

## Islamic Education Pedagogy for Hearing-Impaired Students in Malaysia: Innovations and Challenges in the Wake of COVID-19 Pandemic

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines the methods of teaching and learning (PDP) implemented by Islamic Education teachers in Special Education settings for hearing-impaired students during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. The global interconnectedness of today's world has led to the widespread effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, despite its universal reach, has disproportionately affected vulnerable populations, particularly those with disabilities. In response to the pandemic, the Malaysian government implemented the Movement Control Order (MCO), resulting in widespread school closures that disrupted traditional educational methods, particularly for students with disabilities. This study aims to explore how Islamic Education teachers adapted their teaching strategies to meet the needs of hearing-impaired students during this period. A qualitative approach was adopted, involving surveys and questionnaires with four Islamic Education teachers from Special Education schools, along with document analysis. The findings reveal that teachers utilized sign language, visual aids, and written materials as key strategies for online Islamic Education classes for hearing-impaired students. This study provides critical insights into the challenges faced by Islamic Education teachers and the pedagogical adjustments made to ensure effective learning for hearing-impaired students during the pandemic. The results offer valuable guidance for future online teaching practices, not only during crises like COVID-19 but also for continuing education in the wake of the future pandemic.

**Keywords:** *Islamic Education, Hearing Impaired Students, Post COVID, Special Education Pedagogy.*

## INTRODUCTION

The novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV), also known as COVID-19, has taken the world by surprise, creating significant disruptions across various sectors, including education. In Malaysia, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching consequences, particularly for educational institutions (Azman et al., 2021). Among the most impacted are Islamic Education teachers in Special Education, as the Teaching and Learning Process (PdP) for students with hearing disabilities had to transition to an online format. This shift occurred in response to the school closures ordered by the government as part of the Movement Control Order (MCO) during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia.

The move to online learning posed numerous challenges for teachers, particularly in conducting PdP sessions for students with hearing disabilities. Traditionally, face-to-face teaching methods were used, but the shift to home-based online learning, or *Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran di Rumah (PdPR)*, was necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among both teachers and students. These online PdP sessions presented significant obstacles, including issues related to internet accessibility, the lack of smart digital devices, and the varying levels of student engagement in attending online classes (BH Online, 2020). These challenges were even more pronounced for teachers of students with disabilities, as each student's individual needs required tailored teaching methods.

In response, the Ministry of Education of Malaysia (MOE), through *Surat Siaran KPM Bilangan 3 Tahun 2020*, issued general guidelines for PdP during the MCO period. However, these guidelines were not specific enough to address the unique needs of Special Education teachers in teaching students with disabilities. Teaching students with hearing disabilities, in particular, requires specialized methods, highlighting the need for a more specific guideline from MOE for Special Education institutions. Therefore, this research will examine the PdP methods used by Islamic Education teachers in Special Education for students with hearing disabilities in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic and explore the strategies implemented both during and beyond this period.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Challenges and Strategies in Implementing PdPR for Hearing-Impaired Students in Special Education**

The Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) issued the PdPR implementation instructions through a Notification Letter dated 8 November 2020 (MOE, 2020), marking a significant shift in educational delivery in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This PdPR Manual Version 2 was developed as an enhancement to the initial PdPR Manual released on 2 October 2020, offering guidance to educators in adapting to the new norm. According to the guidelines, teachers are empowered to choose the most appropriate PdPR approach based on the situation of both educators and students. The three PdPR approaches available include online, offline, and off-site methods (MOE, 2020), giving teachers the flexibility to decide which method or combination of methods to implement.

For the online PdPR, real-time learning is facilitated with internet access and appropriate devices. Various platforms such as Digital Educational Learning Initiative Malaysia (DELIMa), Cikgootube, EduWebTV, and social media applications are made available to teachers for engaging students. Live streaming sessions via Google Meet or Microsoft Teams, along with assignments in the form of videos, audio clips, e-Books, E-Games (gamification), and online tasks, help ensure continuous learning for students.

In contrast, the offline PdPR method operates without internet access, where students use devices like computers, tablets, and smartphones or rely on textbooks and printed learning materials. Teaching resources such as videos, slides, audio, notes, and exercises are provided, with the option to download materials during periods of good internet access for later distribution through appropriate communication channels. The off-site PdPR method, designed for situations like disasters or pandemics, takes place in locations like community centers or designated evacuation premises. This approach follows the *Surat Siaran Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia Bilangan 8 Tahun 2016* guidelines, where learning can be conducted independently or with support from the Academic Support Team (AST), consisting of district education officers or appointed school teachers.

