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The Role of Counselors and University Students' Adversity Quotient in Enhancing Islamic Education (PAI) Online Learning: Insights from the COVID-19 Experience

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Abstract

Background/purpose. One of the essential components of the online education system is the university students' adversity quotient (AQ). This study examines the implications of students' AQ on the constructiveness of online learning within the Islamic Education Program (PAI) at the State University of Malang (UM), Indonesia.

Materials/methods. Data were collected using a qualitative case study method through observations, documentation, and online interviews with ten students from term one, ten from term three, and seven from term five studying at the participating universities. The study employed the interactive model of Miles, Hubermann, and Saldana for data analysis.

Results. The findings revealed four key indicators of university students' AQ: persistence, resilience, self-gratitude, and sincerity. These indicators contributed to enhancing the effectiveness of PAI online learning, grounded in the philosophical principle that "students are whole persons." The development of these AQ indicators was further supported by humanist-religious lecturers who facilitated the PAI learning process at UM.

Conclusion. The results of this study emphasize the importance of external support systems, such as counselors, in strengthening students' AQ and enriching their learning experience. As a result, it highlights the need to optimize university students' AQ with the guidance of dedicated humanist-religious lecturers and counselors. The research also addresses students' challenges, especially during the pandemic, which disrupted traditional learning environments.

1. Introduction

The transition to online learning in Islamic Education Programs (PAI) has become a significant focus since the COVID-19 pandemic. As technology has been increasingly integrated to maintain learning continuity, various challenges have emerged that require global attention regarding PAI's adaptation to an online format. Key concerns include ensuring the quality of religious education (Basori et al., 2023; Rohman et al., 2024; Syarif, 2021), bridging access disparities in online learning (Kumi-Yeboah et al., 2023; Liu, 2021; Tsai et al., 2024; van der Merwe et al., 2023), and addressing the cultural and social impacts of religious education (Masuda & Yudhistira, 2020; Ubani, 2023). These challenges highlight the necessity for PAI online learning to adopt a global perspective, especially as issues became more pronounced during the pandemic.

The need to develop a strong adversity quotient (AQ) among students has become particularly evident due to the sudden transition from traditional, in-person learning to virtual learning (Ismiyani et al., 2024; Khomarul Hidayat, 2021). The learning model includes traditional face-to-face classes and online virtual learning (Arce-Trigatti & Silber-Furman, 2022; Mutmainah et al., 2021). With this transition came a surge of new policies, frameworks, and strategies across various fields (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020; Kalia et al., 2024). From a psychological and educational perspective, adaptability and resilience are essential qualities for students to navigate the unique challenges of online learning. Consequently, exploring the relationship between online learning and students' adaptability quotient (AQ) has emerged as a vital area of research.

The literature review indicates that AQ, as conceptualized by Stoltz (1997), serves as a natural mechanism that empowers individuals to confront life's challenges. The theory has been further developed and analyzed from various perspectives, including the interpretation of AQ as an inherent capability bestowed upon individuals (Mahmudah & Zuhriah, 2021). In the context of higher education, AQ is essential for students' ability to adapt to academic challenges (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Additionally, factors such as curriculum design and quality (Yani et al., 2023), the impact of COVID-19 (Supriyatno & Kurniawan, 2020), and individual learning approaches (Marzuki et al., 2020) significantly influence the effectiveness of online learning.

Research has shown that developing students' AQ, an essential component of a resilient education system, significantly impacts their learning outcomes and overall well-being. Studies have explored AQ from its theoretical foundations (Juwita & Usodo, 2020; F. Zuhriah, 2021) to strategies for development (Chadha, 2021) and its influence on education systems (Juwita & Usodo, 2020; Kartikasari & Wiarta, 2021; Maryati & Dwirandra, 2021; Puriani et al., 2021). Specifically, AQ is particularly valuable for overcoming the challenges faced in an online learning environment (Anggraini & Mahmudi, 2021; Hasan et al., 2021; Mardiana et al., 2021; Siswanto et al., 2020). In addition to the innate capabilities of students, external factors such as teacher guidance and counseling play a crucial role in enhancing AQ. Effective counseling and supportive mentorship from lecturers can bolster students' resilience and better equip them for the uncertainties of the learning environment. Although online learning presents various benefits and challenges, counselors and supportive guidance are key external factors that can further elevate students' AQ. By integrating these elements, educational institutions can promote students' resilience and adaptability, enriching their learning experience and success in an increasingly digital world.

