

# Innovating Tahfidz Learning in the Covid-19 Pandemic; a Case Study in Indonesia

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**Abstract.** The COVID-19 pandemic has caused problems in learning tahfidz Al-Qur'an in Indonesia. One of the issues is how to keep the accuracy of reading the Qur'an related to lip movements and makharij letters which should be held through talaqqi (face-to-face) method but now it is conducted in virtual learning. This paper aims to analyze the innovation of tahfidz Al-Qur'an learning in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research uses qualitative data taken from observations and in-depth interviews. The research involves students, educators, and school principals. The data are analyzed using the triangulation technique based on a phenomenological mindset. The results show that (1) the learning of Al-Qur'an tahfidz during the pandemic is conducted online using supporting media technology that can accommodate, integrate, and unify the management of Al-Qur'an tahfidz learning; (2) Al-Qur'an tahfidz learning innovation can solve the existing problems by paying attention more to lip and tongue movements and sounds that the students produce, and; (3) Al-Qur'an tahfidz learning innovation has positive implications for the student's knowledge and skill competencies with satisfactory results. Their good outcomes may also be much better with the improvement of their attitudes in learning. This research suggests further research by developing a virtual tahfidz learning method to provide other alternatives to the tahfidz learning method during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Key words:** Learning Innovation; Tahfidz Al-Qur'an; COVID-19 Pandemic.

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## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic raises specific challenges for the tahfidz Qur'an learning (Dalimunthe et al., 2021). Innovation is necessary for the midst of a paradigm shift in Islamic religious learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Rahmawati, 2018; Fakruddin et al., 2021). This paradigm has undergone a radical change from traditional to digital marked by changes in learning methods (from direct to virtual meetings) (Lockee, 2020). Tahfidz online (R. R. Lubis et al., 2019). Virtual learning has become an alternative to learning the Qur'an during the current pandemic, although it certainly has many challenges (Dalimunthe et al., 2021). Some visible problems of online tahfidz learning can be observed at Pesantren Taruna Al-Qur'an Putri. There, not all female students can carry out their tasks optimally (Mubarakah & Munastiwi, 2020). Meanwhile, Tahfidz Daarul Quran Takhasus II Islamic Boarding School in Cikarang can successfully carry out online tahfidz Al-Qur'an learning (Hidayati & Khumaira, 2020). Thus, learning tahfidz Al-Qur'an demands innovations during this pandemic era. Also, the teachers must immediately develop their teaching skills to adjust to the learning in this pandemic situa-

tion so that learning objectives can still be achieved optimally (Usman et al., 2021).

Some studies on the influence of the pandemic on tahfidz learning have been reviewed by several researchers with various tendencies. Their tendencies can be seen in three types of research. First, there is a study of the implementation of tahfidz learning through e-Learning using web-based, video calls, and other media. This study analyzes how tahfidz learning is combined with technological facilities such as websites (Abdulloh, 2020; Ikhwan et al., 2021; Mubarakah & Munastiwi, 2020; Wasyik & Hamid, 2020) (Manullang et al., 2021); Second, there is a research about the management of tahfidz learning during the pandemic. It studies the management of educational institutions in implementing tahfidz learning during pandemic situations (Azmi Hamid et al., 2020; Muriyatmoko et al., 2021) (Azmi Hamid et al., 2020); The third is about the roles of tahfidz teachers during the pandemic in achieving the expected learning objectives (Dalimunthe et al., 2021; Usman et al., 2021; Djibu et al., 2019). Other studies try to respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on tahfidz learning. However, the three still do not yet identify seen the shift in the tahfidz learning paradigm and analyze the innovations

made.

This article aims to complement the shortcomings of previous studies on the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and learning tahfidz Al-Qur'an by analyzing the paradigm shift at a macro level. Specifically, this research discusses the innovation of educational institutions towards technological advancement to achieve the learning objectives of tahfidz Al-Qur'an. This research is based on many types of innovations and the virtual Al-Qur'an tahfidz learning method. The research also tries to answer how can the innovation of learning Al-Qur'an tahfidz during the COVID-19 pandemic be implemented. It also explains how the COVID-19 pandemic affects the development of the Al-Qur'an tahfidz learning method. These two questions provide direction for understanding that the COVID-19 pandemic is not only an issue but also a distinct advantage for learning tahfidz Al-Qur'an.

