

Higher Education Institutions' Response to Social Phenomena: Flexibility in the Management of UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta Educational Institutions

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the response of higher education institutions to social phenomena, with a focus on the flexibility of educational institution management at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta. The approach used in this study is descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques of student interviews, field observations, and analysis of campus policy documents, namely Circular Letters (SE) and rector's decisions on the management of student activities during the emergence of social phenomena. This study focuses on UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta by comparing its policies with those of other universities in the Greater Solo area. The results show that all universities implement various adaptive strategies, such as adjusting academic policies, strengthening institutional communication strategies, and implementing flexible learning systems as a response to student social phenomena. The implications of this study indicate that management flexibility is a key factor in maintaining the continuity of the academic process while building a democratic and participatory campus climate. Higher education management needs to introduce a culture of open communication between leaders and students and strengthen policies that are responsive to dynamic social phenomena. The recommendation from this study is for higher education institutions to develop a more structured social crisis management system, including.

Keywords: Education management, Higher education, Demonstrations, Student adaptation, UIN Raden Mas Said

Introduction

The dynamics of social phenomena have a significant impact on various aspects of life in society, including in higher education. Universities not only serve as centers for the development of knowledge, but also form part of a social system that constantly interacts with changes in values, culture, and behavior within society. Frequently occurring phenomena include increased

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student participation in social activities, changes in communication patterns in the digital age, shifts in academic culture, and expressions of public aspirations on campus. One of the most prominent social phenomena in recent years has been the increase in student demonstrations. Demonstrations have become a form of social and political participation for students as an expression of their concern for public issues. In the context of higher education, the phenomenon of demonstrations is essential for students because it not only shows social awareness but also assesses the extent to which university management is able to maintain a balance between freedom of expression and academic order. The response of educational institutions to social phenomena reflects the competence of management in dealing with various dynamic and complex social phenomena.

The speed of social change in the digital age requires universities to have flexible managerial competencies in order to adapt to the dynamics of the student environment. Adaptive management enables higher education institutions to maintain academic stability while providing space for student participation in social and political activities on campus (Sutrisno & Hidayat, 2022). This flexibility is an important part of the concept of agile governance in higher education, which emphasizes the ability of institutions to respond to social change with innovative and participatory policies (Prasetyo et al., 2023). Managerial competencies that are responsive to student aspirations have been shown to increase public trust in educational institutions (Baharun, 2020). Other studies also show that educational institutions that apply the principles of adaptive leadership have better organizational resilience in facing social pressures, including student demonstrations (Rahmawati & Aziz, 2021). This condition is experienced by various universities in the Greater Solo area. Campuses in this region face diverse student social dynamics, both from student activities, public forums, and social actions.

The selection of UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta as the focus of this research location is not only because of its status as one of the state religious universities in the Greater Solo area, but also because it has a distinctive institutional and social background. First, UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta has successfully undergone institutional transformation from its initial status as STAIN to IAIN and now UIN, which in managerial terms requires adaptation to a new governance system and a shift to a new academic culture on campus (Fauzi, 2023). Second, geographically and sociologically, UIN Raden Mas Said is located in the Greater Solo area, which is known as a region with a high level of discussion on social, political, and religious issues. The long history of intellectual movements and student movements in this city has made the campus social environment very dynamic and critical of social phenomena. There are various active intra- and extra-curricular student organizations, such as HMPS and PMII, as well as Islamic study groups, creating a complex social system that often demands a quick response from universities to student aspirations. In this case, UIN Raden Mas Said is faced with managerial characteristics that differ from other universities in the region, which are more socially homogeneous. This situation allows research to explore more deeply how campus management flexibility is

applied in dealing with social dynamics that are deeply rooted in the culture of student activism in Greater Solo (Arifin, 2021; Nuryana & Fadhilah, 2022; Puspitasari, 2020; Mulyadi, 2023).

Thus, UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta was chosen as the focus of the research location because it was based on a combination of institutional, geographical, cultural, and managerial value factors that made it a representative case study for analyzing the flexibility of university management in responding to student social phenomena.