Despite the growing emphasis on AQ, gaps remain in understanding its role within specific educational contexts, such as online Islamic Education Programs (PAI) at universities. In the post-pandemic era, universities need to develop flexible and innovative educational models to adapt to evolving learning dynamics (Al-Gerafi et al., 2024). Numerous studies have explored educational frameworks during the pandemic across various areas, including philosophy (Mun'im Amaly et al., 2023), digitalization (Toader et al., 2021), and instructional strategies (Suti'ah & Mardiana, 2021).

These studies highlight the importance of a well-structured educational foundation to support effective learning systems in higher education. While previous research has examined AQ's general impact on learning outcomes and its theoretical foundations, there is limited research into how AQ influences the structure and effectiveness of online learning frameworks. Additionally, the interplay between students' AQ and external support systems, such as counseling and mentorship, plays a crucial role in fostering resilience. Furthermore, AQ's specific role in Islamic education is significant, as cultural, social, and philosophical dimensions come into play.

The State University of Malang (UM) has implemented an online-based Islamic Education Program (PAI) and recently adopted a hybrid approach following the COVID-19 pandemic. As one of Indonesia's leading state universities, UM is recognized for its academic excellence (Hasanah, 2019) and has experienced a significant increase in international student enrollment in recent years (PDDikti, 2020). 2019 For instance, in 2019, UM hosted 314 international students from various countries, including Ghana, Tajikistan, Yemen, Thailand, the United States, China, Burundi, and Timor-Leste (Masyarakat, 2019).

UM's PAI program is based on the philosophy that students are complete individuals capable of navigating modern challenges. This holistic approach aligns with the transition to online learning during the pandemic, which tested students' resilience and adaptability. The university's commitment to nurturing a high AQ among students is fundamental to its educational strategy. Therefore, this study is centered around the research question (RQ): "How does students' AQ influence the structure and effectiveness of the online Islamic Education (PAI) program at the State University of Malang (UM)? Additionally, the research objective is to analyze the impact of AQ on students' adaptability, engagement, and learning outcomes within the PAI online program.

Therefore, this research explores the impact of students' AQ on UM's online PAI learning framework and highlights the role of teachers' counseling support in enhancing AQ development. The concept of "students as whole individuals" serves as a guiding principle for this research, encouraging a deeper examination of how students' resilience shapes the effectiveness of PAI online learning. By assessing AQ's implications in online education, this study seeks to enrich the academic understanding of AQ in higher education and inform strategies for developing student resilience.

Thus, this study aims to explore how university students' AQ influences the structure of PAI online learning at UM, focusing on internal and external influences. By examining the potential of AQ through an interpretive analysis, this research contributes valuable insights into fostering resilience among university students, thus enhancing their learning experience and supporting a robust educational system. The practical contributions of this study were highlighting the importance of mentorship and counseling and providing guidelines for educators and counselors to actively support students' AQ development. However, the theoretical contribution bridges the gap between AQ theory and its application in higher education, specifically within Islamic Education Programs (PAI).

Online learning and its relation to Islamic education has been significantly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which requires a shift to digital platforms. A study at the State Islamic Institute of Syekh Nurjati Cirebon identified eight quality dimensions of online learning, with curriculum design scoring the highest and learning outcomes the lowest (Yusuf et al., 2024). The rapid transition to digital platforms was primarily a response to the widespread closure of educational institutions, leading to substantial changes in how PAI was designed. Scholars have explored the challenges teachers face in adapting traditional PAI curricula to an online format (Mahsusi et al., 2024), particularly in terms of maintaining the authenticity of religious teachings (Rasyid et al., 2022).

