



Sacred Traditions, Digital Transitions: Exploring English Teachers' Experiences in Bridging Faith and Technology in *Pesantren*

Hertiki¹, Eliasanti Agustina², Rahmat Setiawan³, Meytha Dwi Kurniadiansyah⁴

^{1,2,3} Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya

Article Info	Abstract
<p>Received: 2025 - 12- 30 Revised: 2026 01-14 Accepted: 2026 06-01</p> <p>Keywords: English Teachers; Digital Literacy; <i>Pesantren</i>; TELL</p> <p>DOI: 10.24256/ideasv14i1.9180</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Hertiki hertiki@unipasby.ac.id Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya</p>	<p><i>This research scrutinizes how three English teachers in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) located in Ngawi, East Java, Indonesia, negotiate the integration of digital technology within a framework of sacred values and pedagogical practice. Employing a narrative inquiry approach, the research draws on semi-structured interviews conducted between June and October 2025 to capture teachers' life experiences in navigating institutional norms and moral expectations. Data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework to identify recurring patterns of ethical reflection and pedagogical decision-making. The findings demonstrate that digital technology in pesantren is not understood as a neutral instructional instrument but as a moral space imbued with ethical and spiritual significance, where every pedagogical choice is evaluated against religious norms. Teachers engage in selective adaptation strategies, such as restricting open internet access, curating faith-aligned digital content, and repurposing technology for controlled activities like language performances and project-based tasks. These practices give rise to a distinctive form of value-based digital literacy characterized by spiritual awareness, ethical filtering, and pedagogical adaptability. The discussion reveals that although institutional restrictions often constrain technological innovation, they simultaneously foster teachers' reflective agency and moral creativity. The research concludes that effective digital integration in pesantren relies less on rigid regulation than on the cultivation of ethical consciousness among teachers and students, allowing technology to function as an instrument of faith-oriented learning rather than a disruption to religious tradition.</i></p>

1. Introduction

Pesantren has emerged as one of the most significant sites within Indonesia's accelerating landscape of educational digitalization, functioning as a complex intersection between sacred religious traditions and contemporary innovations. According to data from the Indonesian Waqf Board, as of March 13, 2025, there are at least 41,220 *pesantren* across Indonesia (Sulistiyawan, 2025), a figure that underscores not only their institutional magnitude but also their potential role in shaping broader cultural transformations. Historically perceived as centers for the transmission of Islamic knowledge, *pesantren* have increasingly engaged with modern forms of education, positioning themselves as social spaces where tradition and change are continuously negotiated.

In recent decades, this engagement has taken diverse forms. Some *pesantren* have adopted bilingual education, particularly Arabic and English, as a marker of openness to global interaction (Mujib & Majid, 2022; Ramadhan & Luthfi, 2020; Wijaya et al., 2024), as a symbol of openness to the global sphere; others have taken further steps by adopting digital technologies, ranging from online platforms to robotics curricula for their students (Rosyidah, 2024; Tianur et al., 2024). Yet, not a few still uphold bilingual mastery as their hallmark of modernity while setting aside the growing wave of digital innovation. This diversity reflects an ongoing negotiation between the demands of modernization and the preservation of sacred values that constitute *pesantren* identity. Therefore, it arises a fundamental question: To what extent can technological integration take place in *pesantren* without weakening the sacred identity that has long constituted their very foundation?

Within this context, English teachers occupy a particularly strategic position. As instructors of a global language closely associated with modernity, they are situated at the intersection of religious values, global communication, and technological mediation. Unlike teachers of religious subjects, English teachers are often expected to broaden students' global horizons while simultaneously adhering to institutional norms that emphasize moral discipline and spiritual integrity. This dual responsibility places them at the forefront of negotiating how technology is pedagogically and ethically employed in *pesantren* classrooms. This study highlights the experiences of English teachers in *pesantren* as they navigate between preserving religious values and embracing digital innovation. Positioned as foreign language instructors in a faith-based environment, they face the dual challenge of opening global perspectives while safeguarding long-standing sacred traditions.

