

STUDENT RESILIENCE IN RESPONSE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY OF AL MA'RUF PRIVATE ISLAMIC SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL DENPASAR

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Abstract

This study examines student resilience at MAS Al Ma'ruf Denpasar in response to Denpasar City Government's online learning policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employing a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews with students, teachers, and policymakers, the research identifies patterns of student adaptation to distance learning challenges. The descriptive qualitative methodology incorporates data collected via observation, in-depth interviews with stakeholders, and literature review. Conducted at MAS Al Ma'ruf Denpasar, the study utilizes purposive sampling for informant selection. Inductive data analysis reveals student adaptation strategies to technological limitations and academic workload. Key findings demonstrate that while initial resistance emerged due to technological constraints, excessive assignments, and limited social interaction, students progressively developed resilience through technological adaptation, self-regulated time management, and social support utilization. Critical resilience-enabling factors include: (1) systemic school support through teacher training and infrastructure provision; (2) participatory communication among school, student, and parent networks; and (3) curriculum-integrated adaptation values. Theoretical analysis through Foucault and Bourdieu's lenses reveals student resilience as both a response to power relations in educational policy and an outcome of negotiation between student habitus and available socio-economic capital. Policy implications emphasize three requirements for inclusive education: (1) flexible learning methods based on student realities; (2) equitable digital infrastructure strengthening; and (3) sustainable feedback mechanisms for active student participation in decision-making. These findings enrich crisis education discourse by proposing a school-community based resilience model adaptable to other emergency contexts.

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS CoV 2), has triggered global disruption across health, economic, and education systems. The World Health Organization has identified COVID-19 as a zoonotic virus transmitted through human interaction, with severe implications for public health and daily life (Kirigia and Muthuri, 2020).

In Indonesia, the first confirmed case was reported on 2 March 2020, prompting national and regional governments to implement emergency responses. These included the suspension of face to face learning and a rapid shift toward online education. While intended to maintain educational continuity, these measures introduced complex challenges, especially for students lacking access to digital infrastructure or a supportive learning environment (Dewi, 2020).

In Bali, Governor Regulation Number 15 of 2020 introduced a regional framework for pandemic management, complemented by Circular Letter Number 4 of 2020 from the Ministry of Education, which emphasized meaningful remote learning focused on health education and life skills. Despite their preventive intent, these policies dramatically altered students' academic routines and social environments. Learners at Al Ma'ruf Private Islamic Senior High School in Denpasar experienced significant disruption, with limited digital resources, reduced family income, and emotional fatigue emerging as key concerns.

Multiple studies have documented the adverse effects of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research shows that distance education often leads to lower academic engagement, heightened stress, and limited interaction between teachers and students (Wiley and Hilton, 2018; Maulana and Iswari, 2020). The digital divide further exacerbates inequality, with students from low income households experiencing disproportionate barriers (Setiani, 2021). Other contributing factors include lack of internet coverage in rural areas (Palinggi, 2021), increased household expenditures (Susilo, 2013), and emotional exhaustion caused by repetitive screen time and limited peer interaction (Fitriasari et al., 2020). Additionally, a sense of cultural disorientation, or shock culture, has been reported among students adjusting to new learning norms (Suprpto, 2021; Muttaqin and colleagues, 2021; Maisaroh and Ali, 2021).

In the context of these challenges, many students have exhibited various forms of resilience. At Al Ma'ruf, this has included coping strategies such as sharing mobile devices, finding external internet access points, and persisting in schoolwork despite financial and emotional strain. This research interprets such resilience not merely as psychological endurance, but as a relational response shaped by broader institutional and structural forces.

To frame this interpretation, the study adopts Foucault's theory of power relations, which views power not as a fixed resource held by individuals or institutions, but as a dynamic and productive force that permeates social systems (Foucault, 1980). In Foucault's framework, power operates through discourses and institutions, shaping individual conduct and normalizing social practices. It is not centered, but distributed through networks of relations, making it present in everyday experiences such as learning, discipline, and access to resources.

In this regard, educational policy during the pandemic represents more than administrative decision making. It reflects a mechanism of power that restructures how students learn, interact, and respond to authority. Student resilience, therefore, can be seen as both a form of adaptation and a site of negotiation within systems of power that attempt to regulate behavior and normalize responses under crisis.