In his foundational work, Adversity Quotient: Turning Obstacles into Opportunities, Paul G. Stoltz (Stoltz, 1997). introduced the concept of AQ, describing it as a measure of one's resilience and capacity to navigate challenges. According to Stoltz, AQ plays a crucial role in determining how

individuals respond to obstacles (Stoltz, 1997). Building on Stoltz's framework, various researchers have further defined AQ as an individual's capability to overcome hardships and resolve difficulties (Suryadi & Santoso, 2017). Other scholars (Soo & Liew, 2017) characterize AQ as individuals' persistence when working toward success despite challenges. Studies on AQ have examined its determining factors (Saxena & Rathore, 2024) and analysis of its development (Wang et al., 2021).

Recent multi-perspective studies on AQ have yielded valuable insights. For instance, (Sigit et al., 2019) found that Individuals who persist and strive to overcome challenges often achieve higher outcomes. Moreover, the impact of AQ has been shown to positively influence learning outcomes, job performance, and overall well-being in various settings, including education (Juwita & Usodo, 2020). Research also identifies the significant relationship between AQ and mental health (Gou et al., 2024).

A significant yet often underexplored external factor in developing AQ is the role of teacher counseling. Teacher guidance, especially in online settings, can be pivotal for helping students build resilience and navigate challenges. Effective counseling from teachers can provide students with coping mechanisms, enhance their AQ, and prepare them to face academic and life-related obstacles with a proactive approach. This support is essential in a digital learning environment, where students may struggle with motivation or engagement and require external encouragement to persevere. Additionally, increased smartphone usage and internet penetration have also been associated with rising AQ, as greater access to online learning facilitates broader self-control and resilience development (Phutela & Dwivedi, 2020; Suryani & Oktavia, 2019).

2. Literature Review

This research examined the potential impact of university students' AQ on shaping the structure of online learning in the Islamic Education Program (PAI) at the State University of Malang (UM). Given the focus on interpreting and understanding students' AQ and its implications for PAI online learning, a qualitative approach is used to explore these dimensions in depth. Thus, A case study method was chosen to comprehensively analyze AQ's influence in this context.

2.1. Participants

The participants were 27 active UM students at various stages in their studies at the Arabic Language Education Study Program. To capture diverse experiences, participants were selected across three study periods: Ten students from term one, ten from term three, and seven from term five. First-semester students were included due to their recent transition from high school to college in 2022, a period marked by challenges that require high AQ, especially given their academic probation status. Meanwhile, students from terms three and five were selected based on their extended experience at the university, during which they faced academic and non-academic challenges necessitating AQ.

2.2. Data Collection

Data collection in this study was organized to align with the research focus on AQ's potential influence on PAI online learning. Research data collection will be carried out in 2022. First-semester students provided insights through interviews, while students in terms three and five were assessed through virtual observations and review of academic records (including final grades in PAI courses). Observations were conducted with the researcher as a primary instrument, a common practice in qualitative research that emphasizes the researcher's active role in data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Supporting documentation included summaries of student learning outcomes, lecture materials, online PAI learning guides, and related resources. Virtual interviews were used to comply with health protocols due to COVID-19.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Miles et al.'s (2014) interactive model. Initially, data were gathered through interviews, observations, and documentation. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, and transforming the raw data from the 27 informants, with coding used to identify themes related to students' AQ. Data display, the next stage, allowed researchers to organize findings through descriptive narratives and visual charts, highlighting connections between AQ and UM's PAI online learning structure. In the final stage, conclusions were drawn based on identified patterns, outlining how AQ potentially strengthens UM's PAI online learning model. The researcher presents this process through the following table:

Table 1. Process of data analysis

No.	Types of analysis	Objective	Examples
1.	Data condensation	Focus on relevant information by coding and categorizing data.	a. First-term students: Struggle adapting to online learning platforms (e.g., technical issues, lack of interaction). b. Third-term students: Develop resilience through familiarity with systems but cite challenges in maintaining motivation. c. Fifth-term students: Show higher AQ by applying time management strategies and actively participating in peer learning
2.	Data display	Organize findings in a clear and comprehensible format	Arrange the findings based on AQ indicator categories: a. First-term students: Initial stress, seeking help from peers. b. Third-term students: Problem-solving, persistence. c. Fifth-term students: Proactive strategies, self-regulation
3.	Drawing conclusion	Identify patterns and implications for the research question	Students with higher AQ (e.g., fifth-semester students) show better academic performance and engagement in PAI online learning. AQ strengthens persistence, resilience, gratitude, and sincerity, enabling effective navigation of challenges in online learning environments.