Existing literature illustrates the ambivalent nature of technology integration in religious educational settings. On the one hand, studies highlight its pedagogical benefits, including enhanced access to authentic materials, increased opportunities for cross-cultural interaction, and more engaging instructional strategies (Hasumi & Chiu, 2024; Xia et al., 2024). On the other hand, research also

points to significant challenges, such as distraction from normative values, excessive dependence on digital devices, academic dishonesty, and concerns regarding the diminishing authority of traditional figures (Febrian, 2024; Zhang, 2023). Several local studies further reveal that digital adoption in *pesantren* has been associated with declining student concentration, ethical issues, misinformation, and anxieties over shifting religious authority (Pahrurrozi, 2025; Yanto et al., 2024; In'amurrohman, 2019). These concerns help explain why many *pesantren* continue to regulate or restrict digital access, often through surveillance systems or limited connectivity, despite the partial effectiveness of such measures (Hefner, 2022).

Importantly, resistance to technology in *pesantren* is not solely rooted in infrastructural limitations but is deeply intertwined with ideological and epistemological concerns (Jamil et al., 2025; Ridho et al., 2024). While some *pesantren* seek to minimize technological exposure, others adopt digital tools without a clear ethical framework, resulting in pedagogical uncertainty. This situation points to the absence of a coherent, value-based digital literacy framework capable of guiding ethical technology use while maintaining traditional authority and fostering critical awareness among both teachers and students.

Although digitalization in *pesantren* has been widely studied, most research remains focused on acceptance or rejection of technology, students' digital literacy, infrastructure, and the ideological resistance of *kiai* and *ustadz*. However, research on how English teachers integrate sacred values with technology-based pedagogy remains limited. Positioned between modernity and tradition, English teachers in *pesantren* face the unique challenge of teaching a language linked to modernity while preserving deeply rooted religious values. The central thread of this study is to bring forward the narratives of English teachers in *pesantren* as both cultural and digital agents, striving to integrate technology without undermining the authority of tradition. Rather than framing technology merely as a threat or an opportunity, this research seeks to uncover how teachers' critical reflections can cultivate self-awareness in the use of digital tools, both for themselves and their students. In this way, the research not only contributes to discussions on technology integration in Islamic educational institutions but also offers a fresh perspective on how digital literacy can be ethically managed within value-based education. Accordingly, this research aims to address the following questions:

1. How do English teachers in *pesantren* experience the integration of digital technology into their teaching practices?
2. What pedagogical implications can be drawn from these experiences to serve as a framework for developing value-based digital literacy in *pesantren*?

2. Method

Research Design

This research uses a qualitative approach. Narrative inquiry was used to explore comprehensively how technology is used in *pesantren*. The main instrument for data collection in this research is an interview blueprint, carefully designed to provide a structured path while still allowing flexibility in exploring the data. To support the exploration of informants' life experiences, this research uses semi-structured interviews, which allow for consistency between sessions while remaining open to new insights that may appear. The interview protocol consisted of ten core questions, carefully developed to elicit rich descriptions of how English teachers engage with, negotiate, and make sense of technology within their pedagogical and religious environments. This design allowed the researcher to document not only the participants' actions but also the underlying values, dilemmas, and interpretations that shape their digital practices in *pesantren*.

Subject or Participant

The subjects of this research are three English teachers who actively teach in *pesantren* located in Indonesia. The three participants were selected purposively for their dual role as language educators and moral guides in *pesantren*. They were chosen to represent variations in teaching experience, department responsibilities, and engagement with technology, providing diverse perspectives within the *pesantren* environment.

Each participant has direct experience in integrating digital tools into English teaching while maintaining the spiritual and ethical values of *pesantren* education. It is acknowledged that the participants' young age and limited teaching experience may influence their perspectives, which could differ from veteran teachers. This limitation is considered when interpreting the findings.

Given the narrative inquiry approach, depth of insight and richness of personal experience are prioritized over sample size. Three participants allowed for in-depth exploration of individual experiences while maintaining feasibility for detailed analysis. All three participants are from the same modern bilingual *pesantren* in Indonesia, providing a shared institutional context while allowing for variation in individual experiences. The demographic and professional details of the participants are summarized in the table below:

Table 1. Informants' Data

No	Pseudonym	Age	Role in <i>Pesantren</i>	Teaching Experience	Major	
1.	Zaynab	25	Language Advisory	3 years	Arabic Education Department	Language Department
2.	Ruqayyah	23	Data Division	1 year	Comparative Islamic	

			Jurisprudence	
3.	Fatimah	22	Tilor (responsible for 1 year producing and procuring students' clothing and uniforms)	Islamic Education