While existing studies have examined the psychological and logistical challenges of online learning, few have explored how student resilience is formed within the dynamics of institutional power and policy enforcement. This study addresses that gap by investigating the ways in which students at Al Ma'ruf Private Islamic Senior High School in Denpasar responded to government education policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. It aims to analyze the forms, strategies, and implications of student resilience through the lens of power relations, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of agency, adaptation, and inequality in crisis education contexts.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how students at Al Ma'ruf Private Islamic Senior High School in Denpasar responded to government-issued education policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative research was chosen due to its emphasis on understanding social phenomena through rich, contextualized descriptions of lived experiences (Bogdan and Taylor in Sumaryanto, 2001). Rather than reducing data to variables, this method allowed for a holistic interpretation of student resilience as a socio-educational construct shaped by institutional forces. The research was conducted from April to June 2020, with the school serving as

the primary site due to its direct exposure to policy impacts and its student population drawn from varied socioeconomic backgrounds.

Primary data were collected through field observations and unstructured interviews with students and relevant local government officials. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research focus (Sugiyono, 2013). Secondary data consisted of government policy documents, institutional records, and literature related to pandemic-era education. The researcher functioned as the main research instrument, guided by interview protocols and observation checklists developed in advance. Observations were conducted in a non-participant role to document behavioral responses in natural settings, while interviews were used to gather in-depth narratives about students' challenges, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of support. A literature review further complemented the primary data by providing theoretical and contextual grounding.

The collected data were analyzed using an inductive thematic approach, whereby observations and interview transcripts were categorized into emerging themes. Analysis was framed using Foucault's theory of power relations, which conceptualizes power as a productive and diffused force embedded in discourse and institutional structures (Foucault, 1980). This framework enabled the researcher to examine how student resilience was both shaped by and reactive to the embedded authority of educational policy. Findings were presented narratively, organized by theme, and supported with empirical excerpts. In accordance with Miles and Huberman (1992), the presentation was designed to ensure coherence, facilitate interpretation, and lead to well-grounded conclusions. This methodological design ensured that the study captured not only the challenges faced by students but also the socio-political structures that influenced their adaptive responses.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Transition from Resistance to Resilience

The initial implementation of remote learning policies during the COVID-19 pandemic created considerable tension among students at MAS Al Ma'ruf Denpasar. The learning process, which suddenly shifted from classroom-based instruction to digital platforms, brought confusion, frustration, and resistance. Students expressed difficulty adjusting to the new mode of delivery, citing unstable internet access, lack of devices, unfamiliar platforms, and an overwhelming number of assignments. One student shared:

"Saat awal daring, saya bingung. Tugas-tugas datang sekaligus dari semua guru, saya tidak tahu harus kerjakan yang mana dulu. Ditambah koneksi internet sering bermasalah."

Teachers also acknowledged this issue, admitting that in an effort to maintain academic rigor, they assigned more tasks without providing sufficient explanation. This pattern of early resistance was not a rejection of learning but a form of reaction to unstructured and non-dialogical policy implementation. It reflects Foucault's (1980) notion of power, where regulation through discourse can unintentionally generate counter-response when it lacks support and clarity. The impact of this abrupt change also resulted in emotional strain. Students reported increased stress and dissatisfaction due to their inability to interact directly with teachers. The absence of social presence in online learning created a sense of disconnection and fatigue. One student emphasized:

"Saya merasa tidak maksimal dalam pembelajaran daring karena tidak bisa langsung tanya ke guru. Guru hanya kirim tugas, tidak selalu mengajar langsung."

This sense of alienation contributed to early disengagement. However, as time progressed, students began to develop coping strategies. They reorganized their schedules, formed peer support groups, and started voicing their concerns. This gradual transformation from resistance to resilience was supported by institutional responsiveness and growing student agency.

Contributing Factors to Student Resilience

Several interrelated factors supported the emergence of student resilience. Internally, personal motivation proved significant. Students with clear academic goals were more persistent in maintaining learning despite the barriers. One participant noted:

"Saya ingin lulus dengan nilai baik, jadi saya buat jadwal sendiri dan berusaha konsisten belajar meskipun di rumah."

Family support also played an essential role. Students from supportive households, where parents provided encouragement, assistance, or even simply monitored study routines, exhibited more consistent learning engagement. This aligns with the findings of Herfinanda et al. (2021), who highlight the role of family cohesion in stabilizing educational participation during emergencies. However, financial conditions often constrained resilience. Many students lacked access to personal devices or reliable internet. Others had to share phones with siblings or parents. One student explained:

"Saya sering harus tunggu malam karena HP cuma satu. Kadang harus pergi ke rumah sepupu buat cari sinyal."