There are three basic arguments proposed in this article. First, the COVID-19 pandemic has strengthened the practice of digital-based tahfidz learning. Digital developments encourage innovation in learning tahfidz Al-Qur'an. Second, the use of digital technology can support and achieve the learning objectives more effectively and efficiently. The last is learning tahfidz Al-Qur'an online has become a new trend in most Islamic educational institutions. Digital media can strengthen and develop the tahfidz Al-Qur'an learning method. An appropriate learning innovation can positively impact the students' competence in memorizing the Qur'an. The online learning technology must be strictly selected based on ideal learning patterns in memorizing the Qur'an. It is a key to achieving the learning objectives successfully. The use of technology must also consider some indications of students' competence in learning the Qur'an. The COVID-19 pandemic must not limit the space for learning innovation, but instead, provide greater opportunities for implementing digital-based tahfidz Al-Qur'an learning innovation.

## METHOD

Research on the tahfidz Al-Qur'an learning innovations during the Covid-19 Pandemic period is conducted at an elementary school in Semarang city, Central Java, Indonesia. The school is chosen based on three points: 1) it is one of the most favorite schools in Semarang that applies the tahfidz al-Qur'an learning; 2) it has applied innovative tahfidz learning as a creative response or a new culture during the Covid-19 pandemic era, and; 3) the authors have access to conduct research in this school. Also, the research objectives are similar to the school's

principal and educators' vision to improve the quality of tahfidz learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. That is why the authors can easily access and conduct research at this school ethnographically.

This is qualitative research that uses the in-depth interview method to identify the problems faced by the students and institution. The ethnographic approach is used to view the phenomena that occur during the research process at school including learning situations, educators, and students themselves. Ethnography makes the authors immerse themselves directly in the school community. It allows the authors to get closer to observe what happens in the tahfidz learning (Feldman, 2011). They regularly communicate with the school educators and students in the tahfidz Al-Qur'an learning program. Therefore, the authors can easily get along with the school community.

The questions list included in the interviews are related to (1) availability of supporting infrastructure; (2) selection of online learning technology; (3) teaching and learning process of tahfidz al-Qur'an involving educators and students; (4) teachers' experiences in dealing with online learning; (5) students' experiences in participating in online learning; (6) learning materials that support the students and the teachers, and; (5) school policies during the covid-19 pandemic era.

The participants are divided into three groups, namely students, educators, and school principals. The observed students are taken from grades 3 (3 persons), 4 (3 persons), and 5 (3 persons) so that there are 12 selected students. They are chosen by considering gender and socioeconomic background (those who are difficult to own and master technological tools). Other informants are the school principal, guidance and counseling teacher, and 3 tahfidz teachers. All 17 participants are interviewed and asked about their willingness to be involved in the research.

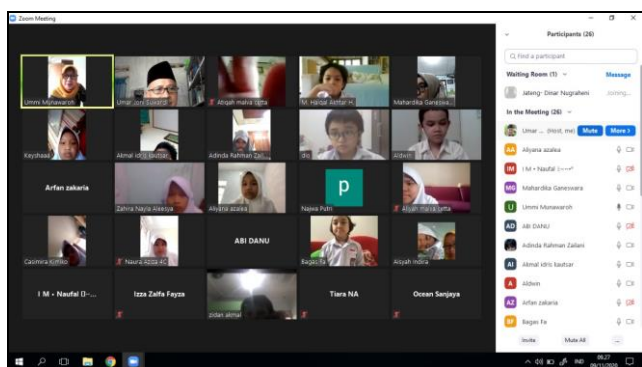
The research starts with a desk review to study some articles that present learning experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. The review summary is used for mapping the main problem issues of this research. The summary also becomes a basis for writing a literature review. In-depth interviews are conducted from March to April 2021. The researchers contact some students according to the school's instructions and permission from their respective parents. Interviews with the principal and the teachers are carried out online through telephone calls and WhatsApp. This step is repeated several times to obtain and complete more relevant data. Observations are also done by reviewing facilities/infrastructure related to online learning.

