

Challenges facing general education female religion teachers in using online learning platforms in KSA during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

This study explored the challenges of using online learning platforms encountered by female religion education teachers working at general education schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) during the novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). A descriptive analytical method was used on a sample consisting of (172) female teachers in the Eastern Province of KSA. Data was collected by means of the “The challenges of using online learning platforms from the perspectives of female religion education teachers working at general education schools in KSA during the COVID-19 pandemic” questionnaire. Results identified a number of challenges religion education teachers face in different educational levels in KSA while using online learning platforms in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, including teacher-related challenges, student-related challenges, challenges related to teaching Islamic education curriculum, and online learning platforms-related challenges. The study recommended providing training on how to use online learning platforms for religion education teachers, and reconsidering professional preparation programs tailored for religion education teachers to be more supportive of using online learning platforms and to overcome the challenges they encounter while using these platforms in instruction.

Keywords: challenges - online learning platforms - female religion education teachers - COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) resulted in disruption of education, closing schools and imposing social distancing. In the attempt to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak, teachers had to transfer to distance education, which required promoting online learning platforms and working on keeping up with innovations brought about by the advancement of digital technology in the educational process. However, this transfer in the nature of the educational system may cause problems for all stakeholders (Marinoni et al., 2020), including concerns regarding the failure of teachers to respond to this transformation, the cost, the digital gap, and the cultural leap that teachers must face (Onyema & Deborah, 2019; Amemdo, 2020). There are also several challenges associated with online

learning facing educational institutions, including lack of student experience with computers or online assessments, lack of access to computers and the Internet, poor technical infrastructure, and insufficient institutional support for educational technologies (Way, 2012; Crews and Curtis, 2010; Alruwais et al. 2018; Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Bdair, 2021).

The outbreak of Covid-19, imposing social distancing, and transfer to virtual learning and work had tremendous impact on teachers, forcing them to use digital technology as an alternative to face-to-face education to avoid infection (Dinh & Nguyen, 2020). Recent research indicates that Covid-19 has had negative effects on education, including delays in learning, decreased access to educational and research services, and increased student debt. It is also observed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, many teachers and students have relied on technology to continue learning.

However, online education was disrupted due to poor infrastructure, including network and internet connectivity issues, inadequate power, lack of accessibility and availability, limited technical skills, consumption of time and effort, and lack of interest (Al-Azawei et al., 2015; Nasution & Sukmawati, 2019; Hennig and Nazarkulova, 2019; Nasution et al., 2020; Yousif et al. 2021). Added to that, educational institutions in the current digital age face many obstacles in providing effective teaching and learning practices, especially those related to social and economic factors, lack of infrastructure, technological instability, technology cost, effort and physical exhaustion of teachers, lack of online learning culture, student discomfort and/or unfamiliarity with online learning, insufficient ICT skills, lack of readiness among students, lack of active participation, diminished motivation, and poor computing and writing skills (Venter et al. 2012; Isabirye and Dlodlo, 2014; Mathew et al., 2019).

Despite the negative consequences of Covid-19 on the education sector, all educational institutions, teachers, and learners tended to use technology and online learning platforms and paid attention to developing their digital skills in line with changing global trends and educational reality. Online learning platforms facilitate communication and sharing information between teachers and students. These platforms are multimedia, optimizing the use of the Internet and Internet-based resources as sources of learning through allowing users to productively learn and collect knowledge via synchronous and asynchronous methodologies (Oye et al., 2012).

Thi and Minh (2021) state that in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers are expected to deliver virtual teaching in order to continue schooling or learning. They also need to learn more about e-learning platforms, applications, and tools, deliver virtual lessons, and deal with a lot of e-learning problems, including technological requirements, computer literacy, and adaptation. This is because that type of teaching brings many benefits to students as well as to teachers who can take advantage of the interaction, flexibility, and presentation and implementation of the learning topic features made available by virtual platforms.

Besides the essential role the religion education teacher plays in deepening the understanding of students and helping them follow the teachings of religion in their scientific and practical life, these teachers need to keep pace with scientific and technological progress in a manner commensurate with the requirements of the current generation and to present it in a distinctive artistic fashion that makes it learnable for the digital generation. This requires recruitment of qualified teachers with distinguished competence to improve and develop the instructional process in proportion to the massive technological revolution, and in support of

the Saudi Vision 2030, which places the development of good education so that it is in line with the scientific and technological development the world is witnessing as a top priority.

Although the use of technology in education involves many challenges, this type of education plays an important role - as cited by Tolba and Al-Otaibi (2021) - in ensuring that learners are able to accurately interpret the information they are being presented with, along with enhancing their ability to process knowledge and skills. This is due to the fact that technology-assisted education helps learners in discovering their skills and developing them. Adeyed et al. (2022) indicates the effectiveness of this type of education in terms of accelerating student learning through online learning tools, engagement in organized learning programs led by teachers on virtual platforms, and providing an exciting and inspiring learning environment for both teachers and students anywhere and anytime (Al-Rifae, 2018).

Since online learning platforms support active learning and problem-based learning (St-Hilaire et al., 2021), the use of educational technologies and online learning platforms (such as Youtube, Tiktok, and Facebook) require teachers to rethink online pedagogy in order for them to be capable of developing effective formative assessment strategies that support higher-level features of deep learning. Technology-assisted learning does not change the roles of teachers or educational institutions but rather the way in which teaching and learning are delivered. It also directs the framework of effective teaching towards the understanding of concepts using technology, employing instructional methods that allow technology to be applied in positive ways to deliver and facilitate content, recognizing the reasons why learning. Some concepts are easy or difficult, understanding the role of technology in addressing some of the problems students encounter; realizing students' prior knowledge, and using technologies to build on existing knowledge to develop new theories of knowledge or strengthen existing ones (Mishra and Koehler, 2006; Gikandi et al., 2011; Padayachee et al., 2018; Mashau & Nyawo, 2021).

An online learning platform is a management system used by educational institutions to provide the necessary tools to develop an integrated educational environment with ease and flexibility, including producing courses electronically, sharing special folders with specialists to take notes, demonstrating lectures, providing assignments and inquiries directly, and monitoring student learning and progress (Abdul Raouf, 2014).