The school's flexible policies also contributed significantly. MAS Al Ma'ruf adapted national and local directives by providing more time for assignments, holding routine discussions, and promoting open communication. The principal stated:

"Kami beri pelonggaran waktu tugas, mendorong guru untuk selalu memantau siswa lewat grup WhatsApp, dan ada diskusi daring setiap minggu."

In addition to academic adjustments, the school created mechanisms for feedback and emotional support. Teachers were encouraged to ask students about their condition, not just their progress. This level of communication helped normalize the learning process, reduced tension, and enabled students to adapt. The experience of shock, brought by lifestyle changes, was particularly visible. Several students described feelings of boredom, fatigue, and social withdrawal. The loss of routines and reduced mobility during the lockdown phase introduced what many called a "shock culture." One student stated:

"Saya jadi cepat bosan. Biasanya bisa ke sekolah, ke perpustakaan, sekarang semua dari rumah. Kadang rasanya seperti tidak sekolah sama sekali."

These sentiments are consistent with studies by Suprpto (2021) and Muttaqin et al. (2021), who emphasize that sudden shifts in educational culture can disrupt emotional stability and lead to psychological resistance. Another barrier to resilience came in the form of financial and administrative burdens. Students reported difficulty paying school fees, particularly during the peak of the economic downturn. Many parents lost jobs or had to reduce income-generating activities. A teacher shared:

"Banyak orang tua siswa mengeluh tidak bisa bayar SPP. Ini memengaruhi psikologis siswa juga. Mereka merasa tidak enak dan semakin terbebani."

Despite these limitations, resilience still emerged. Students adjusted by developing routines, using prayer or journaling to manage stress, and helping one another complete assignments. Peer-to-peer collaboration became an essential part of the learning ecosystem.

Manifestations of Student Resilience

Student resilience was observed through both individual and collective actions. Many students gradually began to build time management skills. They created daily schedules, used digital reminders, and set specific times for study and rest. This shift toward greater autonomy reflects a form of student empowerment. Another expression of resilience was seen in the use of digital resources. Students explored new applications, watched tutorial videos, and took initiative in understanding lessons. Several students acknowledged that they had learned to “study independently” as a result of necessity. Social support also played a role. Informal groups via messaging applications served not only as academic platforms but also as spaces of emotional release. A student remarked:

“Kami bikin grup untuk saling bantu. Nggak cuma nanya tugas, tapi juga curhat, biar nggak stres sendiri.”

Several students also became more proactive in communicating with teachers. When the school provided digital forms and feedback channels, students used them to express concerns and suggest improvements. Teachers, in turn, adapted by reducing task volume or simplifying instructions. However, this resilience was not experienced equally by all. Many students expressed dissatisfaction due to poor infrastructure, perceived lack of teacher engagement, and overwhelming academic pressure. These grievances surfaced most prominently in three key areas: technological access, task load, and reduced social interaction. This finding aligns with Foucault’s (1980) concept of relational power. Rather than being imposed, the ability to adapt emerged from dialogue, reflection, and routine normalization.

One of the primary sources of dissatisfaction was unequal access to technology. Students from economically disadvantaged families often had no personal devices and depended on shared phones or unreliable networks. A student explained:

“Keterbatasan akses teknologi sangat mempengaruhi pengalaman belajar saya... Kami berharap ada solusi yang bisa membantu kami mengatasi masalah ini.”

Although the school made efforts to coordinate with external partners for support, these were often insufficient. The principal reflected:

“Kami berkomitmen untuk terus mencari cara agar semua siswa dapat belajar dengan efektif, meskipun tidak mudah.”

These technological inequalities created learning disparities and hindered meaningful participation, confirming what Zahra and Wijayanti (2020) have observed about the importance of infrastructure in ensuring educational equity during crisis periods. Students also reported that online learning brought a heavier workload than face-to-face classes. Assignments were perceived as more numerous and less manageable, especially when given simultaneously by multiple teachers. A student shared:

“Selama pembelajaran daring, saya merasa beban tugas lebih berat dibandingkan dengan pembelajaran tatap muka. Tugas-tugas sering kali datang bersamaan.”

The absence of real-time clarification further complicated task completion. Teachers admitted that they assigned more work to maintain student activity but later recognized its negative impact:

"Kami cenderung memberikan lebih banyak tugas... Tapi kami menyadari ini bisa menjadi beban tambahan bagi siswa."