From this framework, this study aims to examine:

1. How do social phenomena impact higher education institutions in the Greater Solo area?
2. What are the responses and management strategies implemented by UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta and other higher education institutions in the Greater Solo area to these social phenomena?
3. To what extent is higher education management, particularly at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, flexible in maintaining the stability and continuity of academic activities amid social phenomena such as student demonstrations?

With this analytical framework, the researcher hopes to contribute to the literature on higher education management as well as provide practical references for the formulation of campus policies in the event of future socio-political crises.

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta. This approach was chosen because it is able to explore in depth the phenomenon of campus policies in dealing with dynamic social phenomena. The main data were collected from two sources. First, document analysis in the form of five Circular Letters (SE) issued by a number of universities in Indonesia, including UIN RMS Surakarta, containing emergency policies related to academic operations during the crisis. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with six students from various campuses, namely UNS, UMS, IIM Surakarta, and ITB AAS Indonesia. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the relevance of their experiences to the crisis situation and the implementation of academic policies.

Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which includes three main components: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification. All data were verified through source triangulation, namely by comparing interview results and document data to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings (Sugiyono, 2019). In addition, the analysis of this study was guided by the stages of policy problem solving according to Anderson (2011), which include:

1. Identify problems by examining all the impacts of social phenomena that arise in the university environment on academic stability, institutional governance, and the relationship between management and students;
2. Policy formulation, which is a process of formulating campus policies through the issuance of Circular Letters (SE), decisions by the rector, or

academic references as an institutional response to emerging social dynamics;

3. Policy implementation, which is an analysis of the implementation of these decisions in the field, including bureaucratic challenges and communication dynamics between leaders, lecturers, and students; and
4. Policy evaluation, which assesses the effectiveness of management strategies and the level of adaptability of the academic community in maintaining the continuity of academic activities amid social change. With this approach, the research not only focuses on describing the social phenomena occurring in the university environment, but also critically examines the effectiveness of campus policies and their implications for the flexibility of higher education management, particularly in the context of the institutional adaptation of UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta to the social dynamics developing in the Greater Solo area.

Results

The results of this study were obtained through qualitative analysis of interviews with four student informants from IIM Surakarta, ITB AAS Indonesia, Muhammadiyah University Surakarta (UMS), and Sebelas Maret University (UNS), as well as findings from field observations at each institution. The focus of this study includes the impact of social phenomena on academic activities, campus policy implementation, and student adaptation strategies. One of the phenomena that has emerged in the last two months is demonstrations involving students, the community, and the authorities, which show the increasing social dynamics of the campus and the importance of flexibility in higher education management in maintaining academic stability.

1. The impact of the social phenomenon of demonstrations on campus operations

The demonstrations calling for the dissolution of the House of Representatives had a real impact on academic activities at most of the universities studied. The main impact was the sudden change from offline to online lectures.

a. Sudden Online Lectures

At UMS and UNS, lectures suddenly switched to an online system. At UNS, online lectures were fully implemented from September 1 to 4, 2025 (Ela, UNS). Meanwhile, at IIM Surakarta, several classes had to be postponed or canceled because the lecturers were unable to attend (Anggitia, IIM Surakarta).

b. Postponed Non-Academic Activities

Organizational and student activities were also affected. At UMS, organizational activities were postponed and the campus set a maximum evacuation time of 5:00 p.m. (Hasna, UMS). At IIM Surakarta and UNS, organizational meetings were moved to online platforms.

c. Context of Exceptions

ITB AAS students did not experience a significant impact because the demonstration period coincided with semester break (Aufa, ITB AAS).

2. Implementation of Circular Letters (SE) and Field Constraints

- a. All informants stated that they had received and understood the contents of the campus circular letter regarding demonstrations. At ITB AAS, the CL contained an appeal for students not to be easily provoked (Aufa, ITB AAS). However, the implementation of the policy showed several challenges in the field. At UMS, some lecturers still conducted face-to-face lectures even though the CL instructed online lectures, so students had to confirm the schedule with their respective lecturers (Hasna, UMS).
- b. Technical Challenges with Online Learning
Students experience common obstacles such as unstable internet signals, quickly used up data quotas, and sudden online class notifications (Anggitia, IIM Surakarta; Hasna, UMS; Ela, UNS).
- c. Organizational Obstacles
At IIM Surakarta, organizational meetings have become less effective because some members are inactive during online meetings (Anggitia, IIM Surakarta).