The data are processed through some stages, i.e. data reduction, display, and verification (Huberman, 2010; Fakhruddin, 2019). The collected data are reduced based on thematic and narrative stories from the respondents. Their stories contain the data in the form of interview quotes and thematic narratives taken from data reduction. The data are then analyzed within three steps analysis. First, the data are restated through interviews to maintain the data authenticity. Second, a description technique is used to identify the patterns and trends of the interview data. The third step is when an interpretation is carried out to draw express and implied meanings. The entire data are read in a contextual framework to analyze their significance.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Tahfidz Al-Qur'an Learning Innovation during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Before the Covid 19 pandemic, the tahfidz learning was done in direct meetings (face-to-face). Then, after the Covid 19 hit the nation, the learning must be conducted online learning. The use of user-friendly online learning technology is decided by utilizing social media such as Facebook, Whatsapp, and Telegram. Other platforms allow people to collaborate remotely such as Google Meet and Zoom Meetings as well as cloud-based internet services that prioritize mobility and collaboration. They can make anyone work together from their homes. They can use some features like chats and video conferencing in real-time. Therefore, it is expected that all students can operate online technology based on their abilities and habits.



**Figure 1.** Tahfidz Al-Qur'an learning process via Zoom meeting

Before selecting the most appropriate and user-friendly learning technology, the students and their parents, school management, and tahfidz teachers firstly study some kinds of online platforms to:

- a. Identify the students' characteristics before de-

veloping the best technology, innovative methods, and learning media,

- b. Observe specific designs to improve the students' interest and motivation to learn,
- c. Encourage creativity and responsiveness regarding the importance of direct interaction activities with fellow friends and social environment to strengthen social values and humanities through online media such as videos, YouTube, and others,
- d. Motivate the students to be more creative and innovative so that they do not only get learning media or knowledge from teachers but can develop and innovate independently,
- e. Conduct an exciting and fun learning process by creatively developing or using varied online media.



**Figure 2.** The process of learning group tahfidz Al-Qur'an via Video Call

The online learning technology should also adopt the ideal learning of tahfidz al-Qur'an, namely face-to-face meetings (musyafahah) so the teachers can see and hear directly what the students are saying in reciting the Qur'an verses correctly. The teachers can immediately make some corrections if there are errors made. This learning method can improve the students' skills more effectively. The students also already have the basic abilities to read mujawwad (pronouncing verses with makhorijul letters correctly) to achieve the expected learning objectives.

Based on suitable criteria for online learning technology to improve the students' competence in learning tahfidz al-Qur'an, school management and tahfidz al-Qur'an teachers have decided to use the following media:

Technology	Function in Learning
WhatsApp Chat	To interact with students
WhatsApp Group	To condition the students before learning in groups (halaqoh)
WhatsApp	Individual online tahfidz al-Qur'an learn-

Video Call	ing
Zoom Meeting	Learning tahfidz al-Qur'an online with all students (1 halaqoh)
Learning Video	To make the learning more interesting and fun
Google Form	Making written assessments such as daily tests, mid-semester tests, and final semester test

The online tahfidz al-Qur'an learning is applied to the students of grades 1 to 6. Each class consists of 28-32 students, and 3 Qur'an learning teachers. The learning is conducted in halaqoh model, where one teacher manages 8-10 students. Before learning, the teacher prepares the students first using the WA Group. The lower classes are conditioned through their parents or guardians, while the higher classes handle themselves independently. Next, online learning activities are held using Whatsapp Video Call and Zoom. There are four online sessions a week, where three meetings use video calls, and one meeting is supported by Zoom for having murojaah together. In each meeting, the students should be able to memorize one verse. Individual memorization (murojaah) uses video calls, while classical murojaah is done together within one class using Zoom.