The significance of an online learning platform lies in the provision of communication among various parties involved in the educational system, which in turn contributes to delivering effective education and increased interaction between learners and teachers, and strengthening the role of religion education teachers in providing academic content with a high level of quality, cognitive and modern competence, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic (Al-Rashidi & Al-Ibrahim, 2019; Yogi Tri et al., 2021). It also allows engaging educators in the education and decision-making process (Hollweck & Doucet, 2020).

According to the results of many recent studies, it is recommended that online learning platforms should be activated along with diversifying the instructional methods used on these platforms, qualifying teachers and enhancing student ability to use them, upgrading the infrastructure, benefiting from their various instructional tools, and introducing learning materials through online learning platforms. These studies also recommended preparing future teachers in a manner commensurate with taking advantage of technology in teaching and learning, encouraging and motivating them to employ online learning platforms, and developing the infrastructure for e-learning (Al-Rashidi & Al-Ibrahim, 2019; Al-Tawalbeh, et al., 2018; Al-Shawarbeh, 2019; Arman & Shahatit, 2022). Based on the above, the present

study tried to identify the challenges of using online learning platforms, which is the most used medium by female religion education teachers, especially during the circumstances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Problem of the study

Given the vital role played by female religion education teachers, and the need to help them develop their competencies, the attempt was made in this study to identify the major challenges encountered by these teachers in the instructional process. The results reached by the Al-Osaimi and Al-Hassan study (2016) highlighted several challenges facing Islamic education teachers in using technology in their classrooms, especially lack of classrooms equipped with electronic means and the poor preparation of teachers. Similar results were reached by Al-Ruwaili and Al-Anazi (2021) who found that kindergarten teachers faced many challenges in the use of online learning platforms. In a similar vein, Mathew et al. (2019) observed the reduced motivation of students while using online learning platforms and noted that some lessons were difficult to be introduced through these platforms.

In light of the foregoing, this study aimed at exploring the challenges of using online learning platforms as perceived by female religion education teachers in KSA during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to investigate this problem, the study tried to answer the following main research question: “What are the challenges encountered by female religion education teachers working at different general education levels in KSA in using online learning platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic, from their perspectives?” This question can be answered by answering the following questions:

1. What is the teacher-related challenges encountered by female religion education teachers working at different general education levels in KSA in using online learning platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic from their perspectives?”
2. What is the student-related challenges encountered by female religion education teachers working at different general education levels in KSA in using online learning platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic from their perspectives?”
3. What are the challenges related to teaching Islamic education curriculum encountered by female religion education teachers working at different general education levels in KSA in using online learning platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic from their perspectives?”
4. What are the online learning platforms-related challenges encountered by female religion education teachers working at different general education levels in KSA in using online learning platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic from their perspectives?”

Review of literature

Online learning platforms

Ouadoud et al. (2016) states that, in light of the continuous pursuit of educational institutions to develop educational aids and methods in the instructional process in line with their own goals and the goals of the community, the emergence of online learning platforms paved the way to transform the learning and teaching environments from a single-source setting to an interactive dual-source one, along with transforming the resource-poor environment into a resource-rich one.

Concept of Online learning platforms

The term “online learning platform” refers to the use of digital media technology, with the purpose of transforming and directing instruction, and providing digital resources through the Internet. The availability of the Internet serves as an important tool for facilitating access to and use of equipment and resources for anyone's learning, anytime, anywhere and on any device, regardless of the learner's nature and different needs. This is because digital resources can be blended and categorized to form tailor-made features of an online learning platform (Zhao, 2011, p.139). These platforms are also multimedia-based modalities that allow teachers and students to post and share written, audio, or video messages in a single forum (Nasution et al., 2020).

According to Walters et al. (2009, p.3), the online learning platform is a new category of instructional products that is designed to serve as the primary learning environment in technology-intensive classrooms. This platform supports teachers with tools for curriculum planning, classroom management, and student assessment. Online learning platforms are designed as well to operate in teacher-led classrooms as the primary resource of the curriculum content.

Moreover, Boticki et al. (2015) define an online learning platform as an interactive educational environment which employs web technology and integrates the features of e-content management systems and various social networks. These platforms can offer the advantages of enabling teachers to post lessons, share content, implement educational activities, and communicate with learners through multiple technologies, in addition to providing the possibility of exchanging opinions and ideas between a teacher and students, which contributes to achieving high-quality instructional outcomes.

Online learning platforms can also be defined as “teaching, learning, research, and follow-up resources which are made available through any digital or non-digital medium, whether being released as open sources or under an open license that allows others to freely access, use, adapt, and redistribute them with no or limited restrictions” (UNESCO, 2009 as cited in Al-Maliki & Dagestani, 2020, p.1113).

Itmizi and Al-Salmi (2010, p.103) view online learning platforms as the organization of instructional content and activities within categories and courses. These platforms usually include dialogue and chatting tools, tests and polls, and means for presenting written, audio, visual and other forms of instructional content to the users. An online learning platform is a new technology offering several advantages and characteristics that can be used in many educational areas with the purpose of facilitating the instructional process (Al-Dosari, 2016).

Online learning platforms are a package of integrated interactive services provided to students, teachers and parents via the Internet through a virtual environment rich with educational resources and tools that support the instructional process. In other words, online learning platforms can be viewed as a virtual space containing all learning resources, e-courses and many modern communication tools (Shehada et al., 2021). These platforms are based on Web 2.0 applications, which provide an interactive learning environment that integrates web technologies to publish lessons, exercises, and various activities and to communicate with students (Almazova et al., 2020).

The virtual community provided by online learning platforms allows knowledge management for both teachers and students synchronously or asynchronously in the teaching-

learning processes within the available facilities and capabilities provided by the platform (Yanjie & Siu, 2017). The features made available by these platforms include delivering online training courses, sharing educational content, providing lectures, videos, interactive materials, and multiple means of communication among students, content, and teachers (Wu & Chen, 2017; Fair et al., 2017).

Abdel Naeem (2016) states that online learning platforms are distance training platforms based on web technologies, which act as an arena to clarify the work and spread of e-learning. These platforms include e-courses and activities introduced through communication networks and tools. Al-Shawarbeh (2019) adds that online learning platforms involve various components of e-learning, including instructional resources, e-courses, educational activities, and learning and teaching management systems, which are connected via communication tools to help maximize learning.

Alenezi (2017) argues that online learning platforms are interactive educational environments that employ Web 2.0 technology, and integrate the features of e-content management systems and social networks (such as Facebook, etc.), thus allowing teachers to publish lessons, activities, and assignments, along with administering electronic tests via multiple technologies. This setting also contributes to the exchange of dialogues, sharing of content between teachers and students, and enabling parents to keep track of the progress of their children, which results in achieving high quality educational outcomes.

