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# Learning Innovations and Strengthening Student Character Through Distance Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

**Muhammad Ilham and Udik Budi Wibowo**

Educational Management, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

**ORCID:**
*Muhammad Ilham: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7096-4663*

## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on Indonesia's education system. Learning has had to be conducted remotely to prevent students from contracting COVID-19. The purpose of this study was to determine the innovations implemented by teachers so that learning could continue and to find out how student character can be strengthened through distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. A qualitative approach was taken, using a case study design. Data were collected through interviews with informants. The results showed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, learning was carried out in online networks by utilizing technology. ZOOM and WhatsApp were the applications most often used in the learning process. It was also found that the character of students can be strengthened through distance learning. For example, some teachers suggested that students pray together with their close family and other relatives. Teachers also encouraged students to help with the house chores of the family.

**Keywords:** pandemic, COVID-19, learning, innovation, technology, character, students

Corresponding Author:
Muhammad Ilham
muhammadilham.2018@student
.uny.ac.id

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## 1. Introduction

Coronavirus is a subfamily Coronavirinae in the Coronaviridae family. Coronavirus is also known as COVID-19 [6]. COVID-19 first appeared in Wuhan, China in December 2019. This virus can infect birds and mammals, including humans. The emergence of COVID-19 changed life in all corners of the world. The COVID-19 pandemic forces affected countries to close schools and undertake distance learning to minimize COVID-19 transmission. More than 120 countries have closed schools to impose restrictions on social interaction and impact 1.6 million students worldwide [7]. The COVID-19 case was first detected in Indonesia on March 2, 2020, and has claimed many lives. Until August 8, 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has claimed 5,658 lives and 123,503 cases in Indonesia [8].

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the education system in Indonesia. The COVID-19 pandemic implemented the 2020 National Examination (UN) abolished. Student graduation is determined by the report card score. The COVID-19 pandemic also forces learning to be carried out remotely to minimize transmission of COVID-19 in the school environment. Teachers are forced to do online learning by taking advantage of technological advances. Distance Learning is considered the best alternative to continue teaching and learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Distance Learning is one of the learning innovations that emerged due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Distance Learning has been started since March 2020 and has been going on for five months. Distance Learning raises the pros and cons of parents of students. Parents of students objected to having to spend money to buy internet quotas. Distance learning cannot be done optimally in this country because not all students have smartphones and parts of Indonesia have not been reached by the internet.

A grade IX student at SMPN Salopa, Sultan Zihan from Tasikmalaya, West Java, had difficulty adjusting to online learning during the pandemic. Sultan id not have a cell phone, so he had to stay with friends who had personal cell phones. The same thing was experienced by Dimas Ibnu Elias, a seventh-grade student of SMPN 1 Rembang, Central Java. Dimas had to go to school by himself to study face-to-face because he did not have a smartphone as the main support in distance learning. Makarim said that distance learning can also have negative and permanent effects for students, namely the threat of dropping out of school, decreasing learning achievement, and increasing violence in children [3].

Distance learning is considered not optimal because it cannot achieve all curriculum goals, including strengthening character education for students. Strengthening character education is the joy of President Joko Widodo-Jusuf Kalla in the national education system. This policy of strengthening character education is integrated into the National Movement for the Mental Revolution (GNRM), namely a better way of thinking, behaving, and acting. The main values expected from strengthening character education are religious, nationalist, independent, cooperation, and integrity. These values want to be instilled and practiced through the national education system so that they are known, understood, and applied throughout schools and communities.

Strengthening character education is more emphasized in family and school life, but currently strengthening character education in schools is experiencing obstacles. Learning is not done face-to-face as usual. The learning process is carried out remotely to prevent students from contracting COVID-19. This research is very important to do to find out the appropriate learning innovations that can be used so that learning can run

smoothly without burdening students. This research is also important to do to find out how to strengthen student character through distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 2. Related works/Literature Review

Based on research conducted by Rosali 2020 using a descriptive method with a qualitative approach, it was found that distance learning was not ideal. Student learning outcomes vary from unsatisfactory, moderate to good. This unsatisfactory result was influenced by the availability of internet quotas, unstable networks and supporting devices such as laptops. Applications that are used during the online process are Vclass, meet Unsil, zoom, whatsapp, telegram, google classroom, youtube, facebook, and messenger. Rosali also explained that online learning is considered effective if it is applied during the COVID-19 pandemic [5], but a more varied model is needed to keep it interesting if used in the long term, meanwhile, Kurniasari explain that if what we called new way of courses going well [2], then the teachers should be maintain some details activities from the masterplan into evaluation things simply, more creative, and effective.