Triangulation methods were employed to ensure research credibility. Method triangulation combined virtual interviews and observations to provide diverse perspectives on AQ's influence on PAI online learning. Transferability was supported by auditing the entire research process, and dependability and confirmability were reinforced through respondent validation, where participants reviewed and verified the data they provided. Source triangulation further enhanced reliability by incorporating data from various sources, including students and lecturers involved in the PAI online program. This triangulation of methods and sources enabled a cross-validated understanding of how AQ impacts the effectiveness and structure of online learning experiences. This version clarifies the methodology, steps in data analysis, and credibility measures, emphasizing the structured approach to investigating AQ's role in online PAI learning.

3. Methodology

Stoltz's theory of AQ describes how individuals' ability to confront challenges and obstacles can be measured and developed (Stoltz, 1997). Research has shown that AQ can be enhanced through various supportive measures, including parental involvement, motivation-building, and self-discipline (Astari Putri & Swandi, 2021; Rita & Widodo, 2021; Wirabrata & Handayani, 2021). In the academic context, teachers play a crucial role as external influencers in cultivating students' AQ during online learning. Teachers who provide encouragement, guidance, and a supportive learning environment contribute significantly to students' resilience and adaptability, both critical to their overall academic success (Puspitacandri et al., 2020).

Observations of the Islamic Education Program (PAI) online learning at the State University of Malang (UM) highlighted various technical and academic challenges that required students to be adaptive. Fifth-semester students displayed a positive outlook, confidence, and resilience when facing these challenges, showing a commitment to their learning journey. For instance, one student described how online PAI material spurred engaging class discussions and expanded their understanding of Islamic studies, enriched by the lecturers' active feedback and collaborative peer exchanges.

The research indicates that UM's approach, which positions students as mature learners capable of handling academic obstacles, fosters a constructive learning atmosphere. Semester 3 students reflected on the shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic as an obstacle to traditional peer support due to virtual-only interactions. However, their persistent and sincere attitude, combined with appreciation for the guidance of their character-based lecturers, helped them adapt effectively. Researchers observed that two UM PAI lecturers maintained ongoing communicative interactions with students, providing academic support and motivational guidance beyond the classroom. Additionally, the mentoring provided by PAI lecturers strengthens students' AQ by nurturing both academic growth and personal resilience, as stated by one of PAI's online learning lecturers through online interviews with researchers.

"The PAI learning model at UM is structured within the UM curriculum, which aims to develop student competencies using sipejar.um.ac.id. This competency development is divided into three main components: the enhancement of cognitive skills through online learning, along with the development of psychomotor and affective skills, which we facilitate through BBQ, TDI, and BI activities."

Through academic documentation, researchers observed that lecturers actively monitored students' engagement in three key activities: Tafaqquh fi Diinil Islam (TDI), Guide to Reading the Qur'an (GRQ), and Worship Guidance (WG). TDI involves weekly discussions on Islamic studies based on the course syllabus, GRQ includes daily Quran reading practice, and WG provides external guidance in religious observances. Based on the documentation data, researchers reviewed it into each activity segment.

Tafaqquh fi Diinil Islam (TDI) is an academic initiative involving regular weekly discussion forums focused on Islamic topics, as outlined in the PAI online learning courses syllabus at UM. Another important activity is the Guide to Reading the Qur'an (GRQ), which is mandatory for students and requires them to submit a daily report to their PAI lecturer at UM. Additionally, the Worship Guidance (WG) program involves mentorship provided by external mentors who are not PAI lecturers at UM. This mentorship includes guidance on mandatory prayer activities for students and is also used for reporting at the end of the semester. These three activities are compulsory for all university students enrolled in PAI courses at UM. The lecturers provide feedback and guidance on the material discussed during the forums and monitor students' daily worship activities through mutaba'ah sheets.