Data and Source of Data

The data for this research were collected from the interview with three English teachers who actively teach in a *pesantren* setting. To ensure ethical integrity and protect the participants' privacy, pseudonyms are used throughout this report. All research data, including the original interview transcripts, the translated versions of the interviews, as well as the data that have been categorized through the coding process, can be accessed through this link; https://bit.ly/Data_DigitalTechnology

Data Collecting Technique

The data for this research were collected through semi-structured narrative interviews, designed to explore in depth the lived experiences of English teachers in integrating digital technology within the *pesantren* context. This technique was chosen because it allows participants to share their stories in their own voices, while still providing a structured framework to ensure the relevance and comparability of data across sessions. Before conducting the interviews, the researcher developed an interview blueprint consisting of five guiding questions. Here are the following questions used within interview:

Table 2. Interview Questions

No	Code	Link to RQ	Questions
1.	Q1	RQ1	How do you experience the use of digital technology in teaching English in the <i>pesantren</i> ?
2.	Q2		What challenges do you face in using technology in the <i>pesantren</i> classroom?
3.	Q3		How do students respond to the use of digital media in the learning process?
4.	Q4		How do you perceive the use of technology in relation to <i>pesantren</i> values and culture?
5.	Q5	RQ2	In your opinion, how effective is technology in improving the quality of English teaching and learning in the <i>pesantren</i> environment?

The interviews were conducted individually and in person within the *pesantren* environment to ensure contextual authenticity and to make participants feel comfortable expressing their experiences. Each interview lasted approximately

45 to 60 minutes, depending on the depth of the participant's responses. All sessions were audio-recorded with prior consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim in Bahasa Indonesia. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues, contextual observations, and spontaneous reflections that enriched the interpretive process. This research was conducted in one *pesantren* in Indonesia.

Data Analysis Technique

All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim in Bahasa Indonesia to preserve the authenticity of participants' voices. Interviews were then translated into English by the researcher. Back-translation was employed with an independent bilingual colleague to ensure accuracy and preservation of meaning. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six steps proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, the researcher engaged in familiarization, repeatedly reading both the original and translated transcripts to gain a deep understanding of the data.

Second, initial codes were generated to identify meaningful phrases, expressions, and ideas related to the integration of technology in *pesantren*. Third, the codes were collated into potential themes, grouping similar ideas under broader conceptual categories. Fourth, these themes were reviewed and refined by comparing them with the original transcripts to ensure consistency and accuracy of meaning.

Fifth, the themes were defined and named, capturing their essence and relationship to the research questions. Finally, a thematic interpretation was conducted, connecting the identified themes to the two research questions and the conceptual framework of value-based digital literacy. After initial coding and theme development, participants were contacted to review and confirm the interpretations of their interviews, allowing for clarification and validation of the findings.

Researcher Personality

One of the researchers has prior experience in *pesantren* environments as a language educator, which provides contextual understanding but also requires reflexivity to mitigate potential biases in interpretation.

3. Result and Discussion

A. Negotiating Limited Integration of Digital Technology in Pesantren

The integration of digital technology in *pesantren* remains limited, shaped by ongoing negotiations between institutional rules, cultural traditions, and teachers' pedagogical aspirations. Although tools like language labs and digital content exist, their use is neither systematic nor free from constraints. Teachers must navigate licensing procedures, religious restrictions, and infrastructural limits, making technology use a negotiated rather than normalized practice. Consequently,

teachers adapt and improvise to sustain learning. Two key dimensions emerge: balancing technological possibilities with *pesantren* values, and confronting the practical challenges that regulate and shape technology use in education.

1. Institutional and Moral Constraints Shaping Classroom Technology Use

Classroom technology use in *pesantren* is not primarily constrained by material scarcity, but by institutional governance and moral regulation that frame how technology is interpreted and legitimized. Teachers consistently described the presence of digital infrastructure, such as language laboratories, science laboratories, digital libraries, and computers, while simultaneously emphasizing their limited pedagogical use due to bureaucratic procedures. As one teacher admitted “*There is a language lab, a science lab, a digital library, and computers, but we rarely use them because the permits are complicated*” (Zaynab, Q1). Technology, in this sense, is institutionally available yet pedagogically distant.

