



Digital Media in TEFL: Lecturer's Perceptions at an Islamic Institute in Jambi

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Abstract

This study investigates an English lecturer's perceptions of digital media integration in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at a rural Islamic institute in Jambi, Indonesia. Using a qualitative single-case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with one lecturer at Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kerinci. Thematic analysis revealed six key themes: digital media is perceived as beneficial for increasing student engagement, tools are selected strategically based on language skills, and digital integration is hindered by limited infrastructure and institutional support. Despite these barriers, the lecturer demonstrated strong professional agency by using offline alternatives, engaging in training, and adapting technology to student needs. Platforms such as YouTube, Google Classroom, and Quizizz were commonly used to support listening, grammar, and classroom management. While digital tools enhanced learner autonomy and motivation, challenges remained in curriculum flexibility and equitable access. Digital integration success in TEFL not only requires good infrastructure but also institutional support and empowering the lecturer. In brief, this study offers valuable insights for future research to examine how digital media are utilized in TEFL classes, especially in rural areas.

Keywords: Digital Media, TEFL, Lecturer Perception

Introduction

Nowadays, the role of technology is expanding in the field of education, notably Teaching English as a Foreign Language (Voogt & Knezek, 2008). In the last twenty years, digital tools such as media have evolved into a key component of teaching and learning (Selywn, 2021). In this context, TEFL has undergone a significant transformation in both pedagogical approaches and classroom technology, reflected in lecturers' increasing reliance on digital resources (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000). Additionally, using digital media not only benefits lecturers by fostering creativity but presents challenges, requiring them to adapt continuously

throughout the process (Aliyyah et al., 2023).

Digital media tools such as mobile applications, multimedia platforms, online games, and virtual classrooms have transformed the traditional classroom into a more dynamic, multimodal environment. These tools help foster digital media literacy, which demonstrates the capability to utilize, evaluate, create, and deliver using a digital technology (Jolls, 2008; Ulya & Fitri, 2024). They specifically facilitate the improvement of multimodal literacies by allowing students to actively practice listening, speaking, reading, writing, and observing (Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Walsh, 2008). This shift from static to interactive learning has empowered students to become more autonomous, motivated, and engaged with authentic English language materials (Godwin-Jones, 2018; Hazaymeh, 2021).

However, despite these promising developments, the integration of digital media into TEFL remains uneven, particularly in developing contexts like Indonesia. Numerous studies have shown that limited infrastructure, inadequate digital skills, and insufficient institutional support hinder the effective adoption of technology for learning (Eryansyah et al., 2019; Supratman & Wahyudin, 2017). This digital gap is primarily noticeable in rural areas, where access to reliable internet and professional training are significant barriers (de Freitas & Spangenberg, 2019; Mudra, 2018).

The emergence of Covid-19 heightened the urgency of digital transformation, compelling colleges and schools worldwide to shift rapidly from conventional in-person methods to remote and blended learning models (Alshehri et al., 2020; Bond et al., 2021; Bozkurt et al., 2020). Additionally, lockdowns and the widespread adoption of online learning introduced innovative teaching techniques that expanded opportunities for studying languages (Preis et al., 2023). To adapt to this transition, education systems must not only embrace digital tools but also redefine teaching practices to create more flexible, inclusive, and technology-enhanced learning environments (UNESCO, 2021). Fansury et al. (2020) also highlighted how platforms such as Zoom, Google Classroom, WhatsApp, and YouTube became essential tools for English language teaching. Yet, the abrupt shift exposed the depth of digital divides and placed unprecedented pressure on lecturers to redesign teaching methods, maintain learner engagement, and develop new digital teaching competencies (Hampel & Stickler, 2005; Townsend, 2017).

These challenges are especially pronounced in smaller, religiously affiliated institutions like Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kerinci, where limited internet access, insufficient infrastructure, and low levels of digital literacy hinder the effective use of digital media (Alamsyah, 2017; Mahyoob, 2020). Lecturers in such contexts often encounter institutional barriers, restricted access to professional training, and varying degrees of confidence in their ability to implement technology effectively (Fadil, 2015; Krier & Ching, 2022). The impact of technological advancement has also shifted literacy practices, with individuals increasingly relying on internet-based information and engaging in literacy activities through digital platforms (Silvhiany et al., 2021). While broader research has explored student and lecturer

attitudes toward digital media, few studies address the lived experiences of English lecturers in remote Indonesian settings.

Notably, most prior studies have concentrated on students' perspectives and technology use in metropolitan educational institutions, leaving the voice of lecturers, particularly those teaching in smaller, religiously affiliated universities outside Java, largely underrepresented. This research gap is critical because lecturers' perceptions, readiness, and pedagogical beliefs significantly influence the adoption and success of digital media in language teaching (Scherer et al., 2019). To address this gap, Yin (2018) emphasizes the value of qualitative, context-sensitive investigations, such as case studies, for documenting how educational innovations unfold within specific institutional and cultural contexts. Moreover, the following research question is added to guide this study: "What do English lecturers at IAIN Kerinci think about digital media in TEFL?"

