# Digitizing Darul Faqih Islamic boarding school in Indonesia: Teachers' perspectives on hybrid Islamic boarding school

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the closure of almost all learning processes in Islamic boarding schools. Only some Islamic boarding schools have succeeded in modifying learning methods, one of which is the Darul Faqih Indonesian Islamic Boarding School located in Malang Regency, Indonesia. This community service aims to support efforts to strengthen the digitalisation of Darul Faqih Indonesian Islamic boarding school and direct the development of hybrid Islamic boarding schools after the Covid-19 pandemic. This community service activity consists of two phases. First, at the beginning of the semester, teachers are given training to strengthen the use of learning management systems and mobile apps. In the second phase, the teacher was invited back to conduct a focus group discussion at the end of the implementation. At the end of this service activity, impact measurements were also carried out from a teacher's perspective. A total of 58 teachers participated in this activity. Less than half of teachers have a preference for mixed learning. However, they have high self-efficacy in implementing effective learning to support the implementation of hybrid pesantren. Constraints during mixed learning are appropriate technological and pedagogical support. Despite some challenges, teachers have so far been able to adapt to various online learning methods. Most agree that blended learning can be next as the next main effort towards hybrid pesantren.

**Keywords**

mixed learning; traditional learning; hybrid boarding school

## Abstrak

Pandemi Covid-19 berdampak pada penutupan hampir semua proses pembelajaran di pondok pesantren. Hanya sebagian pondok pesantren yang berhasil memodifikasi metode pembelajaran, salah satunya adalah Pondok Pesantren Darul Faqih Indonesia yang berlokasi di Kabupaten Malang, Indonesia. Pengabdian masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk memberikan dukungan dalam upaya penguatan digitalisasi pesantren Darul Faqih Indonesia dan mengarahkan pada pembangunan pesantren hibrid pasca pandemi Covid-19. Kegiatan pengabdian masyarakat ini terdiri dari dua fase. Pertama, pada awal semester, guru diberikan pelatihan untuk penguatan penggunaan learning manajemen system dan mobile app. Fase kedua, di akhir penerapan, guru diundang kembali untuk melakukan Focus Group Discussion. Di akhir kegiatan pengabdian ini juga dilakukan pengukuran dampak berupa perspektif guru. Sebanyak 58 guru berpartisipasi dalam kegiatan ini. Kurang dari separuh guru yang memiliki preferensi terhadap pembelajaran campuran. Namun, mereka memiliki efikasi diri yang tinggi dalam melaksanakan pembelajaran yang efektif untuk mendukung implementasi pesantren hibrid. Kendala selama pembelajaran campuran adalah dukungan teknologi dan pedagogi yang tepat dan sesuai. Meskipun ada beberapa tantangan, guru sejauh ini mampu beradaptasi dengan

berbagai metode pembelajaran daring, dan mayoritas setuju bahwa pembelajaran campuran dapat diterapkan selanjutnya sebagai upaya utama menuju pesantren hibrid.

## 1. Introduction

The world was currently under pressure due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Djalante et al., 2020). Control and prevention of spread continue to be carried out in all countries by limiting activities involving many people, including religious activities (Hanafi et al., 2022). One of the impacts felt in Indonesia is the closure of learning activities in the pesantren environment (Hanafi et al., 2021b). Following government policies such as the implementation of Large-Scale Social Restrictions (LSSR), only a small percentage of pesantren have made conditional and timely learning modifications to maintain the academic continuity of their students.

One of the efforts made by Pondok Pesantren Darul Faqih Indonesia (PP DFI) is to incorporate technology resources into academic and general services in the form of strengthening the use of Learning Management System (LMS) and developing mobile applications. Literature studies show that technology integration has good effectiveness for religious teaching. A number of studies show evidence that LMS can be done for religious learning effectively, such as in the fields of Qur'anic studies (Hanafi et al., 2019b), hadith (Hoque et al., 2019), Islamic character education (Mustofa et al., 2020), even for specific topics such as zakat (Choiri, 2019). As for mobile learning, research conducted by Fauzi & Wan Khairuldin (2017) shows that students' interest in the use of m-learning is very high, so that it provides learning motivation in learning the Qur'an. The data above is supported by the results of other studies that state that m-learning can be used as a medium for learning the Qur'an and worship (Khairuldin et al., 2017; Hanafi et al., 2020, 2019a).