3. Student Adaptation Strategies and Campus Policy Assessment

Various forms of student adaptation demonstrate sudden changes and provide direct assessment of the effectiveness of campus policies.

- a. Student Adaptation Strategies
Students prepare their internet quota in advance, look for locations with strong signals (Anggitia, IIM Surakarta), and try to stay active in following the material presented by lecturers (Ela, UNS).
- b. Assessment of Policies
Campus SE is considered quite effective in maintaining security and order during demonstrations (Ela, UNS). However, some students considered the implementation to be inconsistent and difficult to adapt to (Hasna, UMS).
- c. Student Suggestions and Expectations
Students hoped that the campus would have clearer and more uniform emergency SOPs, provide internet quota subsidies, and improve the communication system so that lecture information would not be given suddenly (Anggitia, IIM Surakarta; Hasna, UMS).

Discussion

1. The impact of social phenomena on universities in the Greater Solo area

Social phenomena such as yesterday's demonstration calling for the dissolution of the House of Representatives in early September 2025 had a real impact on the continuity of academic activities at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta. In response to the heated socio-political situation, all theoretical lectures were moved to an online platform, while student organization activities were temporarily suspended. Some lecturers still conducted offline learning after coordinating with students, especially for practical courses that were difficult to explain online. Offline learning was carried out while still paying attention to the campus environment, which was considered safe enough to ensure student safety. Meanwhile, in online learning activities, some students complained about poor internet connections in their respective areas of residence, making learning difficult. In addition, various technical obstacles have arisen, such as undetected absences in the system, lecturers' voices being cut off, and the loss of some lecture materials due to connection problems.

These conditions have caused some students to fall behind in understanding the material, or even to not attend online lectures at all. Some students have also experienced a decline in motivation to study, such as laziness, difficulty concentrating, or choosing to sleep during online lectures.

Field data shows that administrative policies have not been fully implemented uniformly, taking into account the diversity of students' social and technological conditions. According to Rohman (2020), the effectiveness of education policies greatly depends on the extent to which they are adapted to the realities faced by students in the field. Therefore, the implementation of online learning policies needs to be supported by mapping student needs, improving digital infrastructure, and providing psychological assistance so that the implementation is more inclusive and effective. Overall, the decision of UIN RMS Surakarta reflects efforts to maintain academic continuity without neglecting safety aspects, even though there are still limitations in technical readiness, equitable digital access, and student discipline and motivation to learn.

2. Responses and management strategies implemented by UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta and other universities in Greater Solo in facing this social phenomenon

Despite facing various obstacles, the academic community showed a high capacity for adaptation in maintaining the continuity of learning. Students developed digital social solidarity by sharing notes, materials, and even internet quotas through online communities. This phenomenon illustrates the formation of digital resilience among students, as explained by Ungar (2021) that digital resilience reflects an individual's ability to adapt to changes in technology-based learning systems. Lecturers also innovated in pedagogy by changing interaction patterns to be more flexible and humanistic. Many lecturers adjusted schedules, allowed more time for assignment submission, and used interactive platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Learning Management Systems (LMS). According to Hodges et al. (2020), this practice falls under the category of emergency remote teaching (ERT), which is the rapid adjustment of learning to an online format without losing the main instructional objectives. On the other hand, there are signs of academic burnout due to monotonous online interactions. This is consistent with the findings by Choi et al. (2021), who stated that digital fatigue increases significantly when students do not have a variety of learning methods. Therefore, innovative pedagogical strategies such as project-based learning (Thomas, 2000), collaborative online learning (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008), and the integration of actual social contexts need to be implemented so that learning remains meaningful even in emergency situations.