Despite the flexibility of these PdPR approaches, the prolonged screen time associated with online and offline learning poses a concern, especially for students' health and development. To mitigate these issues, teachers are encouraged to implement short breaks of 2-5 minutes every 30 minutes of PdPR sessions and a 5-10 minute transition period between subjects for light exercises or stretching. Interactive PdPR activities that involve physical movement can also be integrated into the online learning sessions.

While the initiatives and guidelines provided by the MOE have certainly alleviated some challenges in maintaining educational continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic, the application of PdPR has proven especially challenging for Special Education teachers and students with disabilities. The PdPR Manual Version 2 does not provide specific guidance on appropriate methods for teaching students with disabilities, particularly in the context of Islamic Education. As these students face unique learning barriers, they require tailored instructional strategies that accommodate their specific needs. Therefore, there is an ongoing need for further refinement of the PdPR approach for Special Education, especially for students with disabilities, especially in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. Ensuring that effective, inclusive learning practices are implemented will help maintain the quality of education for these students as the education sector adapts to a post-pandemic world.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative methodology. As stated by Denzin & Lincoln (2000), qualitative research design involves using qualitative methods to examine a social or human issue from various perspectives. It aims to generate concepts, insights, and understandings by identifying patterns within the data (Larry William, 1997). Therefore, this approach facilitated the collection and analysis of data in the current study. An online questionnaire was administered to four Islamic Education teachers from Special Education institutions to explore the methods they employed while teaching deaf or hard-of-hearing students during online PdP. These participants were from Sekolah Kebangsaan Seri Pristana Selangor, Yayasan FAQEH Negeri Sembilan, Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Tembila Terengganu, and Sekolah Kebangsaan Pendidikan Khas (P) Kota Kinabalu Sabah. Additionally, the researchers incorporated a documentation method, analyzing various articles and journals from multiple websites and sources to gather relevant data and information.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

## Identifying the Various Types of Hearing Disabilities in Persons with Disabilities

Sulaiman (2008) defines Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) as individuals who experience limitations in movement, which can be physical (in parts of the body), mental (ranging from mild to severe), visual, or hearing-related. These limitations hinder their ability to live normally and often necessitate assistance in certain areas of life. The Social Welfare Department (JKM) classifies PWDs into seven distinct categories: Hearing Disability, Visual Disability, Physical Disability, Speech Disability, Learning Disability, and Mental Disability (JKM, 2016). Below is a breakdown of the category specifically related to Hearing Disability:

Table 1 – Sub-Category Hearing Disability		
No.	Sub-Category	Explanation
i.	<i>Bilateral Hearing Loss</i>	Hearing Disability is considered if: a) Hearing level $\geq 40\text{dBHL}$ (adult) at a better ear based on average of 4 frequencies: (500Hz, 1KHz, 2KHz, 4KHz) b) Hearing level $\geq 30\text{dBHL}$ (kids) at a better ear based on average of 4 frequencies: (500Hz, 1KHz, 2KHz, 4KHz)
ii.	<i>Single Sided Deafness (SSD)/Profound Unilateral Hearing Loss</i>	Hearing level is worst exceeding $\geq 91\text{dBHL}$ at beside of the ear based on average of 4 frequencies: (500Hz, 1KHz, 2KHz, 4KHz)
iii.	Permanent ear disability/Ear-related syndrome Examples: <i>microtia, atresia, anotia, Treacher Collins, Goldenhar syndrome etc.</i>	Endorsed by Otorhinolaryngologist Expert only.
iv.	Others	

Source: Social Welfare Department (JKM) (2016)

In conclusion, the Disabled People with Hearing Disability have certain levels and categories in determining the level of their disability. The classification depends to the extent of their hearing disability to be classified as Bilateral Hearing Loss, Single Sided Deafness (SSD)/Profound Unilateral Hearing Loss, permanent ear disability/ear-related syndrome/hearing-related syndrome and others. Confirmation from a doctor should be taken into account in determining the intended category of Hearing Disability.

## Statistic of Students with a Hearing Disability and Islamic Education in Special Education in Malaysia

According to the Special Education Data Book (2020), a total of 93,951 students with disabilities or Students with Special Needs (MBK) have been registered as students with special needs in

Special Education Schools, Special Education Integration Program, and Inclusive Education Program in Malaysia (MOE, 2020). From the total numbers of students with disabilities, 3,829 are among the Hearing Disability. In fact, the number is constantly changing year after year starting from 2016 (4,301), 2017 (4,574), 2018 (4,181), and 2019 (4,072) until 2020 (3,829), which recorded a steady increase in numbers each year, despite a slight decrease from 2018 to 2020. Nonetheless, it can be concluded that there are a large number of students with hearing disabilities who register each year.