In light of the above definitions, for the purpose of this study, online learning platforms can be operationally defined as electronic management systems based on connecting to the Internet to organize religion education curriculum in an electronic, interactive fashion between religion education teachers and female learners. These platforms include electronic tabs for lessons, explanations, group discussions, tests, and evaluation methods. The conceptual framework underlying online learning platforms is a combination of constructivist and cognitive theories that support each learner's taking responsibility for his or her own learning.

Significance of online learning platforms in instruction

Modern technological tools play a vital role in teaching and learning in terms of sending, receiving, processing, storing, retrieving and printing information. This means that online learning platforms help in providing different meaningful educational experiences and situations for learners that are rich in visual, audio and electronic stimuli. Moreover, they contribute to enhancing students' engagement in exploration, inquiry, and research while learning, support electronic interaction and cooperation between learners and teachers through the exchange of educational ideas and instructional experiences, allow meaningful discussions through the use of synchronous and asynchronous communication tools, expand the circle of communication for learners through the Internet, provide multiple sources of knowledge, and overcome the problems of time and place (Al-Mutairi, 2021).

Shehata (2015) argues that online learning platforms play an important role in instruction, especially with regard to providing teachers with the information students need through communication, helping learners to maximize their capacity for exploration and inquiry, contribute to changing learners' view of the content and provide them with all the information, sources and documents, and reduce the cost and save effort and time.

Online learning platforms provide an interactive educational environment and introduce electronic content that encourages students to engage in their studies and to learn

according to their own pace, resulting in achieving the learning aims. These platforms also integrate the advantages of electronic content management and communication networks, in addition to providing activities and evaluation instruments (Al-Rashidi & Al-Brahim, 2019).

Al-Mutairi (2021) further adds that the use of online learning platforms improves the educational process and develops its efficiency, promotes the introduction of theoretical learning topics as well as those of a more practical nature, in addition to developing self-learning skills, and enhancing learners' sense of comfort by creating a stress-free environment (Nalliveettil et al., 2019). Moreover, these platforms enhance the development of the necessary skills, abilities, and knowledge needed for the success of learners in social and functional life in the era of the knowledge revolution (Al-Bawi & Ghazi, 2019). They also contribute to making concepts tangible in an interactive and sensuous way, facilitate teaching and learning of educational material, and enhance communication and interaction with teachers (Al-Sobu, 2021). Among the other distinctive features of online learning platforms are enhancing the academic performance and self-efficacy of learners, forming a sound learning environment to master the acquired competencies, and enhancing positive perceptions and interest in learning topics (Lai et al., 2020).

During the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the majority of education systems transformed to e-learning platforms in light of the various learning management features made available by these platforms, including creating educational materials, opening virtual classes, administering tests, grading assignments, and discussion (Thi & Minh, 2021). This is due to the fact that online learning platforms have the potential and effectiveness as educational tools that can make learners feel comfortable, create a stress-free environment, activate communication with students and track their progress, and overcome the obstacles of space and time. All these features make online learning platforms a modern educational method supporting the instructional process and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning (Zumora et al., 2013; Harbi, 2016; Ozkan, 2017; Mathew et al., 2019).

Advantages of using online learning platforms in teaching religion education

Some educators argue that the use of online learning platforms is faced by several challenges and obstacles, including the increase in the time students spend in front of computers, potential social and psychological isolation, weak or interrupted Internet connection in a manner that may impede communication and interaction between teachers and students, the misuse of the Internet, jeopardizing the safety and confidentiality of information, and teachers' lack of confidence in e-learning and the quality of its outcomes (Al-Sayed, 2017). In the Arab world in particular, there are challenges facing the utilization of open online learning platforms, including questions about the appropriateness of these platforms to provide a service in line with the specificity of the Arab environment, the poor internet infrastructure for some Arab countries, and the need to make the tools used in the production of these platforms freely available to all users (Ishan, 2016).

However, online learning platforms provide numerous advantages for the field of education, including establishing an active, effective learning environment that has positive manifestations on learners, teachers and the curriculum; allowing multiple opportunities for learners to train and exercise to master the targeted knowledge and skills; applying some of these skills in situations that have not otherwise been made possible through the simulation of reality; and enhancing students' scientific creativity, and increasing their experiences in line with their life needs. In addition, online learning platforms enable delivering the content in several ways and through various senses along with simplifying information in proportion to

the individual differences among learners. These platforms also allow attendance virtually rather than in person as in traditional classrooms, reduce burdens for teacher, especially those related to grading assignments and correcting tests, and provide variety of ways to assess learners' progress and provide feedback through the immediate evaluation tools on the platform (Al-Hamad, 2019).

Urh et al. (2015) adds that online learning platforms incorporate several features such as employing new teaching methods, using smart devices in the instructional process, and ensuring the confidentiality of student information and privacy. Another significant feature of these platforms is establishing a safe, closed environment between learners and the teacher, in which a teacher has the capacity to control and organize learners. Added to that, the platforms provide teachers with the ability to monitor grades, archive and save messages, and access to them through smart devices or computers.

Researchers state that online learning platforms are also user-friendly and involve several activities beneficial to the instructional educational process such as multiple sources and forums and the establishment of interactive environments and various tasks for teachers and students. Their systems can make use of the majority of e-learning and multimedia tools, allow users such as authors and experts to create or preload content, provide ready-to-use templates appropriate to diverse scientific and intellectual content, engage students in the academic content, ensure comprehensive access to knowledge via a wide range of multimedia and digital formats, encourage continued modernization of information and courses to keep up with scientific and academic advancements, allow multiple opportunities for discussion, save time and money, help achieve a psychological and social climate of safe interaction between teachers and students, and allow parents to see the results of their children and their progress in the instructional process (Oztok & Brett, 2012; Hakami, 2019).

Furthermore, both Tseng and Chen (2020) and Jewitt et al. (2010) list the following multiple benefits of online learning platforms: facilitating communication among teachers, learners, parents, principals and administrators, allowing parents to monitor their children's progress in the learning process, enhancing learners' effectiveness, promoting continuous and self-learning, providing easy access to educational resources, evaluating students' academic levels, providing continuous feedback, and allowing more opportunities for collaborative learning and interaction with teachers and schools. These platforms also contributed to the dissemination of digital learning culture, which helps learners develop their technological skills and increases their attendance rate, given that they can follow lessons anytime and anywhere. Besides, online learning platforms are not a substitute for the traditional education system, but support it through investing time in learning and reducing useless interactions between students.