Before conducting online learning, the teacher firstly assigns the students through the WA Group to have murojaah before making a video call. Next, the murojaah teacher uses Zoom Meeting to ask each student to memorize one verse. Individual murojaah is through WA video calls. If the students have a problem with their network during the teaching and learning process, they will be asked to send a Video Recording which can also be done next time. At the end of the online learning, the teacher and students reflect on the learning activities.

### **Innovation in Tahfidz Al-Qur'an Learning and Its Causative Factors**

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed people's lifestyles drastically, including learning patterns. The Ministry of Education has restricted face-to-face learning in all Indonesian schools that are not included in the "green" zones and decided to conduct online learning for those located in the orange, red, and black zones. The Ministry of Education has forced all schools at all levels to change their conventional learning to online methods. The problem becomes more complicated when most schools do not have many choices of learning technologies and technological infrastructure financing. Also, the government should pay attention to the students' ownership and ability of online learning technology tools and the teachers' skills in using online technology.

The tahfidz al-Qur'an learning at elementary schools requires innovation concerning the use of learning technology to facilitate direct or face-to-face meetings (musyafahah). Therefore, the teacher can discuss directly with students, correct their errors without any misunderstandings, improve their interest and motivation, and support their creativity and innovation in using online learning technology. They are crucial factors for having innovative tahfidz al-Qur'an learning. In the direct meetings, the students can receive direct guidance from the teacher. He can also evaluate students' knowledge and skills in reading the Qur'an from mahrojil letters (movement of the lips and sounds) to the students' memorization process. Without learning innovation, the students will get bored and may experience failure in memorizing the Qur'an.

The learning innovation follows the online learning pattern set by the teacher using Whatsapp group and chats learning technology in preparing the students (preliminary activity) and Whatsapp Video Call (core activity) in memorizing the Qur'an individually. The teacher can see and hear directly their facial expressions and voices. An oral assessment is done through Zoom Meetings (core activities) for classical murojaah, and Whatsapp groups and chats to reflect on the learning process and give assignments for the next meeting (closing activity). The teacher also makes tahfidz al-Qur'an learning videos to be studied at home. The students who have network problems during learning are also asked to send videos of memorizing tahfidz al-Qur'an to their teachers. It is a form of open space for creativity and innovation for both.

### **Implications of Tahfidz Al-Qur'an Learning Innovation on Student Competence**

The research findings show that learning innovation can solve most of the difficulties faced by students. The knowledge and skills assessment shows similar outcomes results with conventional learning (face-to-face). Based on knowledge competence, some students can further develop their creativity by making videos of memorizing the Qur'an. The students also get better skills in using online learning technology. From attitude competence, the results show that the students can grow their independency in learning through learning technology. Some students have successfully increased theirs. They prefer online learning because it is more interesting and varied for them.

However, the findings also indicate that there are still a few students who get declining performance in knowledge, skill, and attitude competencies. It is because they cannot manage their free time wisely and

they know they are not fully supervised by their teachers. They feel they are free from tasks that make them stressed and do not care about their learning schedule. Based on the data on learning development, it turns out that the students who are experiencing performance decline (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) are those who do not yet have sufficient ability to read the Qur'an (mujawwad) as a basic foundation to memorize al-Qur'an properly and correctly. Therefore, they are often asked to repeat the correct reading first before coming to the next memorizing stages.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, tahfidz al-Qur'an learning was carried out face-to-face. Although feeling much pressure, the students could still perceive intensive guidance to keep and maintain their knowledge and skill competencies. However, during the pandemic, the learning must be held online, and some students are often not included in virtual learning. That is why some of them have a declining performance. They have not been able to be independent in learning, so the teacher must visit them in their homes.

The Covid-19 pandemic has drastically changed people's lives, including learning patterns that must be held online. School management moves quickly to innovate in online learning by selecting many alternative learning technologies to support current learning patterns without reducing the quality of learning activities.