**Table 2 – Number of Students with Disabilities by Category of Disability in 2020**

No.	Sub-Category	Total
1.	Visual Disability	2,651
2.	Hearing Disability	3,829
3.	Speech Disability	690
4.	Physical Disability	6,921
5.	Learning Disability	77,205
6.	Various Disability	2,655
<b>Total</b>		<b>93,951</b>

Source: Special Education Data Book (2020)

**Table 3 – Numbers of Students with a Hearing Disability Based on Year**

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,301</b>	<b>4,574</b>	<b>4,181</b>	<b>4,072</b>	<b>3,829</b>

Source: Special Education Data Book (2020)

The Teaching and Learning (PdP) of Islamic Education in Special Education in Malaysia has been strengthened by the MOE and improvements have been made from time to time. The establishment of Special Education Schools was also developed to accommodate students with special needs at every level of study. The school is also directly administered by the Special Education Division. In fact, the J-QAF program for Special Education students is one of the efforts to strengthen the learning of Islamic Education for students with special needs by emphasizing PdP for students with Visual, Hearing and Learning Disabilities (MOE, 2019).

The research concludes that the subject of Islamic Education can not only be taken by normal students, but also students with disabilities through a specific approach to Special Education students. However, the pedagogy and modules used are based on the suitability and categories of students with disabilities such as the Hearing Disability, the Visual Disability and Learning Disability. Thus, Special Education teachers have more teaching challenges because they have to teach students with disabilities in addition to having various problems (Rashed, 2018). Although they have challenges faced, the task as a teacher especially a teacher of Islamic Education in Special Education should be implemented well because it is able to shape the personality and morale of students in a better direction.

## **Innovative Approaches to Islamic Education for Hearing-Impaired Students During COVID-19 in Malaysia**

Students with disabilities, including those in Special Education, were also required to follow the Ministry of Education's directive to continue the Teaching and Learning (PdP) process through PdPR during the Movement Control Order (MCO) due to COVID-19. A survey conducted with four Islamic Education teachers in Special Education for hearing-impaired students revealed that the respondents generally agreed that the visual PdP method is the most effective approach for

teaching Islamic Education to students with hearing disabilities. During the pandemic, the teachers adapted and continued their PdP using creative methods they developed themselves. All teaching methods, including instructional aids (BBM) and others, were visual-based, as students with hearing impairments are still able to see and read clearly. Four key elements can be identified in the visual method employed.

### **1. Sign Language**

The respondents highlighted that the use of sign language as a medium of communication is essential and significant in online teaching. Sign language plays a crucial role in facilitating interaction between teachers and students, especially when presenting learning materials. It is an indispensable tool for communicating with students with hearing disabilities. However, challenges arise when some students struggle to comprehend the content delivered through sign language during online classes. Internet connectivity issues sometimes cause interruptions in video or communication, making it difficult for sign language to be conveyed clearly. Despite these obstacles, the teachers managed the situation by repeating the communication, ensuring that students with hearing impairments could ultimately understand the lessons, even though this process was time-consuming.

### **2. Use of Teaching Aids (BBM) with Visual & Written Elements**

In the teaching of Islamic Education, educators rely heavily on teaching aids that feature visual materials such as images, slides, and videos. These resources are designed not only to provide visual demonstrations but also to include written content that explains the topics being taught, such as the chapters on prayer and ablution. For example, in teaching the method of prayer and ablution, visual aids such as step-by-step images or videos are accompanied by clear, written explanations to ensure that students with hearing disabilities can fully grasp the content. The combination of visual and written explanations allows students to refer to the material easily, helping them better understand and follow the learning process. Furthermore, due to the limited availability of disability-friendly teaching aids in the market, many teachers go the extra mile by creating their own resources tailored to the needs of students with hearing disabilities. Commercially available teaching aids often contain abstract language or overly complex descriptions, which can make it difficult for these students to fully comprehend the material. As a result, teachers have to innovate and adapt their teaching materials to ensure that students with disabilities are able to engage with the content in a way that is accessible and meaningful to them.

### **3. Explanation through Video and Picture Cards**

The participants in this study expressed the view that when students with hearing disabilities have difficulty understanding certain lessons or topics, teachers will utilize additional learning resources such as instructional videos and picture cards displayed through slides. These visual aids are used to supplement the verbal descriptions and ensure that students have a clearer understanding of the lesson. Beyond the regular teaching hours, teachers also take the initiative to provide sign language videos or videos with subtitles, which allow students to review the learning topics at home. These supplementary materials are intended to serve as an additional reference source for students to reinforce what they have learned. However, challenges emerge when not all parents or guardians are familiar with sign language or proficient in its use. This lack of understanding can hinder their ability to effectively support their children's learning at home, making it difficult for them to guide their children through the materials provided. As a result, the responsibility for monitoring and assisting with the learning of students

with hearing disabilities often falls solely on the teachers. The reliance on teachers for continuous guidance and support can create a significant barrier, especially when parents or caregivers are unable to actively engage with the learning process in a way that benefits the students. This situation highlights the need for more comprehensive support systems that involve parents in a more meaningful and effective manner.

