

The Implementation of Open and Distance Education to Advance Educational Access in Remote Areas

 Yasir Riady^{1*},  Melisa Arisanty²,  Eko Kuswanti³,
 Sri Sukatmi⁴,  Muhammad Firman Karim⁵,  Muhammad Ajmal⁶

^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5}Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia

⁶Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan

✉ yasir@ecampus.ut.ac.id*



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Abstract

Background: Indonesia, an archipelagic nation comprising over 17,000 islands, encounters ongoing difficulties in providing equitable access to quality education throughout its many areas.

Aims: This study investigates the implementation of Open and Distance Education (ODE) as a crucial approach for enhancing educational accessibility in isolated regions. Through the application of digital technologies and adaptable learning frameworks, ODE surmounts geographical, economic, and infrastructural obstacles that frequently constrain conventional education

Methods: ODE allows learners to obtain quality education irrespective of their geographical location, promoting inclusion and opportunities for lifelong learning. This study employed qualitative methods to investigate and analyze educational access in rural regions

Results: The efficacy of ODE is contingent upon several crucial aspects, including internet connectivity, digital literacy, and governmental assistance in policy and infrastructure development. Addressing these obstacles will guarantee that ODE evolves into a lasting solution for enhancing educational equity and empowering communities in remote areas.

Conclusion: Open and Distance Education has demonstrated its efficacy in broadening educational access, particularly in isolated regions. The adoption of distance education enables students to learn at their own pace and under their own circumstances, without dependence on traditional educational infrastructure, which is frequently limited in remote areas. This strategy also enables educators to engage a greater number of pupils using more efficient resources.

A. Introduction

Indonesia, an archipelagic nation comprising over 17,000 islands, encounters ongoing difficulties in providing equitable access to quality education throughout its many areas (Musa & Nurhayati, 2025). Data from *Badan Pusat Statistik* (BPS, 2023) indicates that the national average net enrollment rate (NER) for senior secondary school is roughly 61.44%, with markedly lower rates in distant and outermost regions, where certain provinces report figures below 50%. Moreover, significant inequalities in literacy rates and digital access persist between metropolitan centers and rural or island populations, with recent studies revealing that over 30% of students in remote areas lack regular access to internet-based learning tools.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these educational disparities. A national report by UNICEF Indonesia (2021) indicated that at the height of school closures, more than 35% of pupils in rural regions

were unable to engage in distance learning due to infrastructural and economic obstacles, in contrast to 8% in metropolitan areas. Although emergency measures were implemented to alleviate learning loss, the enduring structural challenges obstructing educational access in distant and island regions remain largely unaddressed.

The impact of the covid-19 has caused most of the learning system to change from face-to-face to virtual or online format. This is done to break the chain of the spread of the covid-19 with the rules and systems of teaching and learning activities so that it continues to run well and smoothly (Putri et al., 2024). Eventually, this impact required some adjustments, which led to changes across technical systems, language use, policy frameworks, and educational development (Muhaimin et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these educational disparities. A national report by UNICEF Indonesia (2021) indicated that at the height of school closures, more than 35% of pupils in rural regions could not engage in remote learning owing to infrastructural and economic obstacles, in contrast to 8% in metropolitan areas. Despite the implementation of emergency measures to mitigate learning loss, the persistent structural challenges obstructing educational access in rural and island regions remain largely unaddressed.

Through this change, the style and activities of the community are also restricted, so that there are changes in activities that allow them to continue to carry out activities so that they can continue to be carried out but still follow and comply with the health protocol rules that have been set by the government. This change also gave rise to new things that never existed before, including the use of new terms that emerged in naming activities and activities (Putri et al., 2024).

This had led many people have moved to adopt terms such as online learning, distance learning, open system learning, and blended learning, alternating between online and offline modes depending on the conditions, subject matter, location, and level of educational qualifications to literacy and also the ability of human resources. Other terms have also emerged to describe and understand the conditions and situations, mentioning the circumstances that are taking place at that time.