The study of Kurniasari (2020) had similarity with the research of author [2]. Wahyudi as the subject said, they had been maintain the fit method for the student before the online courses was started. This way, teachers asked to be more creative for the effective and efficient course. They also made some method evaluations in the end of the courses. The evaluation intended to know what exactly fit to the students for studying.

Darojat said, online courses can be taken place everywhere and everytime [1]. The studying process of students can be able to justify with their own capability. This new way of courses also can be prioritize initiative and independency. In other hand, the interaction between teachers and students will be unlimited because of the technlogy we had today. Because of this situation, they still can be sharing and discussing for 24 hours. Absolutely, this can be increasing the quality of the studying process. The research of online course is very important and urgent to do, especially in the region with lack facility and equipments to support it. This way intended to avoid the bomb of the technology we had today. Technology change make the possibility of the online courses can be more longer to prevent COVID-19 and after.

# 3. Material & Methodology

This research using qualitative method with the case study. Subject of the study is Dini Soesila Wahyudi, S.Pd, a teacher of 6th grade who working in an International Islamic Boarding School, Central Java. COVID-19 make the author can not be interractive with the teacher, so we can make comunication via WhatsApp. The author try to looking for the subject with the same passionate about technology to support online courses. The interview taken at August 8th, 2020. Data presentation is done by combining the information obtained from interviews and document studies. Presentation data is done to produce a descriptive form. Withdrawing conclusions, verification of data that has been obtained from the results of presenting data with conclusions from the results of the interview.

# 4. Results and Discussion

## 4.1. Result

According to the study, COVID-19 pandemic brought some changes in the national education field. One of which is making teachers asked to be more innovate in order to find the right method for students. Even though COVID-19 pandemic has stopped many activities in this world, but not with the teaching and learning activities had been done by teachers and students. As a solution, all parties must deal with the technology to be able to carry out the online courses. The challenges for educators and teachers is still ongoing. The process of online courses was not always in line with the methods and goals to be achieved. Many resistance and challenges should be able to be resolved. Teachers' creativity and innovation better required to continue to develop when facing the technology. Its purpose had not been fully achieved by implementing online courses in one time. However, character building on students should be given for students so that they become the next generation who are smart and well-skilled.

### 4.1.1. Learning innovation

The COVID-19 pandemic forces teachers to innovate in learning. Teachers must adjust as quickly as possible so that learning continues despite the COVID-19 outbreak. Teachers are required to be able to take advantage of technological advances in the learning process. ZOOM, WhatsApp, and Canva are the most used applications. ZOOM

is easy to use during the distance learning process because the video quality is good, it can record, share files directly, and can write directly using the board provided by the ZOOM application. The WhatsApp application is used to share subject matter in the form of Power Point (PPT) to students, while the Canva application is used to create schedules. Canva is easy to use for scheduling because of its pre-designed design. Before learning each class begins, students from grade one to grade six simultaneously carry out ZOOM this or tahfid beginning with Al-Fatihah and classical then continue with private learning. This tahsin or tahfid ZOOM is carried out for 45 minutes from 07: 30-08: 15, after which the learning process continues. Before Distance Learning begins, the teacher first provides learning tools such as laptops, cellphones (HP), and internet quotas as well as materials in the form of PowerPoint (PPT) which will be delivered to students through ZOOM. Before the pandemic, learning was carried out full day from 07: 00-16: 00, but after the pandemic, lessons were reduced from 07: 30-11: 15. This reduction in learning time is applied to students. Teachers still adhere to working hours, from 07: 00-15: 00 from Monday to Friday.

The learning process is carried out from 08: 15-11: 15 conducted privately. The time for three hours is divided so that each student has the opportunity to learn privately from the teacher. While waiting for their turn to study, students are guarded to write multiplication and poetry. This guard time is useful for training students' patience. Parents of students participate in their child's learning process. Parents accompany their children in ZOOM activities and assist their children in completing tasks given by their teachers. Parents of students are aware of the facts they are experiencing. Parents complain about not being able to optimally accompany their children in the distance learning process and hope that face-to-face learning at school can be carried out again. This is because the parents of students who are mostly workers also have their activities or activities. Teachers always provide understanding and motivation to parents and students so that they are always patient and enthusiastic about undergoing distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers who teach at this international-minded Islamic school already have permission from the local office to visit students' homes. Teachers can visit students' homes directly to distribute worksheets and teaching aids to support the material.

### 4.1.2. How to strengthen student character through distance learning

Strengthening student character is one of the learning objectives that must be achieved. Teachers are expected to insert character strengthening in each learning process.