In this context, the researcher referred to the ongoing interactions during the PAI online learning process at UM as a relationship of "academic mutualism symbiosis." This relationship is reciprocal, with both parties influencing one another. For lecturers, maintaining positive academic relationships with university students enhances their humanist-religious qualities as educators. On the other hand, university students benefit from strong academic connections with their lecturers, which helps improve their AQ while navigating the PAI lecture process at UM. The students felt positive support from their lecturers, which fostered optimism in achieving their learning goals.

The online learning design implemented at UM during the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the learning process. The academic revolution in the PAI learning system transitioned from traditional face-to-face classes to online learning. This was facilitated through virtual classes via the Learning Management System (LMS) provided by UM, accessible at sipejar.um.ac.id. Throughout the pandemic, all academic activities at UM have been conducted through the LMS. Additionally, there is the possibility of incorporating other online learning platforms, both synchronous and asynchronous. During this research process, researchers noted several supplementary platforms used by lecturers teaching PAI online courses, including WhatsApp Group and Google Meet.

This structured interaction between lecturers and students creates a reciprocal relationship that strengthens students' AQ and enhances PAI online learning's effectiveness. The combination of humanistic teaching approaches, consistent feedback, and structured religious learning fosters students' confidence and optimism in achieving their academic and personal goals, even within an online framework.
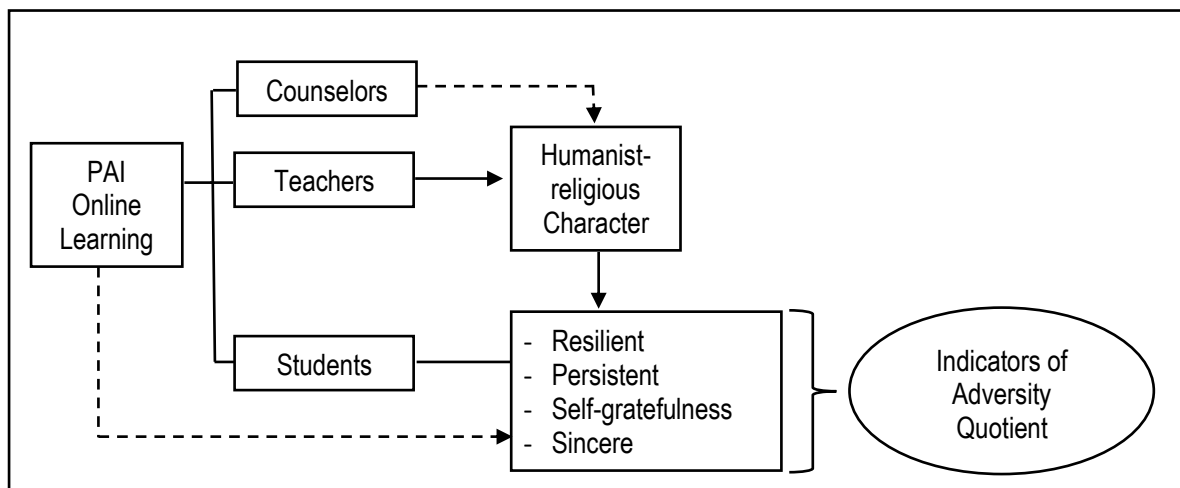

Figure 1. The Relationship Between PAI Online Learning, the Lecturer's Humanistic-Religious Character, Counselors, and Students' AQ

4. Discussion

In constructing an effective learning environment, universities aim to equip students with the skills and resilience needed to succeed academically and beyond. Within UM's PAI online learning context, students' AQ plays a pivotal role, which is evident through their self-motivation and adaptability to the virtual classroom. Interviews revealed that students drew motivation from two key factors: internal self-awareness and the external support system provided by the university.

Internally, students demonstrated a strong understanding of the importance of persistence in overcoming online learning challenges. Their resilience and tenacity were reinforced by a gratitude-based perspective, which helped them remain committed to their academic progress despite facing technical obstacles such as connectivity issues and platform limitations.

Externally, UM's support system, particularly through ICT-based learning resources, fosters an environment that promotes student independence. The PAI curriculum is structured to develop students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills through activities such as TDI, GRQ, and WG, which support holistic development.