Open and Distance Education is one of the solutions, as Indonesia's large population, accompanied by various characteristics of distance, geographical location, as well as islands, make it quite difficult to meet in a big city for those who live in the interior. Through distance education, distance will be lost. This is assisted by technology and information, and the existence of a system that bridges from one point to another (Riady et al., 2025).

Distance education is supported by various systems that can maximize learner to study independently, various systems, learning tools, materials, and access needed so that people can enjoy learning with just their fingertips. This is a challenge in how an agency can reach areas with uneven facility conditions between one place and another (Muhaimin et al., 2023).

Although numerous studies have investigated the implementation and effects of Open and Distance Education (ODE) at both regional and global scales, a significant gap persists in research specifically addressing the Indonesian context, especially concerning remote, island, and geographically isolated areas of the nation. The majority of current work predominantly focuses on ODE activities in urban or semi-urban regions with advanced technology infrastructures, frequently neglecting the distinct socio-economic, cultural, and logistical obstacles encountered by remote island people (Riady et al., 2025).

Moreover, despite Indonesia being an archipelagic country including over 17,000 islands and exhibiting considerable differences in educational access, there has been a paucity of thorough investigation of the efficient customization and implementation of ODE in these varied and frequently isolated regions. The majority of existing studies primarily focus on overarching aspects of digital education and online learning within higher education, while neglecting primary and secondary education systems, as well as lifelong learning efforts aimed at rural and underserved communities.

This work aims to fill this vacuum by conducting a thorough review of the literature about the implementation Open and Distance Education in rural and island areas, specifically focusing on the Indonesian setting. This endeavor seeks to provide novel insights on the techniques, difficulties, and possibilities related to enhancing educational access in these under-explored contexts, while presenting pragmatic recommendations for policymakers and education practitioners.

The main aim of this study is to investigate and assess the execution of Open and Distance Education (ODE) to enhance educational access in rural and island areas, concentrating on overcoming infrastructural and socio-economic obstacles. This study conducts a comprehensive evaluation of

pertinent literature to identify effective solutions, obstacles, and policy implications for the delivery of distant education in physically isolated regions, specifically within the Indonesian setting. This study aims to provide a thorough synthesis of current evidence and offer practical recommendations to enhance the development of inclusive and accessible educational systems for underprivileged communities.

This study aims to provide various distinctive contributions to the domain of open and Open and Distance Education (ODE), especially concerning remote and physically isolated regions in Indonesia. While current research has extensively investigated the impact of distance education in enhancing educational possibilities, a significant portion of this literature mostly concentrates on metropolitan environments or higher education institutions equipped with relatively sophisticated technological infrastructure (Zawacki-Richter & Naidu, 2016). There is an absence of comprehensive information regarding the functioning of ODE in Indonesia's distant and island areas, where infrastructural, socio-economic, and cultural obstacles considerably affect educational access. This study will offer a contextualized understanding of ODE implementation in places that have been significantly overlooked in academic discourse.

This study conducts a unique comparative analysis of ODE deployment prior to and following the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic served as a worldwide impetus for the swift implementation of distance education models, necessitating even the most isolated communities to use digital learning platforms (Bond, 2021). This study will analyze how the crisis transformed educational delivery in Indonesia's marginalized regions and what insights can be gleaned from the experiences during and after this period of emergency remote instruction. This comparative approach will enhance the current literature by providing insights into the adaptation capacity of educational systems in extreme conditions and their implications for long-term educational access initiatives (Bozkurt et al., 2020).

This study seeks to consolidate worldwide best practices in open and remote education and assess their relevance to the Indonesian environment. International research presents various methods for effective ODE implementation; however, their direct use in Indonesia's remote areas necessitates meticulous adaptation, taking into account unique socio-cultural norms and infrastructural constraints (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2018). This project will conduct a critical literature analysis to identify pertinent tactics and propose context-specific adaptations appropriate for Indonesia's archipelagic setting.

The study will provide evidence-based policy suggestions for government agencies, educational institutions, and non-governmental organizations engaged in education delivery in distant locations, alongside its theoretical contributions. These proposals will tackle critical concerns such as the enhancement of digital infrastructure, the augmentation of educator capabilities, the cultivation of community involvement, and the advancement of digital literacy among students. The research seeks to facilitate the creation of sustainable and inclusive ODE models that address educational inequalities in Indonesia's underprivileged areas.