Beyond administrative complexity, moral concerns function as a central interpretive framework shaping institutional policy. Zaynab further noted that the restriction on laptops stems from anxieties over potential misuse, reflecting an ethical orientation rather than a technical limitation. She added “*We’re not allowed to bring laptops to teach without permission, because they’re worried it might be misused*” (Zaynab, Q1).

Importantly, these restrictions are not merely technical but are also framed as moral safeguards, rooted in Islamic values. Teachers consistently emphasize that the use of technology must align with *pesantren* ethics, where certain platforms are considered incompatible with religious principles. As Zaynab noted “*some platforms, like Instagram, have more disadvantages than benefits, so they are not allowed*” (Zaynab, Q2). This negotiation between tradition and modernity is further evident in classroom practice. Some teachers openly stated that they have never used technological tools in formal teaching due to strict prohibitions “*We are not allowed to use laptops or even sound boxes in formal classes*” (Ruqayyah, Q1).

Interestingly, teachers also recalled a time when rules were less rigid, pointing to how institutional governance has gradually tightened “*Back then the permits weren’t complicated, but now we still have to go to the council*” (Ruqayyah, Q1). Given this restrictive environment, digital technology is often redirected toward extracurricular or informal activities rather than formal classrooms. One teacher described this as a substitution strategy “*We only use laptops and sound boxes for drama contests, not for regular classes*” (Fatimah, Q1). This situates technology not as a central pedagogical tool, but as a supplement confined to extracurricular domains.

Moreover, some teachers voiced their sense of limitation in challenging or reforming such deeply embedded systems. Fatimah conveyed “*I don’t think I can change such a big system, especially since I’m only here for a year*” (Fatimah, Q5, SN). Taken together, these narratives reveal that technology in *pesantren* exists within a

delicate balance. While infrastructure is present, its pedagogical application is mediated by bureaucratic regulation, moral evaluation, and institutional authority.

At first glance, teachers' accounts appear contradictory. While Ruqayyah emphasized that technology is "never used" in formal classrooms, Fatimah described the use of laptops and sound systems for drama competitions. Rather than indicating inconsistency, this contradiction reveals a spatial and institutional differentiation of technological legitimacy within the *pesantren* context.

From a hermeneutic perspective, these accounts illustrate how teachers make sense of technological restriction as part of a broader moral project. Prohibitions and permissions are not merely regulatory acts, but symbolic practices aimed at safeguarding religious values. What appears as limitation thus functions as an interpretive strategy through which *pesantren* negotiate the presence of modern technology without surrendering their ethical and spiritual foundations. In this sense, teachers' experiences reflect a deeper hermeneutic negotiation, where pedagogical aspirations encounter the enduring authority of tradition.

2. Practical Workarounds and Uneven Access to Digital Resources

Teachers' narratives reveal that uneven access to digital resources in *pesantren* is shaped not only by infrastructural scarcity but also by institutional regulation that governs where, when, and by whom technology may be accessed. All three participants reported limitations related to internet connectivity and restricted access to digital facilities, although the intensity and form of these constraints varied across roles and contexts. For instance, Zaynab explained that internet access is spatially confined to specific areas, such as the internet cafe, rather than integrated into everyday classroom spaces. As Zaynab noted, "*There is internet, but only in certain areas like the computer center. There is also a lack of media*" (Zaynab, Q2). Similarly, Ruqayyah explained the difficulty of accessing computers in the teacher room. She said "*There are computers, but I've never used them. They're locked, and only opened during breaks. Sometimes we have to queue, and by the time it's our turn, the time is already up*" (Ruqayyah, Q2).

These statements highlight how structural constraints diminish the regular use of digital tools in classroom practice. Beyond technical issues, bureaucratic barriers appear to be even more decisive in shaping teachers' digital experiences. Ruqayyah illustrated this clearly "*If we want to use the language lab, we have to go to Language Advisory Council, the pesantren's language authority and supervised bilingual learning space, first, then to other department to ask the permission. It's really complicated. So, in the end, we just teach without using technology*" (Ruqayyah, Q2). Zaynab similarly highlighted uncertainty surrounding institutional rules, particularly regarding the use of personal devices in classrooms, which reinforces teachers' reluctance to experiment pedagogically "*We have to get permission from advisory council, the pesantren's student welfare and disciplinary authority, first if we want to bring a laptop to class, because they're worried it might be misused*"

(Zaynab, Q2).