This study offers a novel contribution by centering on the voices of English lecturers in a rural, religiously affiliated Indonesian university; an institutional and geographical context that remains underrepresented in TEFL research. While previous studies have predominantly examined student perspectives or focused on technologically advanced urban institutions, this study highlights how lecturers in resource-limited areas perceive, adapt to, and implement digital media in their teaching. By documenting their lived experiences, this study not only enriches the understanding of digital media integration in underexplored contexts but also informs policymakers, institutional leaders, and teacher training programs on targeted strategies to bridge digital divides. The findings are significant because they reveal context-specific challenges and adaptive practices that can guide more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable digital integration in TEFL.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative case study design as described by Creswell (2014) to explore how English lecturer at an Islamic Institute in Jambi perceive and utilize digital media in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. A case study approach was selected because it allows an in-depth examination of real-world experiences within their institutional and cultural contexts (Yin, 2018). This design is consistent with the aim of the study, which seeks to reveal the obstacles, attitudes, and methods. A one participant was selected through purposive sampling; he is a male lecturer with fourteen years of teaching experience, holds a doctoral degree in English education, and has participated in several digital literacy workshops. His extensive experience and routine use of digital media in classroom made him a perfect sample for this study. Although the study involved only one participant, the emphasis was on depth rather than generalizability, consistent with Stake's (1995) argument that a single case can offer valuable insights when it is especially illustrative. Prior to the interview, the researcher met the participant in person to explain the study's purpose, scope, and ethical considerations, and obtained both

verbal and written consent.

Data were collected in Bahasa Indonesia through a 40 minutes WhatsApp semi-structured interview via voice call, chosen for its accessibility and comfort. The session was recorded, transcribed, and translated into English for analysis. Interview questions included:

1. Can you describe how you usually integrate digital media into your classes?
2. What challenges have you encountered in using digital media in your institution?
3. How do students respond to the use of digital media in your classes?

The study did not aim for data saturation, but rather sought depth and richness of understanding. To ensure the reliability of findings, the interview transcript was returned to the participant for validation through member checking. Abrar et al. (2023) and Kamil (2022) confirming that the researcher's interpretations accurately reflected the participant's intended meanings. In addition, a reflexive journal was maintained throughout the research process to minimize bias and enhance credibility.

The study was conducted using the six-phase thematic analysis approach recommended by Braun & Clarke, (2006): (1) getting to know the data, (2) creating the initial codes, (3) looking for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and labeling themes, and (6) creating the final report. The researcher frequently reviewed the transcript in order to fully comprehend its substance and context. Ethical approval was obtained from IAIN Kerinci, with informed consent secured, and participant anonymity maintained through the use of a pseudonym, Budi, to protect confidentiality.

Results

Perceived Pedagogical Value of Digital Media

Budi emphasized that digital media plays a significant role in increasing student engagement and making the learning process more dynamic. He described tools such as videos, mobile applications, and educational games not only as supplementary resources but as essential components of modern English teaching. These tools, he explained, offer flexibility by allowing students to learn independently at their own pace and preferred time, which is particularly valuable in contexts where resources are limited.

As Budi stated, "Digital media increases student engagement and motivation." This finding reinforces the study's focus on understanding how lecturers in rural institutions conceptualize and implement digital media in TEFL.

Media Tools and Strategic Use

Budi's choice of media tools was deliberate and aligned with specific instructional objectives. Google Classroom and Moodle helped him to manage class assignment, while YouTube videos and podcast were used to improve students' listening skills. Quizizz and Kahoot! were selected for teaching grammar and vocabulary. As he noted, "I use YouTube and podcasts for listening... Quizizz for

grammar.”

His integration of both synchronous discussions and asynchronous platforms demonstrates a strategic approach, designed to maximizing students’ participation more effectively.

Institutional and Infrastructural Barriers

Despite the advantages, Budi reported persistent challenges in using digital media for language teaching, including limited internet access, lack of devices among students, and low digital literacy capability. He explained, “Some students struggle with internet access and lack of devices.” These infrastructural constraints were compounded by distractions, particularly when students received social media notifications during lessons, which sometimes disrupted the flow of discussion.

Professional Agency and Adaptation Strategies

In response to these challenges, Budi demonstrated a strong sense of professional agency by adapting his teaching methods to ensure learning continuity. As he stated, “I give an alternative to my students such as offline learning materials, I’m also participate in online training to improve myself.”

He prepared printed materials for offline learning and provided a downloadable content for his students with limited internet access. On the other hand, his participation in online workshops further enhanced his digital teaching competencies, illustrating a proactive effort to bridge the gap between available resources and pedagogical needs.