Al-Maliki and Dagestani (2020) and Al-Sayed (2017) add to the above-mentioned advantages of online learning platforms that they are easy to use, establish an interactive environment and various tasks directed to both teachers and students, involve supportive learning activities such as forums, multiple sources, etc., and enable creating comprehensive and practical multimedia instructional content using video, images, audio and text. This means that online learning platforms allow users such as authors and experts to create content or download previously developed content to save time and effort, along with ongoing update of information and curricula to comply with scientific and academic developments, and allowing parents to monitor the progress of their children.

Online learning platforms establish an e-learning environment conducive to the twenty-first century; allow e-content, files, pictures, and videos, sharing among participating individuals; allow the opportunity to express opinions and engage in discussions; encourage learners to pursue and discuss the ideas presented and make comments, and pave the way for the students to socialize and make friendships (Muhammed, 2017). These platforms also enable surfing the Internet, using the e-mail gallery, communication between teachers and students in large classrooms by means of the audio system available on the platform, and recording, storing, and uploading lectures to the Lecture Management System, thus helping students understand the content of the lectures. Moreover, teachers can make use of Power Point presentation slides with the ability to explain, comment, and add notes on significant vocabulary, along with the availability of playing all educational audio and video files continuously (Bawi & Ghazi, 2019; Claudiu et al., 2020).

According to Piotrowski (2009) and Ismail and Ismail (2021), online learning platforms allow significant features such as user management, educational content management, taking advantage of communication tools (e.g. chat and forums) and learning tools (e.g. interactive whiteboard, notebook, annotations, and evaluation), displaying instructional content in a web-compatible browser, monitoring learners' progress in their tasks and learning, and facilitating handling large numbers of learners at the same time. Al-Hamad (2019) further adds that online learning platforms integrate the advantages of e-learning and learning management systems; provide teachers with the opportunity to use different learning strategies such as cooperative learning, active learning, and project-based learning; introduce a system for logging and securing learners' data by means of username and password; provide applications that can be activated and used in the educational process; and support the Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM), which is a set of international standards for designing electronic courses.

This means that online learning platforms play a vital role in improving the instructional process through providing access to surf the web efficiently and securely, using e-mail to log in the platform, enabling effective communication between teachers and the students, and taking advantage of presentations by teachers in a simple electronic way, which eventually contributes to simplifying concepts and presenting them in a clear way, as well as allowing recording and storing lessons (Ventayen et al., 2018).

Online learning platforms provide a combination of practical and educational benefits, in terms of providing better communication between teachers and students, allowing teachers to use the lecture management system, programming learning materials in an interactive way, content management, and curriculum planning (Al-Sobu, 2021; Gunawardhana, 2020).

Types of online learning platforms

There are several categorizations for classifying online learning platforms. In terms of synchronization, online learning platforms can be synchronous platforms, through which a teacher and students meet at the same time via various tools such as chat rooms, live video and audio broadcasting, participation in programs, whiteboards, etc.; on the other hand, asynchronous online learning platforms serve as virtual classes allowing students to meet teachers via the Internet at different times (Al-Baghdadi, 2011).

Online learning platforms can also be classified according their goals into public or specialized platforms. The former provides diverse and comprehensive courses at all educational levels in various fields and disciplines (e.g. Edraak platform and Riwaq platform).

The latter, however, provides lessons tailored for a specific field or specialization (e.g. the Islamic Academy platform that specializes in Sharia and Islamic sciences. (Flack et al., 2019).

Moreover, online learning platforms can be open source or closed source platforms. Open source online learning platforms help manage the learning process through working in learning groups and providing teachers with multiple opportunities to establish effective e-learning environments, producing e-learning content and employing interactive activities beneficial for learners, thus helping individual teachers as well as institutions like universities and schools. A good example of the open-source learning platforms is “Moodle”. On the other hand, closed source platforms (e.g. Blackboard Learn, and WebCT) serve as learning management systems that provide a collection of WEB-based course development tools aimed at establishing a comfortable environment for both teachers and students, as well as managing learning in several educational institutions interested in e-learning (Zakaria & El Gendy, 2009; Al-Mallah, 2010; Mei, 2012).

Previous studies

El Hawamdeh (2011) explored faculty members’ perceptions of the obstacles to the use of e-learning, with a focus on the effect of academic specialization and obtaining the International Computer Driving License (ICDL) on these obstacles. The results showed that the main problems are associated with the administrative and material aspects, in addition to some obstacles related to the nature of e-learning itself and how teachers perceived it. It was also found that there were no significant differences between the participating faculty members in terms of perceiving the obstacles to using e-learning that could be attributed to academic specialization or obtaining the ICDL.

Al-Dossary (2015) examined the reality situation and the obstacles to using online learning platforms in teaching English at King Saud University. He found that faculty members’ use of these platforms has been at midlevel. In a similar vein, a study conducted by Flagg (2015) investigated the perceptions of faculty members on the effectiveness of online learning platforms in improving classroom interaction among Computer Science and Engineering students at the University of Hail. The faculty members observed that online learning platforms had an average effect in terms of improving classroom interaction among students.

In their study, Rodriguez et al. (2016) developed and implemented a training program that included the skills needed to develop e-tests with the purpose of exploring the attitudes of faculty members towards the use of these tests. The results revealed that the training program had positively changed the attitudes of the participants towards the use of e-tests. Al-Subhi (2016) investigated the open learning platforms in terms of their importance and the difficulties facing their users. The results showed that these platforms promote student engagement in the learning process, and enhance individual efficiency and self- development.

In their attempt to identify the reality of computer teachers’ use of online learning platforms in teaching and the obstacles they encounter, Al-Rashidi and Al-Ibrahim (2019) concluded that despite the high effectiveness associated with the use of online learning platforms, there are obstacles faced by computer teachers related to school administration, the curriculum, the teachers themselves, and students. Similarly, Al-Shawarbeh (2019) examined how graduate students in private universities in Jordan used online learning platforms and their attitudes towards them. It was found that online learning platforms were highly used by the participants.