This study ultimately enhances the greater dialogue on educational justice and inclusion in underdeveloped nations. It frames Open and Distance Education not just as a provisional remedy during emergencies but as a strategic instrument for guaranteeing sustained educational access and social equity for marginalized groups (UNESCO, 2021). This study highlights the significance of localized, culturally pertinent, and technologically viable educational interventions by concentrating on the distinct obstacles encountered by Indonesia's rural and island populations.

B. Research Methods

The study uses a qualitative approach based on a literature review, with data collected from scientific journals, academic sources, and relevant online articles. Literature was selected based on thematic relevance, topicality (within the last 5 years), and reliability of sources. The data is analyzed thematically through a process of classification, observation, and synthesis to identify the relationship between the role of institutions, technology, the systems needed, and digital learning models, resulting in findings that are relevant and applicable to education in the digital era (Ausat et al., 2023).

This study adopts a literature review research design to investigate the implementation of Open and Distance Education (ODE) as a strategy to advance educational access in remote areas. The decision to employ a literature review is grounded in several important considerations relevant to the nature and objectives of this study. Firstly, the topic of Open and Distance Education in remote contexts involves a wide array of interrelated factors, including educational policy, technological infrastructure, pedagogical models, socioeconomic conditions, and cultural contexts. Conducting a literature review enables the

researcher to systematically collect, analyze, and synthesize existing scholarly works, reports, and policy documents, providing a comprehensive overview of current knowledge and identifying gaps that need to be addressed.

Secondly, a literature review is particularly suitable for this study because it allows for the consolidation of findings from different geographical contexts and educational systems. Given the global nature of distance education initiatives and the diverse challenges faced in remote areas worldwide, this method facilitates comparative analysis and the extraction of best practices that can inform future educational policies and implementations. Thirdly, logistical constraints such as limited access to remote areas, the need for extensive resources, and time limitations make primary data collection through fieldwork or large-scale surveys impractical for this study. As an alternative, a literature review offers a cost-effective and academically rigorous approach to gather secondary data and build a solid foundation for understanding the complexities of Open and Distance Education in under-served regions.

Lastly, by reviewing a wide range of academic articles, case studies, and institutional reports, this study acknowledges its limitations and aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders involved in the design and delivery of distance education programs, which may not be wide-ranging in their applicability across all areas of Indonesia. The literature review method supports this objective by offering a critical synthesis of existing research, highlighting successful implementation strategies, and pointing out persistent challenges in the field. In summary, the selection of a literature review as the research design for this study is justified by its capacity to comprehensively explore the multifaceted dimensions of Open and Distance Education, its feasibility given the study's scope and resources, and its potential to produce practical, policy-relevant insights for improving educational access in remote areas.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

The simplest way to understand the terms that appear in describing various concepts in the delivery of teaching and learning by investigating the continuum from the concept of online learning, to traditional face-to-face teaching in the classroom. Online learning is very easy for anyone, especially during the pandemic to reduce meetings carried out online activities so that they can still be carried out properly, this is also assisted by an Open and Distance Education (ODE) system which is very identical to the online or online system (Yang, 2017).

In the remote open education system, online learning is very commonly used to help access and eliminate distance between learners. This system has been widespread since the pandemic; several applications have been developed, ranging from Zoom, Gmeet, Microsoft Teams and others, in order to carry out learning activities face-to-face virtually or online. This device is one of the tools that is often used for activities that can be done effectively, efficiently, easily and cheaply (Camilleri & Camilleri, 2022).



Figure 1. The Concept of E-Learning in Online Learning (Source <https://www3.ubu.es>)

Online learning is to put all the content of the material to be created as well as designed in such a way so that it can be made available online via the internet. This online material can be in the form of lecture

recordings, videos, PowerPoint slides, learning manuals or guidelines, recommended readings, and self-assessment exercises, as well as a place for discussion and question and answer with all students and teachers. Through access with quotas and the internet, material that can be studied at any time allows users to do other activities at the same time. This can happen with the existence of an online system (Budiman et al., 2024).