The implementation of academic policies during a crisis is generally carried out through the issuance of Circular Letters (SE) by each university. At UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, the Rector's SE serves as the main guideline for lecturers and students in adjusting academic activities. All theoretical lectures have been transferred to an online system, while student organization activities, field activities, and large gatherings have been temporarily suspended to maintain campus security. Lecturers were given the flexibility to continue teaching face-to-face on a small scale, especially for practical courses

that were difficult to conduct online, provided that they paid attention to safety and the relatively conducive campus situation. This situation resulted in all academic activities being paralyzed for several weeks and caused deep psychological trauma for students and educators (Li & Yang, 2025; Student Burnout Review, 2025). In response, UNNES shifted all lectures to a fully online platform and opened psychological counseling services for affected students. However, limited internet access and digital facilities have prevented this policy from being fully effective (Fazira, Putri, & Rahmawati, 2023). In comparison, Sebelas Maret University (UNS) implemented a hybrid policy, especially for practical, professional, and laboratory courses that require physical attendance. This approach is considered more flexible in maintaining academic continuity, but it also carries a high risk to safety and learning effectiveness because it still involves face-to-face activities amid an unstable socio-political situation (Imanika, Pangastuti, & Setiaji, 2023; Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020).

Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah University Surakarta (UMS) implemented a full online learning policy during the first week of lectures, but continued to provide normal campus administrative services. This policy demonstrates an effort to maintain internal stability on campus without interrupting public services. On the other hand, the Muhammadiyah Islamic Institute (IIM) Surakarta decided to shift all New Student Orientation (Mastaka) activities to an online system and cancel field activities. This step was taken to prevent potential crowds and conflicts in the field, while ensuring that campus orientation activities continued to run in a safe atmosphere. Meanwhile, the AAS Indonesia Institute of Business Technology (ITB) has taken the most decisive policy by prohibiting all members of the academic community, including students, lecturers, and educational staff, from participating in demonstrations. In its official circular letter, the campus emphasized that all members of the academic community must maintain neutrality, avoid provocation, and refrain from spreading political content on social media. This policy prioritizes campus security and social stability, while also demonstrating a more restrictive and preventive management approach [Ahmad, 2023].

In general, the implementation of SE in various campuses has succeeded in providing administrative certainty and maintaining academic continuity in the short term. However, the policy is still reactive and lacks comprehensive guidelines covering physical protection, psychological support, technological readiness, and academic freedom for students [Siska et al., 2024]. This phenomenon shows that the success of higher education management in a crisis situation is not only determined by the speed of response, but also by the institution's ability to anticipate the long-term social and emotional impacts that arise after the crisis has passed. However, there are challenges in implementing academic policies during periods of emergency when social phenomena are ongoing. The implementation of academic policies during a crisis faces multidimensional challenges, including technical, social, and psychological aspects. At UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, the biggest obstacles stem from unequal internet access and limited digital devices among students. Many students live in areas with unstable connections, making it difficult to optimally participate in online lectures. This phenomenon is in line with the findings of Coman et al. (2020), which show that limitations in digital infrastructure are a major obstacle to the effectiveness of online learning in

developing countries. In addition, various technical issues such as undetected absences, interrupted lecturer audio, and the loss of some lecture material due to network disruptions reduced student engagement. As stated by Bao (2020), the success of online learning is largely determined by technological stability and the readiness of users to utilize digital platforms. Ideal conditions often cause some students to experience a decline in learning motivation, boredom, and even not attending online classes due to digital fatigue, a phenomenon also found by Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) in a global study on pedagogical challenges during the pandemic.

Previous research confirms that social crises in academic environments can cause long-term emotional disturbances that impact learning performance and trust in educational institutions (Nugroho, 2025; Saud, 2023; Misra & Castillo, 2004). At UNS, challenges arise from technical and psychosocial aspects. Lecturers faced difficulties in adjusting to online learning methods, while students faced academic pressure due to excessive workloads and uncertainty. This is in line with the theory of crisis management in higher education (Mitroff, 2005), which emphasizes the importance of policy coordination, resource readiness, and adaptive communication during times of crisis. Thus, the success of higher education management cannot only depend on administrative regulations, but also on the readiness of digital infrastructure, the balance of academic workload, and psychological support for the academic community (Marinoni, van't Land, & Jensen, 2020).