The junior high school curriculum at PP DFI adopts student-centered active learning using a variety of collaborative learning methods. Everything is done with face-to-face learning. The group discussion approach is most often used to deliver material in class. Then, during the COVID-19 pandemic, learning is done with the help of an LMS that is openly and freely available. The LMS system is used to facilitate various teaching and learning activities and supported by mobile applications for other services. Learning materials and various other additions are provided through the LMS to support independent learning at home.

As the Covid-19 pandemic protocol continues to change and allows for limited face-to-face learning, PP DFI then tries to conduct blended learning to provide certainty of student learning outcomes. Group discussions and material delivery are conducted using various online platforms. To keep the format the same as before the pandemic, group discussions are conducted with the presence of the teacher, and the time spent is also set similar to classroom learning. Meanwhile, practices where the expected learning outcomes involve various psychomotor skills, such as worship practices, are postponed until the boarding school is ready to open face-to-face.

Blended learning is defined as the integration of traditional classroom and online learning to facilitate independent and collaborative learning (Amir et al., 2020). In simple terms, a blended learning approach is learning that is implemented through a combination of face-to-face and online learning activities (Hrastinski, 2019). The findings of a study by Hanafi, Ikhsan, et al. (2021) indicate that religious education is more effectively delivered through blended learning than through online learning. It is further explained that there is a big and long homework assignment to be able to do religious learning online.

Although previous reports prove that blended learning has good effectiveness, evaluation in the context of a pesantren environment is not widely available. Teacher feedback can provide important information for the evaluation of blended learning so as to improve the efforts of hybrid pesantren development. Therefore, this community service was conducted to provide support and strengthen the digitalisation of PP DFI through the development of mobile

applications and LMS training for teachers, and ending with the measurement of teachers' perspectives. We have a belief that teachers' positive perception of the acceptance of blended learning has an important role in the development of hybrid pesantren in the future.

## 2. Methods
### 2.1 Partners and Targets

This community service was carried out from September to October 2022. The involved partner is Pondok Pesantren Darul Faqih Malang (PP DFI). PP DFI is situated in Pandanlandung Village, Wagir District, Malang Regency. This pesantren is renowned for its excellence and proficiency in educational implementation and digital transformation, particularly during the COVID-19 epidemic, throughout the Wagir sub-district area. The specific focus of this community service initiative is 58 junior high school (SMP) teachers. This community service has obtained permission and is funded by the research and community service institution (LP2M) of the State University of Malang (UM). The partners and targets involved in this community service have signed an agreement form to become partners.

### 2.2 Activity

This community service activity consists of two phases. First, at the beginning of the semester, teachers were given training to strengthen the use of the learning management system (LMS) and mobile app for learning and management of DFI Junior High School, following previous conditions that required distance learning (during the COVID-19 pandemic). Teachers were required to attend an orientation session and then asked to use the mobile app and LMS as much as possible for approximately two months. The mobile app was developed by PP DFI and then refined with the help of the community service team. The first activity is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Activities to strengthen the use of LMS and DFI Mobile

In the second phase, at the end of the implementation, teachers were invited back to conduct an online and offline Focus Group Discussion (FGD). FGDs were conducted with teachers, pesantren leaders, and community leaders. This FGD was conducted to discuss the progress of online learning implementation and the possible direction or opportunity for PP DFI to become a hybrid pesantren in terms of human resource readiness. For this purpose, teachers were given an online questionnaire to assess the preference of hybrid pesantren from the teachers' perspective. Teachers were encouraged to fill out the hybrid pesantren survey questionnaire, but teacher participation was voluntary and free of coercion. The second activity is shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Online and offline FGDs with teachers, pesantren leaders, and community leaders