Yet, despite these obstacles, teachers continue to find opportunities for creative integration of technology into their practice, albeit in limited and informal ways. Zaynab described how teachers often rely on the computer center:

“Well, like it or not, if learning isn't integrated with technology, we as teachers usually take the initiative to go to computer center to find interesting lessons that will motivate the children to learn, so whatever we find at computer center, we apply it to the children” (Zaynab, Q2).

Within these constraints, teachers do not challenge institutional boundaries directly; instead, they develop pragmatic workarounds that allow limited exposure to digital resources without violating formal regulations. In addition, from a hermeneutic perspective, these pragmatic workarounds can be understood as teachers situated interpretations of institutional constraints, where meaning is produced not through overt resistance, but through everyday pedagogical adjustments that reconcile compliance with professional responsibility.

B. Shaping a Value-Based Framework for Digital Literacy in Pesantren

Building upon the fragmented yet promising practices of digital integration, this explores how *pesantren* can move towards a more coherent and value-based framework for digital literacy. The challenge lies not only in adopting technological tools but also in cultivating ethical awareness and reflective practices that ensure their use remains aligned with the *pesantren's* religious and cultural ethos. To unpack this, the discussion unfolds in two interrelated directions: first, by examining the necessity of Towards Ethical and Reflective Digital Pedagogy, and second, by highlighting the importance of Integrating Technology into Bilingual and Religious Curriculum as a culturally grounded practice.

1. Ethical Filtering and Supervised Use of Digital Media

The regulation of digital technology in *pesantren* extends beyond infrastructural or bureaucratic constraints and is deeply embedded in ethical, cultural, and religious considerations. Teachers consistently frame technology not as a neutral pedagogical aid, but as a value-laden medium whose use must align with *pesantren* norms. As Zaynab articulated, the *pesantren* emphasizes a bounded notion of freedom, one that permits technological use only within appropriate temporal and spatial contexts. As Zaynab explained *“We are free to use technology to deepen our knowledge, but not anywhere or anytime” (Zaynab, Q4).*

This notion of freedom is not absolute; it is bounded by ethical guidelines that ensure technology is used in ways consistent with Islamic norms. Central to this ethical stance is the recognition of technology's potential misuse. As Zaynab further noted *“Technology is restricted, because some people might misuse it, particularly on*

social media, but it is permitted when clearly directed toward educational purposes and aligned with pesantren values" (Zaynab, Q4).

This illustrates how the *pesantren* carefully filters acceptable practices: digital tools are welcomed when they serve a clear educational function, but restricted when they risk exposing students to inappropriate content. Other teachers echoed similar concerns. Ruqayyah highlighted the dangers of social media, remarking that "*Because certain social media content is viewed as inappropriate, technology use is tightly regulated and often avoided if non-digital alternatives are available*" (Ruqayyah, Q4). At the same time, even when digital tools are permitted for extracurricular purposes, such as events, their use remains under careful supervision. As she noted, "*we usually allow students to use laptops during certain events. If it's urgent, it's allowed*" (Ruqayyah, Q3).

In addition, supervision emerges as a critical strategy to reconcile access with ethical responsibility. Fatimah recounted how he lends his laptop to students under strict monitoring "*Usually, I lend them my laptop under supervision or with a time limit*" (Fatimah, Q3). Finally, the *pesantren's* approach is not purely restrictive but seeks to embed technology within an ethical framework, balancing openness with moral integrity. However, participants' accounts show that technology use remains tightly regulated, as it is often viewed as prone to misuse, such as exposure to social media or content deemed incompatible with *pesantren* values. This cautious stance, though ethically grounded, still positions technology more as a potential threat than a transformative tool.

From a hermeneutic perspective, these accounts suggest that ethical filtering functions as an interpretive practice through which *pesantren* teachers assign meaning to technology within a moral horizon shaped by religious authority. Rather than rejecting digital media outright, teachers actively reinterpret its legitimacy by situating technological use within supervised, purpose-bound, and value-oriented pedagogical contexts.

2. *Embedding Digital Practices within Bilingual and Religious Activities*

The integration of digital technology into the bilingual and religious curriculum in *pesantren* demonstrates both opportunities for enrichment and the persistence of structural limitations. Teachers consistently highlighted how technology, when permitted, supports bilingual practices by enabling students to access English and Arabic content in more engaging ways. As Zaynab explained, "*Oh, I also watched the vital organs in the body with my students using English and they were so happy*" (Zaynab, Q3). Similarly, the Language Activity Center plays a central role in fostering bilingual learning, as Ruqayyah mentioned "*The Language Advisory Council regularly screens Arabic and English films, provided the content is appropriate and non-romantic*" (Ruqayyah, Q3).

