools, online platforms emphasize communication and engagement among learners. (Haque, 2020). Online religious education benefits from self-paced and

personalized learning in the context of online delivery. The courses allow learners to control their own progression, enabling them to revisit difficult topics or move forward smoothly (Rashid & Asabere, 2018). By focusing on areas of interest, exploring specific subjects in depth, and customizing learning to individual needs and preferences, this approach empowers learners. Online religious education has become accessible, flexible, interactive, and personalized, expanding access to learners regardless of their geographical locations.

## **CHALLENGES FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

Online learning offers advantages and disadvantages in religious education that need to be carefully considered. Islamic teachings can be misunderstood or misinterpreted if there is no direct instruction from knowledgeable scholars. Online learning environments need to employ certified instructors and provide avenues for students to seek assistance with complex subjects (Al-Daihani, 2020).

In online environments, false information and untrustworthy sources are a common problem. Ensuring the authenticity and credibility of content is crucial in religious education (Nik & Mesbahul, 2022). For students to have access to credible texts, academic articles, and translations of religious texts, institutions should thoroughly screen online resources (Hassan, A. M., 2020).

Online platforms can provide students with immersive and interactive learning experiences by employing multimedia resources like video demonstrations, simulations, and virtual reality experiences (Ahmed, 2021). But certain aspects of religious education, such as practical training and rituals, require in-person instruction. (A. Nur and N. Mohd, 2021). It is crucial to verify the credibility and genuine nature of online religious education. Although, Online learning in religious education provides substantial advantages but requires addressing challenges related to interpretation, misinformation, and practical aspects for a truly comprehensive and effective teaching method.

## **CASE STUDY**

A survey questionnaire was used to gather information from a religious student sample. The survey was designed with Google Forms in English. The text is divided into three sections.

In the initial section, students' demographic information such as email, gender, age, semester, and faculty were gathered.

The next section aimed to assess the respondents' experiences with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The final section of the questionnaire consisted of items related to attitudes toward online learning, preferences for traditional versus online learning, and beliefs regarding the quality of online education.

Appropriate statistical methods were employed to analyze the data and gain insights into the interests and opinions of the participants.

## **RESULTS**

### **Participants**

A total of 123 students from the three courses of faculty Quranic and Sunnah studies, Islamic Science University of Malaysia, participated in this study. The three courses were Quran and Sunnah Studies (QS), Quran and Multimedia (QM), and Sunnah with Information Management (SPM), of which 52% were male and 42% were female students aged 19 years and above. Of them, 72.4% were fourth year and 27.6% third year students, and they had experience with online learning.

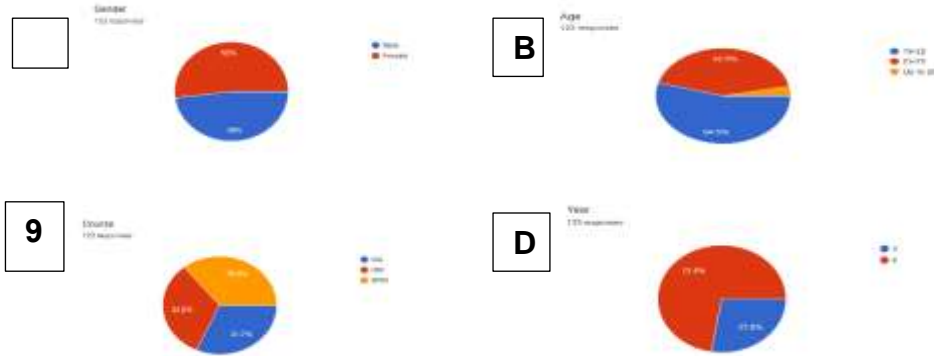
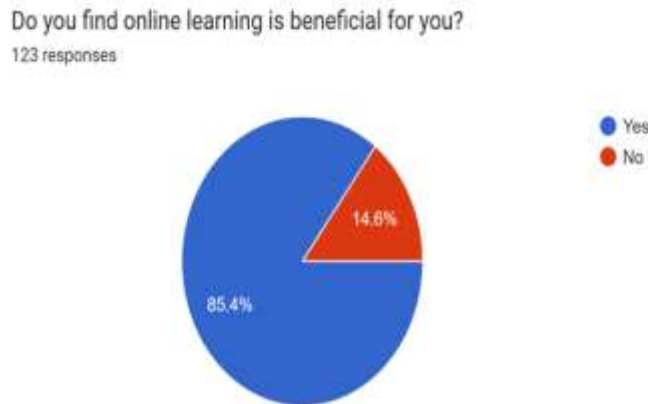


Fig. 1 Shows Respondents' demographic information

Figure 1 shows the student demographic information

### Attitudes toward Online Learning

The results of the study indicated that majority of religious students exhibited a positive attitude toward Online learning. When asked, “Do you think online learning is beneficial for you?” 85.4% of the participants responded affirmatively, while 14.6% expressed a negative opinion. These findings highlight a strong interest among most religious students in embracing online education as a viable and appealing option to meet their educational needs. Figure 2 depicts Students' attitudes toward online learning.