Through the distance learning system, a person can learn the material at their own speed, initiative and ability, whenever they have time and internet access, using a smartphone, tablet, or PC that can support learning, so that they can learn independently. Online learning is sometimes highly dependent on the provider and package at the agency or organization. It also includes support from a tutor who can be contacted if students have questions about the material that they still don't understand. Sometimes various programs, applications and systems such as *e-learning* or electronic learning are developed with materials that can be adjusted to needs and goals (Budiman et al., 2024).

2. Discussion

2.1 Distance Learning System

Distance learning is a broader term that most simply refers to distance learning from an educational institution. Through this system, online learning can be technically applied as a single part of a distance learning system. However, the term is more commonly used to refer to a condition where teachers or tutors are separated from students; they can gather at several points and can also be spread across several other areas.

Distance learning is one of the solutions methods that has been developed for a long time, especially for those who face challenges of distance, cost and circumstances involving complicated and difficult terrain. The development of the distance learning system, especially during the pandemic, also has progressed rapidly and is developing well, leading several educational institutions to implement a distance learning system. When the pandemic was present, this system became highly suitable for the situation, because in addition to maintaining distance to break the chain of covid-19, one could still actively carry out learning without being physically present (Putri et al., 2024).

In principle, the learning material will be in a textbook or other written format. This will be shared with all students, and students will then post their essays and assignments back to the college, which then post the marked work back to the students. Indeed, distance learning continued to be based on the postal system, while later models used modern technologies such as video and CD-ROMs, until the Internet developed enough to replace it as the primary method of communication.



Figure 2. Distance Learning System Concept (Source <https://www.digation.id/>)

The materials prepared for distance learning are currently in design and are also available online, and also contain the same content as general learning. Nonetheless, the addition of live lectures at a specified time and date that students are expected to attend makes online and offline system learning mutually shared and also complementary.

Distance learning has a more diverse structure with start and end dates for the learning period, which makes it more like teaching in general, such as in scheduled classes. Classes will use device programs or application tools that allow them to participate in groups such as Zoom, Gmeet or Microsoft Teams, so that students can interact with the lesson. Lessons are also usually recorded for evaluation, discussion, and also future notes, as well as basic materials prepared for the exam (Camilleri & Camilleri, 2022; Keerio et al., 2022).

2.2 Blended Learning System

Blended learning is a combination of face-to-face teaching and online learning (Sori et al., 2024). The concepts in this system are delivered face-to-face in a classroom or other room by tutors, and course materials are available online (Udo, 2025). Combined learning can also be one of the choices of needs, and divide the meeting time between when it is held face-to-face and when it is online, and the portion of the meeting can be 50%, 60%, 70% or even 80% depending on the needs (Lapitan et al., 2021).

In this system concept, learners can study relevant material before face-to-face activities, and also follow up afterward through online discussion (Pasaribu et al., 2022). Teaching is often done with a division of time between one and the other. This can be agreed upon in advance and may also include information provided later. When it comes to cost, combined use is certainly more expensive than online, due to the need to pay tutor salaries, travel, and accommodation, as well as the need for connection and preparation of materials both offline and online. However, combining both types of learning is one of the best solutions for face-to-face and online classroom learning.

Regarding the learning system, we must understand the type and character and culture in this situation. Joint learning is one of the best types of learning because it combines two types of learning systems, so that the problems in the online system can be solved in face-to-face meetings.

2.3 Advantages of Online, Distance and Combined Learning

Face-to-face learning is class-based learning that is inflexible because it is determined by a time and date that has been set for lectures and has become a common and natural thing. The face-to-face system has been carried out for a long time and will also continue over time in the future. Nonetheless, since the pandemic face-to-face meetings have been reduced and also replaced by online learning systems.

Online, distance, and blended learning has become an increasingly important and widely used teaching method even before the impact of Covid-19, and there is no doubt that it will continue to increase its use in the future (Syarifussalam et al., 2024). Learning with any system depends on the conditions, situation and readiness of both facilities and infrastructure in using the system.