#### 4. Simulation technique, Demonstration and Question and Answer (Q&A)

Based on the feedback from the respondents in this study, it was emphasized that theoretical learning alone is not enough to ensure that students with hearing disabilities fully comprehend the material being taught. In fact, the bulk of the learning time is dedicated to applying the theoretical knowledge in practical or hands-on sessions. To facilitate this, teachers typically start by demonstrating a simulation of the topic, followed by a detailed demonstration, and then end the session with a question-and-answer segment to gauge students' understanding. For those students who still struggle to grasp the material, teachers use a method of explanation that incorporates lip-reading techniques and written explanations, ensuring that they receive the information in a way that is more accessible to them. This technical support approach is crucial in ensuring that students with hearing disabilities are able to follow along effectively. Additionally, teachers encourage students to actively participate by repeating the simulations and demonstrations they have already learned. This repetition reinforces the students' understanding and helps them retain the information.

Furthermore, the involvement of parents and families at home plays a significant role in the success of this approach. The support and monitoring provided by caregivers ensure that students continue their learning process outside of the classroom, reinforcing the concepts taught during PdP sessions. To evaluate students' understanding, teachers employ online assessments such as Google Forms and interactive tools like Kahoot! to create questions and quizzes. These platforms provide an engaging way to assess students' knowledge and offer immediate feedback, enabling both teachers and students to track progress. Overall, the combination of practical application, repetition, parental involvement, and interactive assessments enhances the learning experience for students with hearing disabilities, ensuring that they have a thorough understanding of the topics covered.

Table 4 – Numbers of Students with a hearing disability according Year

Type of Students' Disabilities	Teaching and learning method (PdP)
Hearing Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of Sign Language</li> <li>• Visual and Written Teaching Aids (BBM)</li> <li>• Video Screening and Picture Card</li> <li>• Simulation, Demonstration and Question and Answer</li> </ul>

Source: Field Research (2021)

In conclusion, the PdP method used on students with a hearing disability when conducting PdP online involves a lot of visual approach. Sign language mediation along

with pictures and videos help students to understand the learning topics that are taught virtually. Teachers also use a lot of visual teaching aids such as video recordings that are appropriate to the topic of learning in addition to using written modules. The method of written explanation and lips reading is also done to explain slowly for students who do not understand the learning topic. Each description will also be interspersed with simulation and demonstration methods. If the description is done by video projection, the video must have a written description (subtitles) under it. Then, question and answer are also done by the teachers which the students need to answer the questions via Google Forms links or online application games like Kahoot! game.

## CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound implications for Malaysia's development, particularly in sectors such as the economy and education. While the Ministry of Education (MOE) has made commendable efforts to provide guidelines and manuals to support teachers in continuing PdP (Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran) sessions during the Movement Control Order (MCO), challenges remain, particularly for Islamic Education teachers in Special Education working with students with hearing disabilities. The MOE's guidelines, though useful, are broad and do not address the specific needs of Special Education institutions, leaving teachers to navigate the most effective teaching methods for students with hearing impairments.

Students with hearing disabilities have unique learning needs that differ significantly from those of typically hearing students, making it essential to tailor the PdP approach to suit their specific challenges. Findings from this study suggest that the visual method is most commonly used by teachers when conducting Islamic Education lessons for students with hearing disabilities. This method is facilitated by sign language, which serves as a vital communication tool for interaction between teachers and students. In addition to sign language, other methods such as videos, picture cards, and subtitles are integral to the teaching process, helping students better understand the lesson content. Practical techniques, including simulations, demonstrations, and interactive Q&A sessions, are also utilized to enhance the learning experience and reinforce the theoretical concepts.

It is hoped that this study will provide valuable insights for teachers and serve as a reference for future situations where the country faces a crisis, requiring educational institutions to shift to online learning. Looking ahead, it is crucial that the MOE revisits and refines the guidelines to offer more specialized support for teachers and students in Special Education. The unique needs of students with disabilities demand a more tailored approach to teaching that is clearly defined and detailed in the guidelines. By addressing these needs, the MOE can better support Special Education teachers in the future, ensuring that they can effectively manage online classes, both during and in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. This emphasis on specialization will ultimately lead to more inclusive and effective education for students with hearing impairments, preparing them for success in a rapidly evolving educational landscape.

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