Adaptation Strategies of the Academic Community to Changes in the Learning System. Despite facing various obstacles, the academic community has demonstrated a high capacity for adaptation in maintaining the continuity of learning. Students have developed digital social solidarity by sharing notes, materials, and even internet quotas through online communities. This phenomenon illustrates the formation of digital resilience among students, as explained by Ungar (2021) that digital resilience reflects an individual's ability to adapt to changes in technology-based learning systems. Lecturers also innovate in pedagogy by changing interaction patterns to be more flexible and humanistic. Many lecturers adjusted schedules, allowed more time for assignment submission, and used interactive platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Learning Management System (LMS). According to Hodges et al. (2020), this practice falls under the category of emergency remote teaching (ERT), which is the rapid adjustment of learning to an online format without losing the main instructional objectives. On the other hand, there are signs of academic burnout due to monotonous online interactions. This is consistent with the findings by Choi et al. (2021), which state that digital fatigue increases significantly when students do not receive a variety of learning methods. Therefore, innovative pedagogical strategies such as project-based learning (Thomas, 2000), collaborative online learning (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008), and the integration of actual social contexts need to be implemented so that learning remains meaningful even in emergency situations.

3. The flexibility of higher education management, particularly at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, plays a role in maintaining the stability and continuity of academic activities amid social phenomena such as student demonstrations.

Campus policies through the issuance of Circular Letters (SE) can generally be categorized as effective from an administrative perspective because they are able to maintain the continuity of academic activities during times of socio-political crisis. Online learning has become a strategic solution that allows teaching and learning activities to continue without neglecting safety aspects. However, the effectiveness of these policies is still limited to technical and administrative dimensions. A number of national studies have found that online learning policies often do not address the aspects of academic interaction quality, digital justice, and student psychological well-being (Fazira et al., 2023; Winarningsih & Cempaka, 2024). Field findings at several campuses show that the implementation of SE has indeed succeeded in stabilizing academic activities, but has not been accompanied by support for the psychosocial aspects of students. This is in line with global studies that highlight the increase in burnout and loneliness in online learning due to social isolation and high academic burdens (Li & Yang, 2025; Student Burnout Review, 2025).

These conditions emphasize that the success of higher education policies during times of crisis is not only determined by technical readiness, but also by the sustainability of social and emotional support for students. In the context of crisis management, Coombs (2007), through his Situational Crisis Communication theory, asserts that the effectiveness of policies is highly dependent on the transparency of communication and the consistency of the organization in responding to emergencies. In this study, most universities in Indonesia have demonstrated a rapid response, but there is still a lack of evaluation and cross-unit coordination mechanisms. The resilience-based governance approach, as described by Boin and Lodge (2016), is relevant to be applied so that campuses are not only responsive but also have a long-term institutional resilience system. In addition, Dasuki, Herdienata, and Hidayat (2025) emphasize that the resilience of higher education organizations is built through three main dimensions, namely adaptive leadership, collaborative organizational culture, and digital infrastructure readiness. This view is reinforced by Altbach and de Wit (2020), who state that evidence-based governance is a key prerequisite for higher education institutions in an era of global disruption. By integrating empirical evaluation results and policy innovation, higher education institutions can improve the effectiveness of SE not only as a temporary response but as part of a strategy to strengthen a resilient and inclusive education system in the face of socio-political uncertainty.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research conducted, it can be concluded that the education policies implemented by various universities in Indonesia, including UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, during social phenomena such as the demonstration to dissolve the House of Representatives in 2025, demonstrate a serious commitment to maintaining the continuity of education amid instability. The use of online learning methods emerged as a strategic solution that was able to maintain the academic process without neglecting safety aspects, even though it still faced several challenges such as a lack of digital infrastructure, unequal internet access, decreased motivation to learn, and academic fatigue among students due to monotonous online interactions. On the other hand, the issuance

of a Circular Letter (SE) by the campus serves as an effective crisis management tool at the administrative level, as it provides operational guidelines for lecturers and students. However, this policy is still reactive and does not fully consider psychosocial aspects, technological readiness, and the continuity of learning quality. These findings show that the success of higher education management in emergency situations is not only determined by the speed of the university's response, but also by the institution's ability to build a robust, adaptive, and human-centered learning system. Therefore, higher education institutions are expected to develop evidence-based crisis management strategies that link technical, social, and emotional aspects and encourage the formation of a culture of resilience in the academic environment. In this way, higher education can not only survive in the face of socio-political turmoil, but also turn it into an opportunity to strengthen an inclusive, resilient, and welfare-oriented learning system for all members of the academic community.

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