This use of audiovisual resources, when permitted, is regarded as highly effective for developing listening and pronunciation skills. As Zaynab added

"Audiovisual media is effective for listening, as it allows students to hear native speakers and practice pronunciation" (Zaynab, Q5). Beyond these mediated experiences, students also engage directly with language practice in non-formal contexts, Fatimah conveyed *"Weekly sessions with native English and Arabic speakers called 'fun Friday' are used to compensate for limited listening and speaking practice in formal classes"* (Fatimah, Q2). In teachers' view, technology is not the only path to bilingual practice. Ruqayyah added *"So, actually, the use of technology can also be overcome, with events like this to replace speaking and listening"* (Ruqayyah, Q2). In addition, Ruqayyah often relies on personal strategies to bridge gaps. She said *"During holidays, I watch English films with subtitles to build my speaking vocabulary, a strategy I later share with students"* (Ruqayyah, Q2). While Zaynab tends to emphasize structured bilingual programs, Ruqayyah and Fatimah frame digital practices more as situational and compensatory.

Despite ongoing licensing barriers, teachers seek incremental opportunities to innovate, as Ruqayyah noted, *"It's not too difficult to learn the material, but the permits are hard to get, so I'll try using fun quizzes on my laptop tomorrow"* (Ruqayyah, Q2). From Fatimah's perspective, access itself remains inconsistent *"Access to the facility is irregular and often limited to events, such as Arabic or English weeks when films are shown in the respective languages"* (Fatimah, Q1). Nonetheless, when access is granted, students show visible enthusiasm. Fatimah mentioned *"students become highly enthusiastic because access to electronic devices is rare in the boarding school context"* (Fatimah, Q3).

However, the effectiveness of integration remains uncertain without systematic preparation. As Fatimah admitted *"Technology may make students more engaged, but its effectiveness in boarding schools depends on whether teachers are prepared and trained to use it"* (Fatimah, Q5). Encouragingly, there are already efforts to professionalize bilingual competence through structured programs such as IELTS training, Zaynab informed *"There is such training, it's the IELTS learning training every week, which is for students like us. The teacher is a teacher who studied in the UK at that time, so that we can improve our English skills"* (Zaynab, Q2). These differences suggest that teachers' engagement with digital practices is shaped not only by institutional rules but also by their pedagogical roles and confidence levels.

Together, these accounts reveal that technology integration in bilingual and religious curricula remains sporadic and conditional, but it opens a window of opportunity for enriching both linguistic and cultural learning. When interpreted hermeneutically, the teachers' narratives reveal a tension between the pedagogical potential of technology and the bureaucratic realities as well as strict regulations in *pesantren*. On one hand, teachers view technology as an instrument that opens wider access to bilingual practices, whether through foreign-language films, the use of language laboratories, or direct access to native speakers. However, another interpretation arises from structural and cultural dimensions. Rules that restrict the use of technology in formal classes, along with the difficulty of obtaining

permission, signify that digital practices in *pesantren* are more incidental and sporadic rather than systematic. In this context, activities such as *Fun Friday* or sessions with native speakers function as cultural substitutions for the limited use of technology. Teachers attempt to fill this gap with non-digital creativity, which on one hand demonstrates pedagogical resilience, but on the other hand reveals how digital opportunities are not being managed optimally.

4. Discussion

The integration of digital technology in *pesantren* education emerges not as a technical reform but as a moral and cultural negotiation shaped by religious authority and pedagogical responsibility. Teachers do not treat technology as a neutral instructional tool; instead, it is interpreted through a spiritual lens that requires ethical supervision and alignment with Islamic values. Consistent with Fadlilah et al. (2025), Rusdi et al. (2023), and Sulisno (2025), teachers engage in selective adaptation by filtering content and redefining digital practices so that technology reinforces, rather than disrupts, *pesantren's* moral order.

Although some previous studies have examined the challenges of digital adaptation in *pesantren*, our findings show that the success of technology use largely depends on each teacher's moral authority and on how teachers can foster students' self-awareness regarding the responsible use of technology. This means that outcomes can vary between teachers and *pesantren*. Even when adaptation is discussed in other studies, the ability to align technology with moral and spiritual goals is not always consistent.