Student Learning Impact

Budi observed that students respond positively to the digital media in learning process, which influenced their study habit and autonomy. “By using digital media make my students tend to be more independent and active,” he noted.

He acknowledged that digital tools supported the development of English skills such as listening and writing; however, he cautioned that technology should complement rather than replace in-person interaction especially for speaking practice and cultural understanding.

Curriculum Integration Challenges

While digital media proved effective for certain topics, Budi noted that others, particularly those requiring face-to-face interaction, were less compatible with online formats. As he explained “The curriculum sometimes does not fully support technology,”

This misalignment highlights the need for curriculum flexibility and institutional reforms to accommodate hybrid learning models more effectively, ensuring that both digital and in-person modalities can be integrated without compromising learning objectives.

Discussion

Barriers Reflect Contextual Realities

Limited access to devices and unstable internet is the common institutional and infrastructural problem in rural area, as highlighted by Budi in this study. These obstacles confirm earlier findings by Alamsyah (2017) and Aliyyah et al. (2023), which stress the severity of the digital divide in Indonesia.

Although Budi demonstrated a strong commitment to using technology in his teaching, there were occasions when his effort was limited due to difficult circumstances. Warschauer (2003) noted that students in rural and low-income areas are mostly affected by such limitations, making this a major issue that requires to be solved.

This study's novelty lies in documenting how a lecturer in rural Islamic higher education institution navigates these constraints through self-initiated strategies, rather than relying solely on institutional solutions. Instead of passively awaiting institutional support, he acknowledges the limitations and actively sought practical methods to support his student learning.

Professional Agency in Practice

By creating content that can be accessed offline, participating in professional training, and modifying existing teaching methods, Budi demonstrated his adaptability and professional agency. These findings support earlier study conducted by Scherer et al. (2019), who argue that lecturer autonomy is a critical factor in the success of digital integration, especially when institutional support is limited.

Moreover, Priestley et al. (2012) stated that lecturer agency is influenced not only by individual characteristics but also by environmental and social contexts. Through continuous professional development and the adaptation of technological tools to align with student needs, Budi shows how a lecturer can be creative and resourceful even when working within many limitations.

His experience offers valuable insight into how lecturers in rural areas can take initiative and adapt, helping to broaden existing ideas about lecturer agency at Islamic higher education.

Implications for TEFL in Rural Islamic Institutions

The findings of this study indicate that digital media holds a significant potential to support and enhance English language learning in resource-limited areas, but its effectiveness depends on whether lecturers receive adequate training, access, and instructional flexibility. Furthermore, S et al. (2024) emphasized that sustainable digital integration depends more on continuous institutional support than on infrastructure alone.

In the case of Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kerinci, digital transformation depends not only on hardware and connectivity but also on empowering lecturers. Moreover, curriculum designers and policymakers should collaborate to develop adaptable frameworks that integrate digital tools into TEFL without replacing the essential elements of face-to-face learning interaction, particularly for communicative skills such as speaking. For Islamic institutions, the integration of

digital media requires merging religious educational principles with modern instructional frameworks, as highlighted by Sumiati et al. (2024), who addressed the complexities and challenges of digital transformation in Islamic higher education.

The study's findings have important policy implications, suggesting that focused lecturer training, adaptable curriculum plans, and infrastructure support could help reduce the digital gap in similar rural and religious institutions.

Limits and Recommendations for Future Studies

Since only one participant was involved in this research, the findings may not represent all context. However, through these findings, it delivers depth and contextualized insights into the experience of one digital-literate lecturer facing rural challenges. Although the primary data collection was interview-based, future research should include methodological triangulation such as classroom observation or analysis of teaching artifacts to enrich interpretation, and include broader participant samples across different departments or institutions and explore student perspectives for a more holistic view, correlated with Yin and Creswell recommendations for single-case studies and, emphasized the importance of in-depth comprehension in qualitative research design.

Conclusion

This study shows that even in rural Islamic higher education contexts with limited infrastructure, digital media can play a powerful role in enhancing TEFL by allowing lecturers to adapt, be creative, and have a strong professional agency. The participant's use of YouTube, Google Classroom, Quizizz, and providing offline resources demonstrates that effective teaching method can thrive despite unstable internet, scarce devices, and low digital literacy levels, as long as lecturers are willing to innovate and connect their approaches to local conditions.

The result also highlighted that bridging the digital divide in rural areas involves more than upgrading infrastructure alone. Institutions and policymakers must also focus on personal training of lecturer, creating flexible curricula, and sustained institutional support. For Islamic higher education, this means arranging digital integration that honor religious principles while fostering practical learning.

In conclusion, by documenting the lived experience of one lecturer in a resource-limited areas, this study offers practical guidance for policymakers. Simultaneous investment in infrastructure and lecturer empowerment can lead to more inclusive and sustainable digital learning based environments, enabling rural institutions not only to catch up with their metropolitan counterparts but also to develop the human resource quality.

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