Mailizar et al. (2020) investigated the perceptions of secondary school mathematics teachers on the implementation of e-learning during the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia, with particular focus on four obstacles facing the implementation of e-learning, namely: teachers, school, curriculum and student. The results revealed that the challenges facing students had the greatest influence on the use of e-learning. It was also concluded that there was a strong positive correlation between the school-related challenges and those embedded in the curriculum. On the other hand, the backgrounds of teachers had no effect on these obstacles.

Nasution et al. (2020) examined the challenges faced by lecturers in the Department of English language at a university in Indonesia in terms of developing, managing and evaluating instructional practices using a virtual learning platform. The results showed a number of challenges related to evaluation, dealing with students, time management, the instructional process itself, and mastering technology. Similarly, Siddiquei and Kathpal (2021) explored the challenges encountered by academic institutions within the transfer into a digital platform during the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in an attempt to develop a suggested model for understanding the challenges of online teaching. The study found major challenges related to teachers, the institution, students, and infrastructure, along with content, motivational, and technological factors. In more detail, challenges for teachers included problems associated with unstable online communication while teaching, with preparing lessons, and with selecting the appropriate teaching methods. School-related challenges included teacher training and providing technical support. As for students, there were problems associated with their readiness, the technical skills needed for online learning, stability of internet connection issues, interaction, and engagement. Content-related challenges included the need to develop new materials and multimedia tools (videos, PPT, animations), and presenting and marking regular assignments. Moreover, job security, family support, and psychological and emotional support from colleagues and higher authorities were perceived as the major motivational challenges.

Thi and Minh (2021) investigated the challenges and opportunities for English language teachers when teaching online. They found that virtual platforms were useful for teachers in terms of providing interaction, flexibility and teaching. However, the study identified some problems that limited the effectiveness of these platforms, including disruption of the applications, lack of student enthusiasm, student misbehavior, teacher physical exhaustion, isolation, and poor computing skills for both teachers and students. In light of the results reached, the study recommended the need to integrate e-learning into the instructional process, encouraging teachers to use the available tools to enhance their teaching practices, facilitate classroom management, and promote interaction within the classroom, and adopting a variety of strategies and teaching tools to enhance student engagement via e-learning platforms.

Al-Falahi (2021) explored to what extent online learning platforms were used by primary school teachers, and found that the participants' use of these platforms was to a moderate degree. Similar results were reached by Al-Sbou (2021) who examined the reality of science teachers' use of online learning platforms and the challenges they face. He found that although the participating teachers had broadly positive opinions on using online learning platforms, they reported several constraints in their use. Likewise, Al-Khaibari (2021) investigated the reality of secondary school Arabic language teachers' use of platforms in teaching in an attempt to identify the main difficulties they faced in using these platforms. He found that online learning platforms were highly used by the participating teachers.

Al-Ruwaili and Al-Enezi (2021) explored the obstacles to using online learning platforms as perceived by female kindergarten teachers. The major obstacles identified were

lack of educational tools, the difficulty of recording lessons, lack of technical specialists, the great effort required of teachers, lack of management tools, difficulty of storing assignments, insufficient training programs on the use of online learning platforms, and the unstable internet service.

Recently, Al-Khafaji (2022) explored how Arabic language teachers used online learning platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as their attitudes towards them. It was found that the participants had positive attitudes towards these platforms and intended to use them in these emergent circumstances. In a similar vein, in a study conducted by Al-Shurafat (2022), the attempt was made to identify the obstacles to using online learning platforms from the perspectives of science teachers. The results showed that obstacles faced by the participants working at public schools were high. Finally, Arman and Shahatit (2022) explored the perceptions of mathematics teachers in Hebron Governorate about online learning platforms, and found that the participants had average or neutral perceptions.

Methodology

A Descriptive Analytical Method was used in this study in order to provide an accurate description of the phenomenon under investigation, to examine it in a real context, and to interpret all the circumstances surrounding it.

Population and sampling

The population of this study included all female religion education teachers working at public and private schools which fall under the supervision of the General Administration of Education in KSA in the academic year 1442-1443 AH. A total number of (172) female religion education teachers working at public and private schools were randomly selected to participate in this study (61 primary school teachers, 66 middle school teachers, and 45 secondary school teachers).

Instrument of the study

“The challenges of using online learning platforms from the perspectives of female religion education teachers working at general education schools in KSA during the COVID-19 pandemic” questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire was developed in light of the studies and research related to online learning platforms, the goals of teaching religion education in the general education levels, and the opinions of some experts and specialists. The instrument consisted of 34 items distributed into four main sections, namely: teacher-related challenges (12 items), student-related challenges (10 items), teaching Islamic education curriculum-related challenges (8 items), and online learning platforms-related challenges (6 items). Each item should be graded according to a 4-scale Likert rating (high, medium, low, unavailable). The initial form of the instrument was presented to a set of jury members in order to verify its validity, to determine the consistency of each item with the section to which it belongs, and to determine the accuracy of the language used. The necessary modifications were made in light of the opinions and comments of the jury members. The questionnaire was initially administered to a pilot sample consisting of 44 female religion education teachers working at KSA public and private schools who were nonparticipants of the main study with the purpose of calculating internal consistency of the instrument, by means of calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient between the degree of each of the questionnaire items with the total degree of the questionnaire. The correlation coefficients ranged between (0.47-0.86), which is statistically significant at the level (0.01) of significance, thus indicating that the

questionnaire has a high degree of internal consistency validity. In addition, the reliability of the questionnaire was calculated by use of the Alpha Cronbach coefficient. The reliability coefficients ranged between (0.74-0.75) for the sections of the questionnaire, and (0.75) for the questionnaire as a whole, which are perceived as high values of reliability.

Results of the study

In order to answer the questions of the study, the sections of the questionnaire were analyzed in terms of the weighted arithmetic mean and the Percent by Weight Formula to identify the availability of each item of the questionnaire (i.e. the challenges included). Since the ratings of the responses to the questionnaires were (high - medium - low - unavailable) with the grade of (3 - 2 - 1 - 0), respectively, the value of (1.5) with a percent by weight amounting to (50%) represented the cut-off point, which means that the weighted mean (i.e. the arithmetic mean) that amounted to 1.5 or more indicates the availability of the item. On the contrary, if the value of the (weighted) arithmetic mean was less than 1.5, this indicates that the item is not available.

Results of Question 1: What is the teacher-related challenges encountered by female religion education teachers working at different general education levels in KSA in using online learning platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic from their perspectives?