This disconnect highlights the need for balanced pedagogical planning, particularly in digital environments where emotional and instructional feedback is limited. The lack of face-to-face engagement diminished students' motivation and emotional wellbeing. Virtual platforms reduced the frequency and depth of interaction between students and teachers, which in turn affected the development of moral, emotional, and social skills. The principal explained:

"Siswa kehilangan kesempatan untuk berinteraksi langsung... Kami berusaha mengatasi hal ini dengan mengadakan kegiatan virtual, tapi kami menyadari bahwa ini tidak sepenuhnya menggantikan interaksi tatap muka."

This reduction in interaction resonates with findings from Suprpto (2021), who documented cultural shock among students as a result of abrupt lifestyle and learning environment changes.

Role of Policy and Communication

The implementation of education policies during the pandemic, such as Circular No. 4 of 2020 and regional regulations in Denpasar, provided a legal and operational framework for distance learning. However, the success of these policies depended heavily on local interpretation and implementation. At MAS Al Ma'ruf, policies were not simply executed but adapted. Teachers simplified learning objectives, used informal communication, and invited student feedback. When students understood the purpose of a regulation, they were more willing to comply. One student explained:

"Saya jadi lebih bisa terima kebijakan sekolah karena dijelaskan langsung. Guru juga sering tanya kabar kami, jadi terasa lebih peduli."

Effective communication, especially when repeated and responsive, became a tool of normalization. This aligns with Foucault's concept of governmentality, in which governance operates through the shaping of conduct, not only through rules but through the internalization of expectations. Conversely, lack of communication often resulted in renewed resistance. When policies were abrupt or delivered without context, students became disoriented. As such, the role of discourse, through newsletters, WhatsApp groups, and virtual meetings, was critical in maintaining student motivation and understanding.

Synthesis with Previous Research

This study confirms and expands previous findings. Zahra and Wijayanti (2020) noted that poor communication and rigid enforcement often trigger student rejection of remote learning. Zulfikar (2020) emphasized the importance of household readiness in sustaining engagement. Both align with the current research, which finds that communication, flexibility, and empathy are core to building educational resilience. Moreover, the study contributes a theoretical perspective by applying Foucault's framework of power and discourse. Here, resistance is not interpreted as deviance but as a transitional response that, with institutional support, becomes resilience. The findings affirm that resilience is not a static trait but a social process, shaped by interaction, negotiation, and structured adaptation. Thus, the experience of MAS Al Ma'ruf students illustrates that resilience is cultivated not solely through individual strength, but through collective adjustment, relational support, and adaptive governance. The crisis of the pandemic, therefore, served not only as a moment of disruption, but also as a platform for transformation in how power, policy, and student agency are enacted in education.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the resilience of students at MAS Al Ma'ruf Denpasar during the COVID-19 pandemic emerged not as an immediate trait, but as a process shaped by structural, social, and individual factors. Initially, government policies such as social restrictions and the implementation of distance learning created significant challenges. Students faced technological disparities, cognitive overload, and confusion about new learning modes. However, over time, these obstacles became spaces of negotiation and adaptation.

The collaborative efforts between school leadership, teachers, families, and local education authorities played a decisive role in transforming resistance into resilience. The school responded by offering technological assistance, adapting curricula, training teachers, and providing emotional support. Meanwhile, the Education Office delivered continuous policy guidance and monitored implementation effectiveness. Through consistent communication and transparency, students began to view the policies not as limitations, but as protective and enabling measures. This normalization process was reinforced through school-based campaigns, social media outreach, and participatory discussions.

Students developed technological adaptability, time management strategies, and alternative ways to maintain social interaction. They established online study groups, joined extracurricular activities virtually, and practiced emotional regulation through proactive coping methods. The values of persistence, adaptability, and optimism were intentionally embedded into both academic content and non-formal learning activities, enhancing students' psychological readiness to face uncertainty.

The resilience demonstrated by these students holds important implications for the evaluation of education policies. While resistance was evident in the early phases, students eventually reconstructed agency within the regulatory framework, illustrating that policy effectiveness depends not only on design but also on social embeddedness. The transition from disengagement to active participation, marked by improved time management, emotional regulation, and self-directed learning, suggests that power, as conceptualized by Foucault, operates productively through discourse and relational structures.

Ultimately, this case highlights that resilience is a social construct forged through collaboration, understanding, and responsiveness. It underscores the need for inclusive, dialogical, and adaptable policy approaches in the face of educational crises. The transformation experienced by students at MAS Al Ma'ruf reflects not only their capacity to survive disruption but also their potential to thrive within and beyond it.

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