Three types of online technologies have been chosen to meet the qualifications of the learning activities that have been implemented so far. The first type is social media such as Whatsapp and Telegram to communicate and condition learning activities. The second one is the technology that allows the teachers to broadcast learning stimuli, the interaction between teachers and students, and establish collaborations such as Google meet and Zoom meeting. The last one is the media that enable sharing learning materials, collaborating in writing in online spaces, and conducting and displaying online assessments such as Google Suite. Thus, the teachers can still use some learning models that have previously been applied in face-to-face learning. The school management also prepares to learn evaluation techniques such as daily tests, mid-semester tests, and final and school exams using Google forms and preparing other media for sending the assessment results such as e-mail.

Tahfidz learning was previously carried out directly (the students meet the teachers) and guided attentively by the tahfidz teacher and supported with high enthusiasm and motivation during the memorization process together in one class. It must suddenly

be stopped and changed by remote activities. Certainly, this is a shocking condition for both sides. For this reason, the school management has implemented some policies. First, the school will conduct special training for the teachers about online learning technology. Second, the school suggests the students and their parents use online technology. Third, the school chooses and decides to use user-friendly online learning media which are expected to reduce the impact of learning to stutter.

Learning innovation also applies in the tahfidz al-Qur'an learning. The new learning pattern begins with conditioning the students' learning activities using WhatsApp Group. Next, the core activity (memorizing Qur'an verses) is conducted using WhatsApp video call technology so that the teacher can see the students' voices and lip movements. After each student has met the specified qualifications, the next step is classical murojaah using Zoom meeting.

The change in learning patterns (from face-to-face to online learning) raises some important points of view. First, the schools must provide higher infrastructure funds to adopt online learning technology. Second, the teachers, students, and parents/guardians may find it difficult to provide and use online learning technology, so the schools should think about user-friendly online learning technology without reducing the quality of the direct learning process. The media should be able to accommodate some learning models that have been used by teachers in the teaching and learning process. Third, the success of the tahfidz learning process is set by the quality of teachers' attention and parental guidance and support. The teachers' abilities in using technology to provide intensive attention and guidance can improve the quality of the tahfidz learning.

Previous studies have emphasized two points. First, difficulties have been linked to the availability of technological devices. Inadequate learning technology media is viewed as a precondition (Tanzil, 2019; Makmur, 2020; Mirna, 2020). Second, a study emphasizes the students' unpreparedness in experiencing changes from classroom to home learning. Teachers' absence is also considered a learning problem (W GVE, 2019; VEEY, 2020; DEI, 2021). This research, in contrast to the two studies above, identifies online learning not only from the technological point of view but also the adaptation of technology in developing learning patterns to encourage the students' interest and motivation to learn. Thus, the findings are also expected to improve their knowledge and skill competencies.

The difficulties in online learning are mere because of network problems, the lack of support from

parents/guardians, and the lack of teachers' ability to control and guide the students intensively. Three "action plans" are formulated to improve the situation. First, there should be better time allotment to manage time constraints. Second, teachers and students should use a good quota so that the network runs smoothly. Third, the teachers must oversee and supervise their students to solve problems in learning. The three action plans are oriented towards assistance in encouraging a transformation to integrate new technology-based learning patterns.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the innovation of tahfidz al-Qur'an learning at elementary schools has found three key factors. First, the selection and use of online learning technology platforms should consider special characteristics of some subjects, and users' skills, and open up space for creativity and innovation. Second, the use of a popular online platform (user-friendly) can support learning and overcome all obstacles. Third, the learning pattern must be adjusted to the specific characters of each subject to synergize with the right online learning technology to successfully achieve the best learning outcomes.

This research is limited to a small sample, so it is impossible to conduct a comparison. There are at least two things that need to be developed: adding school categories and adding more informants involved in the research. A comprehensive analysis can only be done with a comparison. Therefore, the research suggests a survey that accommodates various types of schools and involves not only school personnel, but also community and educational leaders. In this way, the results can cover a more complete and in-depth portrait of the online learning experiences during the pandemic. Also, more targeted policies can be formulated properly.

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