

Chapter 64

Facilitating Learning by Going Online: Modernising Islamic Teaching and Learning in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the impact of eLearning and Web 2.0 social media in a socially conservative environment in Indonesia that has nevertheless proven surprisingly adroit at change management. Web 2.0 social media has proven enormously popular in Indonesia but traditional Islamic schools (which are known in Java as pesantren but elsewhere in the Muslim world as madrasah) the focus of this study is often unable to access Web 2.0 or the Internet in general. Progressive non-national government organizations (NGOs) seek to remedy this situation by providing satellite broadband links to remote schools and this chapter examines one particular project. Despite the impoverished and conservative nature of their community, the leaders of this school have led their students in a surprisingly enthusiastic reception of eLearning technology, recognizing its great capacity to produce and enhance social networks and provide new opportunities for learning. Particular attention in this case study is given to factors relating to social capital, attitudes, and patterns of behavior in leadership and change management. A case study approach was chosen to enable a richer and more finely-grained analysis of the issues. The case study is based on semi-structured interviews and observations conducted over several years. This research shows that whilst the adoption and uptake of eLearning with emerging technologies is strongly shaped by cultural and social factors, it plays out in very different ways than might first have been expected.

INTRODUCTION: E-PESANTREN

Muslims have creatively applied Internet technologies in the interests of furthering understanding of their religion. It is only natural for a net-literate generation to seek out specific truths and affiliations online, especially when the information cannot be accessed in a local mosque or community context. Cooke and Lawrence (2005, p. 13) reflect Dawson's point in a discussion on religion and the Internet: 'the Internet

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is used most often to expand people's social horizons and involvement. Thus far, however, *pesantren* have mainly been using the Internet for the purposes of religious teaching. A recent initiative by the International Centre for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP) and the Ford Foundation, is aimed more at bringing general education to *pesantren* via the Internet. Started in 2007, a program called the Open, Distance and eLearning (ODEL) Program for *pesantren*, plans on giving *pesantren* students the equivalent of a high school education, which in Indonesia is split into two levels of lower middle school (Years 7–9), and higher middle school (Years 10–12).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emerging Technologies

Veletsianos (2010) defines emerging technologies as follows: emerging technologies (ET) are not necessarily new technologies. According to Veletsianos, emerging technologies can be described as evolving organisms that exist in a state of 'coming into being'; experience hype cycles; satisfy the 'not yet' criteria of not yet being fully understood, and not yet being fully researched or researched in a mature way; and are potentially disruptive, but their potential is mostly unfulfilled. For the purpose of the discussion here, we will focus on the first criterion: emerging technologies are not necessarily new technologies. Veletsianos further explains that a technology is still emerging if it is not yet a 'must-have'. Veletsianos (2010) further explains this criterion:

Newness, by itself, is a problematic indicator of what emerging technologies are, as older technologies can also be emerging (Veletsianos, 2010, p. 13).

We see this characteristic as compelling in the sense that it gives a broader view of the term 'emerging technologies' and can be taken to suit one's experiences and cultural nuances with technologies. Educators are constantly experimenting with various technologies to foster and explore learning processes, and we see this concept as an emerging way of using various technologies in an integrated manner. Internet technology is becoming more readily available and is allowing the integration of other technologies such as Internet-based video-conferencing, learning objects and podcasts. Internet video-conferencing has re-emerged as a result of technological advancements, cost savings, and climate change concerns (Veletsianos, 2010).

Emerging technologies are also seen as synonymous with Web 2.0. The term Web 2.0 refers to the changing trends in the use of the World Wide Web technology that enhance communication, information sharing, collaboration and creative use of the web. Web 2.0 concepts have led to the development and evolution of web culture communities and hosted services such as social-networking sites, video sharing sites, wikis, blogs, and folksonomies (Veletsianos, 2010).

Emerging technologies such as wikis, blogs, podcasts, social networking tools, virtual worlds and avatars are being widely used in higher education. Wiki pages can be used by anyone to publish new content direct to the Web, including text, images and hyperlinks; to edit existing content; and also, because the wiki is fluid and open to all, to 'roll back' if necessary to previous versions through a 'page history' utility. Students can develop their own knowledge content promptly using a wiki and seldom need to study alone because of participation in a technologically mediated social space conducive to

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