Strengthening character education has been included in the 2013 curriculum and then added to activities in co-curricular and extracurricular activities. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, learning was carried out remotely and extracurricular activities were eliminated so that strengthening character education was not optimal. Every teacher is required to be creative so that the strengthening of character education is conveyed to students even though learning remotely. The constraints experienced when doing distance learning can be used to strengthen character education. Teachers and parents are always polite both in terms of behavior and speech during learning and outside of learning. This polite attitude will be a real example or role model for students. The teacher always apologizes to students if there are obstacles in the learning process. This apologetic attitude will make students realize that apologies are to do after making mistakes.

The teacher always reminds students to pray in congregation, infaq, and help their parents. Character strengthening can also be done through assignments. The teacher gives assignments to students who need cooperation with their families such as making fried eggs, gardening, and exercising with the family. Exercise and gardening are very important to do during the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain a healthy body. Strengthening character education aims to cultivate and equip a golden generation of monotheism so that it has good character provisions, can be fair, analytical, creative, and collaborative leaders by the Al-Qur'an and Hadith. Student literacy can also be done through distance learning in which students are given the task of reading the text of the proclamation, the 1945 Constitution, Pancasila, and reading the biographies of Indonesian heroes.

### 4.1.3. Supporting factors and obstacles to distance learning

Distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic was considered the best alternative so that learning continued. On the other hand, not all students can adjust to online learning. Not all students have online learning tools and there are still areas in Indonesia that have not been reached by the internet. Teachers often experience problems in the learning process such as the internet network which often experiences interference, collection of assignments is often late, students feel bored. UNICEF surveyed 18 to 29 May 2020 and 5 to 8 June 2020 through the U-Report channel consisting of SMS, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger, receiving more than 4,000 responses from students in 34 provinces. Participants were asked a series of questions about how they experienced distance learning and how they felt about school reopening. The survey results showed that about two-thirds of students (66%) said they felt uncomfortable studying from

home and a majority of 80% said they wanted to return to school immediately. Despite experiencing various obstacles in the distance learning process, parents always support and assist their children in learning. Parents, teachers, and students can work together well so that distance learning can run properly. Parents realize that the distance learning policy is not the government's desire, but to prevent students from transmitting COVID-19.

## 4.2. Discussion

From the findings above, it can be concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic has a major impact on the world of education in Indonesia. The 2020 National Examination must be eliminated and the teaching and learning process carried out remotely to avoid transmission of COVID-19 in the school environment. Distance Learning is the right alternative so that the teaching and learning process continues amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers and students take advantage of technological advances in the Distance Learning process. Teachers deliver material using the Zoom application and send course materials via the WhatsApp application. The Canva application is used to create study schedules. Learning outcomes cannot be achieved optimally due to the disruption of the internet network and the availability of internet quota for students. Makarim explains that teachers are not required to achieve curriculum goals as long as distance learning is carried out [3]. This aims to prevent students from experiencing stress due to heavy assignments.

Strengthening student character must still be conveyed even though learning is done remotely. There are many ways that teachers can strengthen the character of students during the COVID-19 Pandemic, such as giving the task of memorizing prayers, helping parents, praying in congregation and giving donations. Strengthening student character can also be done when learning takes place, such as students being asked to read Pancasila and the Basic Law which aims to make students understand the state ideology so that students can love the country. The obstacles experienced by teachers in the Distance Learning Process do not break the enthusiasm for teachers to always carry out the learning process. Besides that, parents also play an active role in the Distance Learning process. Parents of students help their children in the learning process and do assignments given by the teacher.

# 5. Conclusion

Distance Learning (PJJ) is considered an effective learning method carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic. Distance Learning can minimize the transmission of COVID-19 in the school environment. although it is considered effective, Distance Learning has a negative side, namely that the learning objectives cannot be achieved optimally. this is because the internet network and the limitations of supporting tools by teachers and students. Distance Learning during the Pandemic also empowered teachers to innovate learning so that teachers have new experiences in the teaching and learning process. Strengthening student character can also be done through the Distance Learning process by means of the teacher giving assignments to students to pray in congregation, invest and help parents. The online courses has changed the student's characters, in some positive and negative way of thinking. As long as the online course still carrying out, there is so many students who forgot with homeworks such as daily pray text and lack of focus on getting the lessons from teachers. In the other hand, online course can be able to boosting the lesson about technology because they are disciplined to be prepare the course through web application called Zoom. This brought new brand of idea for parents to knowing their children's characters. Because, the students almost spent the whole time with their own family

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