Table (1) shows the major teacher-related challenges encountered by female teachers when using online learning platforms.

Table (1) results of the weighted arithmetic means and the percent by weight of the challenges included in the first section: the teacher-related challenges

No	item	Frequency				weighted means	percent by weight	ranking	Chi ²
		high	medium	low	unavailable				
1.	Poor human communication between the teacher and her students when using online learning platforms.	27	87	49	9	1.77	58.9	6	78.7
2.	Teachers' lack of awareness of the importance of using online learning platforms in teaching and learning.	10	77	68	17	1.47	48.8	10	82.5
3.	Excessive teaching loads impede a teacher's use of online learning platforms as required	97	50	19	6	2.38	79.5	2	114.2
4.	Busy teaching schedules of teachers reduce their	111	40	16	5	2.49	83.1	1	158.3

	motivation when using online learning platforms								
	Lack of professional competitiveness among teachers in terms of								
5.	developing their performance when using online learning platforms in teaching and learning	21	70	61	20	1.53	51.2	9	48.1
	Busy teaching schedules on online learning platforms hinder teachers from								
6.	cooperating with their colleagues in developing shared visions in presenting developed scientific material.	94	50	22	6	2.35	78.3	3	103.7
	Inadequacy of online learning platforms in								
7.	prompting teachers to invest class time in teaching and learning.	30	76	49	17	1.69	56.4	7	45.8
	Lack of practical experience in using modern technology								
8.	programs in teaching religion concepts using online learning platforms.	26	77	57	12	1.68	56.0	8	60.5
	Lack of training workshops on online								
9.	learning platforms provided to teachers for practical applications	35	81	43	13	1.80	60.1	5	56.0
	Teacher incompetence in using some modern								
10.	learning strategies in religion education curricula through online learning platforms.	26	81	51	14	1.69	56.4	7	61.4
	Inadequacy of online learning platforms in								
11.	helping teachers manage and track students' learning progress.	40	78	47	7	1.88	62.6	4	59.2
	Lack of serious								
12.	implementation of an additional hour provided	25	55	64	28	1.45	48.3	11	26.4

outside the platforms for teachers to communicate with their students in answering their questions and inquiries related to the curriculum.

Results presented in table (1) show that all values of (Chi²) were significant at the level (0.05) of significance, with the mean scores of the responses to the items (3-4-6) being at high level, the items (1-2-5-7-8-9-10, and 11) being at middle level, and the item (12) being at low level. According to these findings, analyzing the items of the first section reveals that the values of all means were greater than the cut-off point value (1.5), which indicates that all teacher-related challenges were present except for two items (i.e. 2, 12) whose mean values were less than (1.5).

In terms of the reported challenges, item no. 4 (busy teaching schedules of teachers reduce their motivation when using online learning platforms) was perceived as the greatest challenge facing female teachers, while item no. 5 (lack of professional competitiveness among teachers in terms of developing their performance when using online learning platforms in teaching and learning) was the least important challenge facing them. These results can be explained in light of several factors, including poor motivation, high teaching loads, weak human communication between teachers and students, lack of awareness, poor spirit of professional competitiveness among female teachers, lack of practical experience in using modern technology programs, and incompetence in using some modern learning strategies through online learning platforms.

These findings showed some support for those reached by previous related studies in terms of the existence of teacher-related problems reported by the teaching staff that impede e-learning (El Hawamdeh, 2011); the existence of high levels of obstacles facing science teachers in using online learning platforms (Al-Sbou, 2021); the existence of difficulties facing teachers when using online learning platforms (Al-Khaibari, 2021); listing several barriers that teachers faced when using online learning platforms in teaching (Al-Rashidi & Al-Brahim, 2019); the existence of obstacles preventing the use of online learning platforms, such as the difficulty of recording lessons, and the lack of training programs on the use of online learning platforms (Al-Sharafat, 2022; Al-Ruwaili & Al-Anzi, 2021); and identifying a number of teacher-related challenges, including communication barriers in online teaching, preparation, and appropriate teaching methods (Siddiquei & Kathpal, 2021). Moreover, the results extracted are also consistent with those reached by both Al-Falahi (2021) and Al-Dossary (2015) who concluded that these difficulties would affect the use of online learning platforms, Arman and Shahatit (2022) who reported the effect of these challenges on the teaching competence of teachers, and on improving classroom interaction (Flag, 2015).

Results of Question 2: What are the student-related challenges encountered by female religion education teachers working at different general education levels in KSA

in using online learning platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic from their perspectives?

Table (2) shows the major student-related challenges encountered by female religion education teachers working at different general education levels in KSA in using online learning platforms.

Table (2): results of the weighted arithmetic means and the percent by weight of the challenges included in the second section: the student-related challenges

No.	item	Frequency				weighted means	percent by weight	ranking	Chi ²
		high	medium	low	unavailable				
13.	Reduced self-motivation among some female students towards the use of online learning platforms in their learning.	69	73	26	4	2.20	73.5	3	78.7
14.	The inability of some female students to solve technical problems related to the instability of the Internet.	75	74	23	0	2.30	76.7	1	98.5
15.	Inadequacy of online learning platforms in developing higher-order thinking skills (i.e. critical, creative, and reflective skills) among female students when learning.	36	88	42	6	1.90	63.2	8	80.1
16.	Having difficulty in searching for information within the online learning platforms for some female students.	34	67	65	6	1.75	58.3	10	58.4

17.	Students do not refer to religion education textbooks, and limit themselves to the content presented via online learning platforms.	72	57	37	6	2.13	71.1	4	56.8
18.	Some of students' negligence in interacting with the teacher while presenting religion concepts	55	74	38	5	2.04	68.0	6	59.9
19.	Occurrence of system malfunctions in the technology of online learning platforms leading to poor engagement of students during the learning process	62	67	37	6	2.08	69.2	5	54.5
20.	Lack of positive discussions with the teacher through chat rooms and e-mail.	41	80	45	6	1.91	63.6	7	63.9
21.	Students' dissatisfaction with the intense home assignments when using online learning platforms in the learning process.	80	61	29	2	2.27	75.8	2	83.0
22.	The inability of online learning platforms to provide individualized feedback for each student.	42	72	48	10	1.85	61.6	9	45.5

Results presented in table (2) point out that all values of (Chi²) were significant at the level (0.05) of significance, with the mean scores of the responses to the items (14, 17, and 21) being at high level, and the items (13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, and 22) being at middle level.