### 2.3 Instruments and Impact Measurement

There are two instruments used in this community service activity, namely, process and measurement instruments. Instruments for the process of implementing community service in the form of guidelines for using the LMS and mobile app (Figure 3) were developed by the community service team. These guidelines and products were then used as sources/references in the first activity.
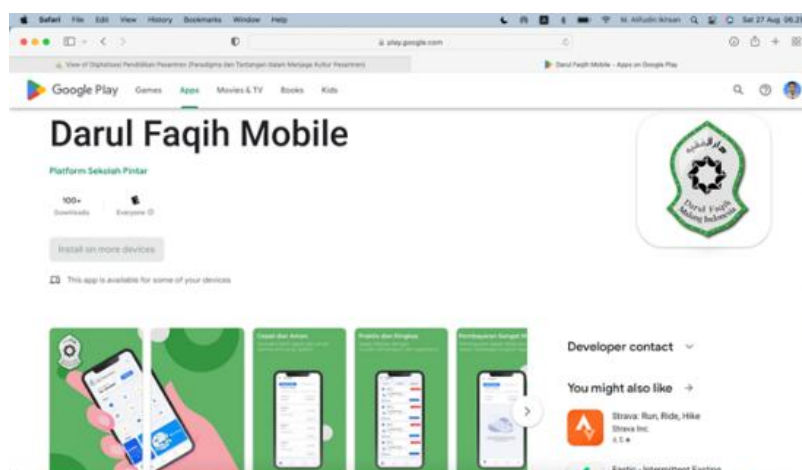


**Figure 3.** Darul Faqih Mobile

Meanwhile, the measurement instrument used for the second activity was a questionnaire, which was developed to assess teachers' perceptions of hybrid pesantren. Overall, the questionnaire consisted of three parts: (A) preparation towards hybrid; (B) reflection on online learning; and (C) professional needs of transitioning to hybrid. The results of the measurements describing the impact of this community service activity will be presented descriptively. Teachers will be labelled from one, two, three, and so on, e.g., "G1" for the first teacher participant, "G2" for the second teacher, and so on.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the unprecedented closure of Islamic boarding schools, and this has affected the way students learn in all Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. Most of the boarding schools have hardly undergone a sudden virtual transformation, so that teaching and learning activities cannot be carried out at all, or they are forced to continue with strict health protocols. However, a small number of pesantren, such as PP DFI, took a new step by organizing online learning during the Large-Scale Social Restrictions (LSSR) policy, then slowly blended online and face-to-face learning after the relaxation of LSSR, and now have full face-to-face learning. With this experience, PP DFI plans

to organise online and face-to-face learning to serve santri more optimally, which is then called a hybrid pesantren.

This community service documents how PP DFI's efforts as a partner to build a hybrid pesantren with the UM community service team. The efforts that have been made are training to strengthen the skills of using LMS for teachers (Figure 1) and the development of Darul Faqih Mobile and its guidelines (Figure 3). This community service also tried to see teachers' perspectives on hybrid pesantren at the end of the activity (Figure 2). This community service is the first attempt to build a blended learning mode related to preference, effectiveness, and readiness in pesantren after the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the end of this activity, the measurement results showed that almost half of the teachers (41.3%) preferred blended learning, and the rest preferred traditional face-to-face learning. This result aligns with previous research that reported more positive preferences and experiences in traditional classes (Weldy, 2018). Teachers' experiences conducting learning during the pandemic may explain why the percentage is higher in traditional classes than in online and blended classes. Online learning is less preferred, perhaps because it offers a sense of inconvenience, even increasing confusion (Dhawan, 2020). Teacher (G14) gave her perspective that "*teachers can be closer to students because they can provide motivation and attention, how sophisticated technology is, teacher presence is still needed.*"

Research conducted by Suwannaphisit et al. (2021) shows evidence that blended learning is not more effective than traditional learning. In the context of the pesantren environment, teachers' acceptance of traditional classes in the context of learning has more advantages. One teacher stated that "*the interaction between teachers and students in offline learning goes well, students' problems with their lessons can be directly asked and teachers can fully control learning*" G5. Supported by another teacher, G13 stated that "*the essence of learning is the meeting of teachers and students in one place. The goal is to be more focused and directed in learning. In addition, the teacher will better understand the character of the students.*"