The main reason for the use of diverse systems is the need and flexibility that can really be applied so that it can run both during and after the pandemic. Another reason is that various systems can be used according to our learning style and needs. All systems are good, depending on the independence and also the desire of the learner, according to their abilities and needs, whether the system is remote, online, or a combination of both.

Learning through a distance system will be one of the solutions in the future. This is because it reveals effectiveness, efficiency, and also economic value that can be utilized by students so that they can carry out many activities without having to reduce other activities.

2.4 Implications

This study's findings underscore the essential function of Open and Distance Education (ODE) in broadening educational access in remote areas. ODE efficiently mitigates barriers imposed by geographical, infrastructural, and socio-economic constraints through the utilization of digital platforms and flexible learning systems (Jung, 2019). The execution of ODE influences educational policy, prompting governments and institutions to allocate resources towards digital infrastructure, enhance teacher proficiency in remote teaching, and create inclusive curricula tailored for varied learning contexts. Furthermore, ODE fosters educational equity and can exemplify effective emergency education delivery in times of crisis, such as natural catastrophes or pandemics.

2.5 Research Contribution

This study enhances the existing literature on educational accessibility by focusing on the practical applications and problems of ODE in remote areas, a context frequently overlooked in global educational studies. The research provides actual evidence on how digital education might surmount infrastructural and economic limitations in rural areas, particularly in the Indonesian archipelago. It additionally offers policy guidelines and strategy frameworks for institutions seeking to implement or enhance ODE programs. This paper presents a comparative analysis of the developments in distance education implementation before and during the pandemic.

2.6 Limitations

This work, despite its merits, has numerous drawbacks. The research focus is limited to specific remote locales, which may not adequately reflect the varied socio-cultural and infrastructural situations of all isolated regions. The study predominantly depends on qualitative data, constraining its capacity to generalize results to a wider population. The availability and dependability of internet connectivity in some places presented issues during data collection and may have affected participant responses. Finally, this study fails to thoroughly examine long-term student learning results or the sustainability of ODE programs in these contexts.

2.4 Suggestions

According to the research findings, many recommendations are put up for future projects and studies: 1) To policymakers: Enhance investment in rural digital infrastructure and internet connection to facilitate the efficient execution of ODE. 2) For educational institutions: Create blended learning frameworks that integrate online resources with intermittent in-person sessions at community centers or mobile learning units. 3) For prospective researchers: Implement longitudinal research to assess the enduring educational outcomes and socio-economic effects of ODE in isolated communities. 4) For practitioners: Develop culturally pertinent and accessible educational resources to promote inclusivity and enhance engagement among distant learners. 5) Future research should adopt a mixed-method approach, incorporating quantitative data to enhance qualitative findings and yield a more thorough knowledge of ODE's efficacy.

E. Conclusion

Open and Distance Education has demonstrated its efficacy in broadening educational access, particularly in isolated regions. This educational paradigm utilizes digital technology and flexible learning methods to overcome geographical, social, and economic constraints that frequently hinder educational equity. The adoption of distance education enables students to learn at their own pace and under their own circumstances, without dependence on traditional educational infrastructure, which is frequently constrained in remote areas. This strategy also enables educators to engage a greater number of learners using more efficient resources.

The success of implementing Open and Distance Education relies on various elements, including internet connectivity, the preparedness of educators, and governmental regulations that promote the digital learning environment. With an appropriate plan, distance education can serve as a viable alternative for enhancing the quality and accessibility of education, thereby fostering a more empowered and informed society across diverse regions, including remote ones.

The introduction of Open and Distance Education (ODE) is crucial for broadening educational opportunities, especially in remote and underserved regions. ODE utilizes digital technologies and adaptable learning models to overcome obstacles related to location, financial constraints, and infrastructural issues, thereby making excellent education available to learners irrespective of their actual surroundings.

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G. Author Contribution Statement

Author YT was responsible for the idea, framework and methodology, while Author MA contributed to the theoretical framework and content distribution. Author FM reviewed and revised the manuscript. All authors contributed equally to the final version of the manuscript.

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