Analyzing the items of the second section reveals that the values of all means were greater than the cut-off point value (1.5), which indicates that all student-related challenges were reported. Furthermore, item no. 14 (The inability of some female students to solve technical problems related to the instability of the Internet) ranked first as the greatest student-related challenge facing female teachers, while item no. 16 (having difficulty in searching for information within the online learning platforms for some female students) was the least significant challenge facing teachers.

These results can be explained in light of several factors, including poor motivation, technical problems related to the instability of the Internet, students' inability to handle these technical problems, lack of interaction between the teacher and her students, poor engagement of students during the learning because of process system malfunctions in online learning platforms, lack of positive discussions with the teacher through chat rooms and e-mail, and inability of online learning platforms to provide individualized feedback for each student.

These results are in line with the conclusions reached by Al-Rashidi and Al-Brahim (2019) who found that there were student-related barriers facing teachers in using online learning. Similarly, the results extend the generalizability of those reached by previous related studies, for instance Siddiquei and Kathpal's (2021) study which listed a number of student-related challenges, including readiness, technical skills for online learning, network and speed issues, interaction, and engagement; and Mailizar and his colleagues' (2020) study which showed that the barriers at the level of students had the greatest impact on the use of e-learning. Moreover, the findings also showed some support for those reached by other researchers (e.g. Al-Hawamdeh, 2011; Al-Sbou, 2020; Al-Khaibari, 2021; Al-Rashidi and Al-Brahim, 2019; Al-Khafaji, 2022) which concluded a number of challenges facing teachers in using online learning platforms.

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from the above results is the need to enhance students' experience when using online learning platforms, to help them acquire the proficiency in using computers, to allow them to search for resources and to engage in online learning experience, and to increase their willing and motivation to transform the way they learn (Baleni, 2015; Mashau & Nyawo, 2021). Another significant conclusion is that computer literacy should be reconsidered to move beyond the perspective that students should possess technical knowledge to the fact that they need to efficiently use instructional multimedia tools to communicate, interact, and express their concerns in the academic world (Brown, 2012).

Answers of Question 3: What are the challenges related to teaching Islamic education curriculum encountered by female religion education teachers working at different general education levels in KSA in using online learning platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic from their perspectives?

Table (3) shows the major challenges related to teaching Islamic education curriculum in using online learning platforms.

Table (3): results of the weighted arithmetic means and the percent by weight of the challenges included in the third section: the challenges related to teaching Islamic education curriculum

No.	item	Frequency				weighted means	percent by weight	ranking	Chi ²
		high	medium	low	unavailable				
23.	Adapting religion education curricula via online learning platforms requires experts and field specialists.	56	77	31	8	2.05	68.4	1	62.7
24.	Lack of religion education learning materials on online learning platforms	29	72	57	14	1.67	55.8	5	48.2
25.	Religion education concepts need to be learned through various activities that may be difficult to employ in online learning platforms	33	85	45	9	1.83	60.9	2	70.3
26.	Some of the applied aspects of religion education curricula are overlooked on online learning platforms	34	84	43	11	1.82	60.7	3	64.8
27.	The tendency of some female teachers to deliver religion concepts through traditional education rather than using online learning platforms	30	82	48	12	1.76	58.5	4	62.2
28.	The difficulties involved in using various evaluation methods in religion education curricula via online learning platforms	25	76	56	15	1.65	54.8	6	55.0

Results presented in table (3) show that all values of (Chi²) were significant at the level (0.05) of significance, with the mean scores of the responses to items (14, 17, and 21) being at high level. Analyzing the items of the third section reveals that the values of all means were greater than the cut-off point value (1.5), which indicates that all challenges related to teaching Islamic education curriculum were reported by the participants. Specifically, item no. 23 (Adapting religion education curricula via online learning platforms requires experts and field specialists) was reported as the greatest challenges related to teaching Islamic education curriculum facing female teachers, while item no. 28 (the difficulties involved in using various evaluation methods in religion education curricula via online learning platforms) presented the least challenge related to teaching Islamic education curriculum.

These challenges can be attributed, inter alia, to the following factors: lack of religion education learning materials on online learning platforms, overlooking some of the applied aspects of religion education, and the difficulties involved in using various evaluation methods in religion education curricula via online learning platforms.

These findings are consistent with the results reached by Siddiquei and Kathpal (2021) who identified a number of content and teaching-related challenges, including developing new materials and multimedia tools (e.g. videos, PPT, animations), regular assignments, and checking assignments, in addition to the factors that impede teaching the content, especially network instability and speed issues, device compatibility, and ease of use. Another aspect of consistency is mentioned in research published by Mailizar et al., (2020) which demonstrated that the barriers at the curriculum level had the greatest impact on the use of e-learning.

Results of Question 4: What is the online learning platform-related challenges encountered by female religion education teachers working at different general education levels in KSA in using online learning platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic from their perspectives?

Table (4) shows the major the online learning platform-related challenges in using online learning platforms.

Table (4): results of the weighted arithmetic means and the percent by weight of the challenges included in the fourth section: the online learning platforms -related challenges

No.	item	Frequency				weighted means	percent by weight	ranking	Chi ²
		high	medium	low	unavailable				
29.	The negative societal perception and general community attitude towards the efficiency of learning through online learning platforms.	46	80	41	5	1.97	65.7	4	65.7
30.	Online learning platforms may run slowly, thus leading to wasting part of the class time	87	51	28	6	2.27	75.8	2	83.6
31.	Frequent interruption of internet connection during learning via online learning platforms hinders the instructional process	84	58	25	5	2.28	76.2	1	85.4

32.	Reducing class time while learning through online learning platforms	37	78	50	7	1.84	61.4	6	60.6
33.	Prolonged use of online learning platforms may affect the good planning of the instructional process	55	61	46	10	1.94	64.5	5	36.4
34.	Lack of direct technical support to solve any problem a teacher may face while using online learning platforms	61	73	31	7	2.09	69.8	3	61.9

Results presented in table (4) point out that all values of (Chi2) were significant at the level (0.05) of significance, with the mean scores of the responses to the items (30 and 30) being at high level, and the items (29, 32, 33, and 34) being at middle level. Analyzing the items of the fourth section reveals that the values of all means were greater than the cut-off point value (1.5), which indicates that all online learning platform-related challenges were reported by the participants. In more detail, item no. 31 (Frequent interruption of internet connection during learning via online learning platforms hinders the instructional process) came first as the greatest student-related challenge facing female teachers, while item no. 32 (Reducing class time while learning through online learning platforms) was the least online learning platform-related challenge facing teachers.