Blended learning is the most feasible way of learning technology integration for schools in the pesantren environment (Hanafi et al., 2021a). Technology integration in boarding schools is necessary to support access to digital resources and improve technology use skills for teachers and students. Based on previous research results, blended learning can improve knowledge but not performance and applied practice skills (Maatuk et al., 2021; Ravat et al., 2021). So in the context of pesantren, as also stated by G51 that "*blended learning can be done online in the early meetings because it is more about learning conceptual theory. Then, it is continued with offline meetings to engage students directly for tutorial and practice activities*". In other words, blended learning offers greater flexibility and personalization to meet students' needs (Pratt and Kovatcheva, 2018). These advantages are in accordance with the learning process of students in pesantren, who have to learn more topics than students who study in public schools.

A number of studies have shown that preferences in the use of learning technology are influenced by age. Younger teachers generally have a higher attitude and acceptance of technology than older teachers (Ibrohim et al., 2021). In the context of PP DFI, although most of the teachers are young, the results are inversely proportional. One contributing factor may be related to the curriculum and the paradigm that learning in pesantren cannot be done online. The reason is that religious learning, especially related to worship, requires physical arrangements and psychomotor skills, and it cannot be replaced by online learning (Hanafi et al., 2021a), as also stated by a teacher (G56) that "*offline learning models are more suitable and possible to be implemented in schools based on Islamic boarding schools.*"

In addition to self-readiness, other factors needed by teachers in implementing learning are self-regulation, self-efficacy, and motivation (Amir et al., 2020). It is undeniable that teachers have varying motivation and confidence in utilizing learning technology. When asked, how confident are you in motivating your students to follow online learning with regular face-to-face meetings? Only 23 out of 58 answered very confident, the rest were moderately (34 people) and somewhat confident (1 person). These results were also similar when teachers were asked about how confident they were in helping students in terms of academic support in the hybrid boarding school learning model. Although some teachers preferred traditional learning,

teachers at PP DFI have a fairly high confidence in implementing blended learning to support the realisation of hybrid pesantren.

Despite the obvious advantages, blended learning also brings the disadvantage of complex technology use skills. These conditions can hinder the successful implementation of blended learning (Kumar and Selva Ganesh, 2022). Obvious infrastructure-related barriers are also faced by teachers who complain about unstable internet connections; for example, teacher (G47) states, "*The challenge of online and blended learning is the unstable internet connection, which can result in the material not being delivered properly.*" Another statement from G48 reads, "*The main challenge is the need for more intense internet access in online learning. On the other hand, it is important to prepare learning media that is fun and still appropriate to the material so that students do not get bored, considering they have to stare at the gadget screen for a long time.*" In the future, teachers also stated that they need support in the form of capacity building: "*Teachers need to get workshops on materials, media, or learning activities that are suitable for online mode*" (G49).

The results of this impact measurement provide important preliminary findings for the improvement and development of pesantren in the future. However, the questionnaire used only measures teachers' perceptions. There is no information on the impact of previous online and blended learning experiences on teachers' current teaching performance. Thus, it is crucial for the evaluation of curriculum transformation from pre-pandemic and post-pandemic conditions. This deserves further investigation. Despite these limitations, the results of this community service offer valuable information about teachers' perspectives in the current pesantren environment concerning the learning methods applied post-COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the uncertainty of learning in pesantren during the pandemic, learning methods must change for continued student academic achievement. The development of hybrid pesantren is a platform for teachers to determine the learning method that best suits the current situation and have a proper plan once face-to-face teaching can be fully resumed.

## 4. Conclusion

The impact measurement results of this community service present evidence that teachers can adapt to the current conditions despite some challenges to conduct blended learning. Most teachers have enough motivation and confidence in integrating technology, and agree on the efficiency of blended learning that can lead to the development of hybrid pesantren at Pondok Pesantren Darul Faqih Indonesia. The closure of the pesantren during the COVID-19 pandemic presents many opportunities to transform learning. As more and more students have high technological literacy, teachers in pesantren need to consider integrating blended learning into their curriculum.

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