### Preferences for Traditional versus Online Learning

In terms of preferences, the study found that 73.2% of religious students preferred traditional learning, while 26.8% expressed a preference for online learning. This indicates that a significant proportion of religious students still value the traditional educational environment. However, it is worth noting that more than a quarter of participants preferred online education, indicating that demand for this type of education is increasing.

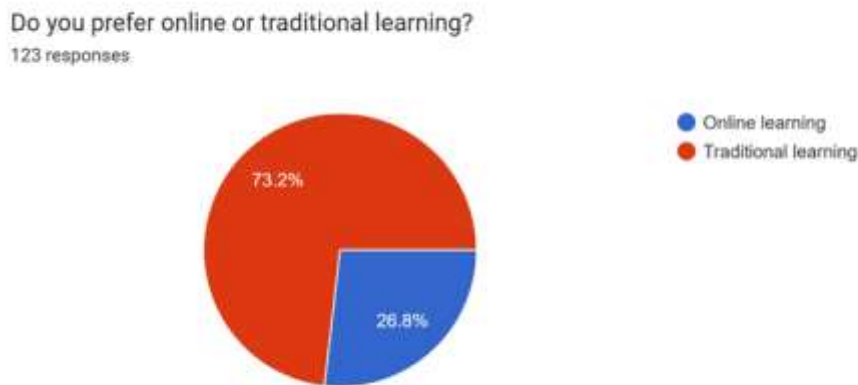


Figure 3 depicts student's preferences for Traditional versus Online Learning

### Beliefs about Online Education Quality

Regarding the perception of online education quality, the findings showed that 44.7% of religious students believed that online learning provided the same quality as traditional education. On the other hand, 55.3% disagreed with this belief, suggesting scepticism regarding the quality of online education. This finding highlights a need to address concerns and enhance the perception of online education quality among religious students. Fig. 4 shows the students perception about online education quality.

### DISCUSSIONS

Based on the results, it is crucial to enhance the standard of Islamic education on digital platforms. This can be achieved by educational bodies through the process of accreditation, meticulous course development, and the implementation of efficient online teaching methods. Moreover, a hybrid model that merges conventional and digital learning methods can meet the needs of faith-based learners while integrating the advantages of in-person instruction and spiritual teachings. It's crucial for religious institutions to address the doubts of students about online education by recognizing and lessening their worries (Al-Hunaiyyan and Al-Sharhan, 2019). Showcasing the positive aspects and successful instances of online learning, involving religious leaders and influencers, conducting enlightening workshops, and executing focused marketing initiatives could aid in enhancing the perception of online education among Islamic learners and enrich their comprehensive learning experience.

### IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study have important implications for the development and implementation of future online learning strategies in Islamic education. It recommends that religious considerations are very important in online education for interest of religious students, such as:

#### Religious Teachings and Values:

Religious students' choices are greatly influenced by their religious teachings and values. These teachings emphasize ethical values such as honesty, integrity, and righteousness. As indicated in a study by (Al-Samarraie et al, 2020) religious students prefer online education that is in harmony with their faith and convictions. In order to increase the interest of religious students in online learning, institutions should acknowledge and integrate religious teachings and values in online education.

**Perceived Ethical Conduct:** Perceived Ethical Behaviours have great impact on Religious Students' interest in Online Education. Most of the religious students' participation and enthusiasm in online

learning depend greatly on ethical conduct. A deficiency in moral behaviour may hinder religiously oriented students from fully participating in online education. (Al-Emran et al., 2018) Institutions should emphasize ethical behaviour in online education to attract religious students, ensuring that course content and interactions uphold moral values.

**Content with Moral Principles:** Integrating moral principles into the online curriculum is crucial for creating a harmonious learning experience for religious students. By incorporating social learning experiences, ethical examples, forums, group tasks, and ethical role models, educators can promote moral development and engagement among religious students in virtual classrooms.

**Pedagogical Approaches:** Engaging religious students in pedagogical approaches such as moral reasoning, ethical discourse, case studies, ethical issues, and reflective exercises can be promoting critical thinking and interest of participation in online.

**Instructor Guidance and Support:** The presence of effective instructor guidance is essential in increasing the participation of religious students in online learning. Instructors should align the content with moral principles, facilitate social learning, incorporate ethical role models, use pedagogical approaches that promote moral thinking, and provide personalized guidance to support religious students and enhance their moral development in online learning environments.

## **CONCLUSION**

Finding of this study shows that, many religious students have a positive attitude toward online education. They believe online learning is beneficial for them. However, a significant number of students who prefer traditional learning and express scepticism about the quality of online education. By addressing religious concerns early on and customizing online learning strategies to align with religious values, Institutions can reach the needs of religious students. This approach not only ensures interest of participation but also fosters a sense of belonging and alignment with religious values in the context of online education.

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