These challenges can be explained by the negative societal perception and the general community attitude towards the efficiency of learning through online learning platforms, the fact that online learning platforms may run slowly, reducing class time while learning through online learning platforms, and the lack of direct technical support. This finding is consistent with the results reached by Siddiquei and Kathpal (2021) who reported several challenges associated with technological factors while using online learning platforms, including network instability and speed issues, device suitability and ease of use, the availability of technical support for troubleshooting, and the use of multimedia.

Table (5) shows the weighted arithmetic means and the percent by weight of each section of the questionnaire.

Table (5): the weighted arithmetic means and the percent by weight of the challenges included in each section as well as the questionnaire as a whole

No.	item	Frequency				weighted means	percent by weight	ranking
		high	medium	low	unavailable			
1.	Teacher-related challenges	542	822	546	154	1.85	61.63	3
2.	Student-related challenges	566	713	390	51	2.04	68.10	2
3.	Challenges related to teaching Islamic education curriculum	207	476	280	69	1.80	59.85	4
4.	Online learning platform-related challenges	370	401	221	40	2.07	68.90	1
5.	Overall challenges (the questionnaire as a whole)	1685	2412	1437	314	1.94	64.50	-

Results presented in table (5) reveal that the challenges included in the fourth section (i.e. Online learning platform-related challenges) ranked first as the highest cohort of challenges facing female teachers, followed by the challenges included in the second section (Student-related challenges), then the challenges included in the first section (Teacher-related challenges), and finally the challenges included in the third section (the challenges related to teaching Islamic education curriculum).

On the whole, it is concluded that challenges included in the four sections were reported, albeit to varying degrees, by the participating teachers according to their relative weights. This finding extends the generalizability of those reached by previous related studies in terms of demonstrating the existence of difficulties and challenges facing teachers while using online learning platforms. For instance, the conclusions reached by Al-Hawamdeh (2011) indicated that there were problems hindering e-learning, including the administrative and financial aspects, the obstacles related to e-learning per se, and the problems associated with teachers. Similarly, Al-Rashidi and Al-Brahim (2019) indicated the major obstacles encountered by computer science teachers in using online learning platforms in teaching were those related to school administration, the curriculum, the teachers themselves, and the students.

In a similar vein, the results are in line with the conclusions reached by Al-Ruwaili and Al-Enezi (2021) in their investigations of using online learning platforms. The authors identified a set of challenges associated with these platforms, including insufficient educational tools, the difficulty involved in recording the lessons, the lack of technical specialists, the need to exert excess effort to take advantage of online learning platforms, lack of administrative

tools and facilities within these platforms, the difficulty of storing assignments, interruption of Internet service, and the lack of training programs on the use of online learning platforms.

Another aspect of consistency is with the one published by Nasution et al (2020), who identified several challenges in terms of assessment, interaction with students, time management, stress, and mastery of technological skills required. These findings are also consistent with the results reached by Siddiquei and Kathpal (2021) who indicated that there were major challenges related to teachers, students, the institution per se, and the necessary infrastructure, along with other content, motivational, and technological factors. Similarly, Mailizar et al (2020) concluded that there were barriers affecting the use of e-learning, including the school, the curriculum, and the learners.

Moreover, the present study represents an empirical validation of the conclusions reached by other previous studies (e.g. Venter et al., 2012; Isabirye & Dlodlo, 2014) in terms of reporting a cohort of obstacles to providing effective teaching and learning practices, including social and economic factors, lack of necessary infrastructure, technological instability, technology cost, teacher efforts and effectiveness, lack of online learning culture, student discomfort with online learning, insufficient ICT skills, and lack of readiness among students.

In line with the above, it is important to conduct more research with the purposes of learning more about and making maximum use of online learning platforms in light of their potential to enhance student engagement in learning, improving the competence of individuals, and helping them develop themselves as well as their society (Al-Sobhi, 2016). It is also necessary to make positive changes in teachers' attitudes towards the use of these learning platforms (Rodriguez et al., 2016); to integrate e-learning in various teaching activities; to consider the use of easy-to-use and time-saving tools to enhance teaching practices, interaction inside the classroom and classroom management; and to adopt a variety of strategies and teaching tools to enhance student engagement across e-learning platforms (Thi & Minh, 2021). Added to that, there is a pronounced need for those in charge of reforming the instructional process to give front-page attention to the use of e-learning platforms and effective strategies that support deep learning and the representation of complex concepts, along with changing the way teaching and learning are delivered, the use of teaching methods that allow implementing technologies in positive ways to present and facilitate content, and understanding and employing students' previous knowledge in constructing and developing new knowledge (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Gikandi et al., 2011; Padayachee et al., 2018; Mashau & Nyawo, 2021).

Recommendations

In light of the results reached, it is recommended to train religion education teachers on how to use online learning platforms, to work on enhancing student motivation to use these platforms in their learning, to provide educational materials and various activities related to the specialization of religion education on online learning platforms, to provide multiple opportunities for support and professional development for teachers to address the problems they face while using online learning platforms, to change the general community attitude towards the efficiency of learning through online learning platforms, to reconsider professional preparation programs tailored for religion education teachers to be more supportive of using online learning platforms, to help teachers acquire the necessary skills to use these platforms,

and to overcome the challenges they encounter while using these platforms in their teaching, especially in the current circumstances that have made delivering learning and assessment online an inevitable necessity as a result of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is also of critical importance to further investigate the requirements for integrating online learning platforms into teacher professional development programs, and examine how to help these teachers possess relevant ICT skills to ensure the effective implementation of teaching and learning through online learning and to disseminate digital knowledge in the entire learning process.

Contribution and Practical Implications

This study serves as an attempt to fill a gap in the existing literature on the main challenges of teaching via online learning platforms in the post-COVID-19 scenarios. As long as social distancing has become a norm, this study can help educational institutions in understanding the major challenges they may encounter and how to develop strategies aimed at improving the learning environment across online learning platforms for both religion education teachers and students through paying attention to the factors that can be addressed at the institutional level, including advising, appropriate training, and addressing the challenges related to teachers and students, thus contributing to the success of online teaching and learning.

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