The role of PAI lecturers extends beyond traditional instruction to include guidance and mentoring, which is vital in helping students develop the attributes associated with high AQ. Their consistent, humanistic approach fosters a nurturing learning environment where students feel supported in their academic journey. This research underscores the importance of counselors and support staff in developing students' AQ by providing additional mentoring on resilience and coping strategies, especially in online learning contexts.

The researchers have indicated that two key factors contribute to the solid foundation of PAI online learning at UM. This foundation is rooted in the philosophy that university students are holistic learners. The study highlights the potential of university students' AQ, which is reflected through four key attitude indicators: resilience, persistence, self-gratitude, and sincerity. These factors help instill confidence in students, enabling them to navigate the learning process effectively.

The first indicator, resilience, is shown when students exhibit strength in overcoming technical challenges during online learning, such as network issues, limited knowledge about web tools, and restricted internet access in some regions. The second indicator, persistence, is demonstrated by students' ongoing efforts to engage with the online PAI learning process. This commitment becomes particularly evident as they adapt their learning strategies to the platform at sipejar.um.ac.id.

The third indicator, self-gratitude, is characterized by students expressing appreciation for all the outcomes they achieve through their hard work during the learning process. Finally, the fourth indicator, sincerity, is reflected in the genuine satisfaction students feel when acquiring new knowledge, especially in Islamic studies related to practices of worship. This is particularly evident in activities such as Tafaqquh fi Diinil Islam (TDI), Guide to Reading the Qur'an (GRQ), and Worship Guidance (WG).

UM's educational philosophy positions students as holistic learners, emphasizing personal development alongside academic success. This philosophy promotes AQ as a foundational element, helping students to navigate educational challenges with maturity and confidence. The "Student as a Whole Person" concept reflects UM's commitment to fostering a well-rounded worldview supporting constructive academic and personal engagement.

The significance of a solid educational framework in the development of higher education is widely recognized. Efforts to strengthen this framework must be consistently pursued. At UM,

research findings indicate that the relationship between AQ and the support from lecturers with a humanist-religious character contributes to the strong foundation of online Islamic Education (PAI).

Educators and policymakers can create more inclusive and effective educational strategies by examining the interplay between AQ and its relevance to the effectiveness of PAI online learning. These strategies can empower students to excel academically and positively impact society, even in the face of challenges. Ultimately, this approach enhances the effectiveness of online Islamic Education (PAI).
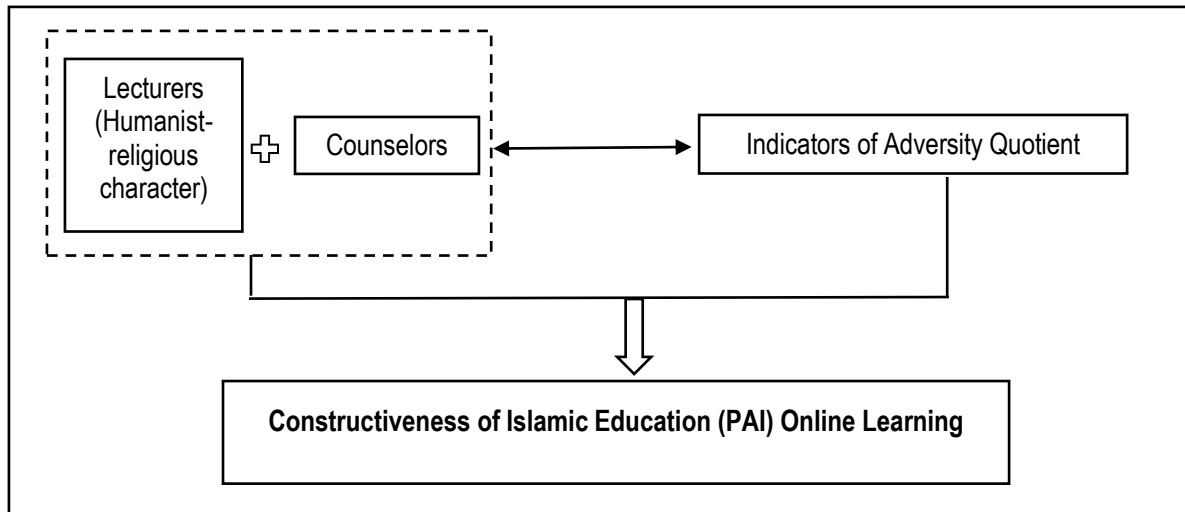

Figure 2. Influence of Students' AQ on the Constructiveness of Islamic Education Program (PAI) Online Learning

This discussion about online learning in global issues allows us to explore how students' AQ influences their responses to broader societal challenges. Online learning platforms provide opportunities to educate students about critical global issues, such as climate change, poverty, and human rights. Understanding how AQ affects students' openness to these topics and their motivation to take action can help inform instructional design and intervention strategies. Thus, UM's interactive and supportive learning structure, grounded in character-driven teaching and the enhancement of AQ, serves as a model for developing resilient and capable students. Teachers, counselors, and policymakers should consider implementing AQ-focused strategies and mentorship programs that empower students to navigate adversities successfully and enrich their learning experiences.

The theoretical implication of this study is that AQ as a framework in online learning. It is based on the findings that align with Stoltz's (1997) foundational theory of AQ, which emphasizes resilience, perseverance, and adaptability as crucial traits for overcoming challenges. Research by A. Zuhriah (2021) supports this, showing that high AQ positively influences academic outcomes, particularly in environments requiring significant adaptability, like online learning. Additionally, Anggraini and Mahmudi (2021) highlights that AQ fosters persistence and problem-solving in students facing technical and systemic barriers. However, some studies argue for the importance of external systemic factors alongside AQ. For instance, Kumi-Yeboah et al. (2020) and van der Merwe et al. (2023) emphasize that disparities in digital access and institutional support systems often surpass individual resilience in determining educational success. While UM provides ICT-based learning resources, these resources must be continuously evaluated to ensure equitable access. Nevertheless, the practical implication of this research reveals that teacher training should emphasize the role of

humanist-religious teaching styles in fostering AQ, as exemplified by UM's lecturers, to ensure student support extends beyond academic guidance.

Limitations of this study lie in the sample size and scope of the research. While the study provides insights into AQ's role, the sample size (27 students) may not fully represent the broader student population. Further research with diverse samples is needed to validate these findings. For future research, testing these findings in other institutions or fields and comparative studies that evaluate the effectiveness of online, traditional, and hybrid models in Islamic education could provide further insight.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study concludes that university students' AQ holds significant implications for strengthening the structure and constructiveness of UM's online Islamic Education (PAI) program. Students' AQ is observed through key traits—persistence, resilience, gratitude, and sincerity—reflecting their ability to face and adapt to online learning challenges constructively. These findings suggest that AQ is central to students' engagement, learning outcomes, and overall experience in an online educational setting.

The contribution of this research to the body of knowledge lies in the findings, which emphasize that the presence and role of PAI lecturers who apply a humanist-religious approach are very important in strengthening the characteristics of AQ. These lecturers provide not only academic knowledge but also a sense of value and motivation, acting as mentors and supporters. Their commitment to appreciating and guiding students at every stage of the learning process fosters an environment where knowledge transfer naturally includes the transfer of values. This strong bond between AQ development and the supportive guidance of lecturers is instrumental in the effective structuring of UM's online PAI program. In addition, these findings can provide input for the development of AQ in other scientific disciplines or educational systems outside Islamic education through the contribution of counselors in the learning process at the university level.

The study demonstrates that students with higher AQ tend to show greater engagement, adaptability, and academic resilience, often achieving better learning outcomes. However, it also recognizes the influence of external factors on AQ, such as counselors, which could impact students' success in the online PAI program. These factors are limitations in fully capturing AQ's impact, as they may significantly shape students' capacity to thrive.

For future research, testing these findings in other institutions or fields and comparative studies that evaluate the effectiveness of online, traditional, and hybrid models in Islamic education could provide further insight. Educators and policymakers can develop strategies that better support students' resilience, adaptability, and engagement in diverse learning environments by examining how each instructional model affects AQ and student outcomes.

Declarations

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