This form of spiritual awareness positions digital pedagogy as an extension of religious practice, where teaching through media becomes an act of ethical mediation. In line with Saini (2024), pedagogical decisions are guided less by efficiency than by moral intentionality, challenging dominant assumptions that technological integration is inherently progressive. The contrast with Saini's findings highlights that even when efficiency is secondary, the interplay between moral intent and institutional structure can either support or constrain meaningful integration, suggesting that context-specific factors are critical for understanding digital pedagogy in *pesantren*. This suggests that "progress" in *pesantren* contexts cannot be measured through technological adoption alone, but must be evaluated through its alignment with moral purpose and relational accountability.

At the same time, ethical filtering practices reveal a fundamental tension between fostering moral consciousness and enforcing institutional control. While *pesantren* rely on strict regulations to govern students' access to technology, teachers increasingly recognize that excessive restriction risks producing compliance without ethical reflection. Strict regulations may reduce students' motivation and creativity, as they focus on following rules rather than understanding the ethical rationale behind technology use. Moreover, limiting access does not necessarily increase students' digital awareness; instead, it may

hinder their ability to develop self-regulation and responsible practices, which can have long-term implications for how they use technology after graduation. Drawing on self-determination theory Ryan and Deci (2000), the findings suggest a gradual shift from external regulation toward awareness-building, where students are encouraged to internalize ethical principles governing digital use. Nevertheless, this shift remains uneven and limited, as institutional rules continue to prioritize obedience over dialogical ethical reasoning. This approach resonates with Nurfazri et al. (2024), who conceptualize digital literacy as a form of critical and reflective practice rather than technical mastery. However, this ethical orientation remains constrained by institutional power structures and conservative leadership, which limit systematic integration and place teachers in a constant position of negotiation (Fadli and Dwiningrum, 2021). In this sense, teachers function simultaneously as moral agents and institutional enforcers, a dual role that complicates their pedagogical autonomy and blurs the boundary between ethical guidance and disciplinary control.

Within these constraints, pedagogical adaptation takes the form of innovation under limitation. Teachers repurpose modest resources, offline videos, projectors, and supervised media spaces, to create meaningful learning experiences that remain consistent with *pesantren* values. This adaptive practice reflects situated learning, where knowledge develops through contextual negotiation rather than technological abundance (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In practice, innovation under constraint manifests not through curricular reform, but through micro-level improvisations: selective media use, time-bound exposure, and teacher-led framing that recontextualizes digital content within moral discourse. Yet, this resilience also exposes an innovation paradox: institutional restrictions simultaneously inhibit and generate creative practices, leaving digital integration sporadic rather than systemic. As Madkur (2024) argues, such conditions give rise to a model of faithful innovation, where moral discipline and pedagogical flexibility coexist. However, this model risks becoming unsustainable if innovation continues to depend on individual initiative rather than institutional support and structured professional development.

From a practical perspective, these findings imply that digital literacy initiatives in *pesantren* should move beyond prohibition-based regulation toward ethically guided engagement. Teacher training programs should therefore focus not only on technical competence, but also on ethical facilitation, reflective dialogue, and pedagogical decision-making in digitally mediated contexts. At the institutional level, *pesantren* leadership may need to reconsider rigid control mechanisms in favor of graduated autonomy that allows students to practice ethical judgment under guidance. For policymakers, this suggests the need for context-sensitive digital education frameworks that recognize *pesantren* as moral communities rather than merely alternative schooling systems.

Nevertheless, the absence of student perspectives in this study limits claims

of generalizability, particularly across different types of *pesantren*. The *pesantren* examined in this study is a modern institution with a focus on bilingual education, so the findings reflect digital experiences in a relatively progressive and language-rich environment. The findings are most applicable to *pesantren* with moderate technological exposure and strong teacher-centered authority, and may not fully capture dynamics in highly modernized urban *pesantren* or strictly *salaf* rural institutions. Future research should therefore incorporate student voices to examine how ethical intentions are received, negotiated, or resisted in practice. Including comparative designs across *pesantren* typologies would also clarify how institutional culture mediates the balance between moral regulation and digital engagement. Such efforts would ensure that digital literacy evolves not only as moral awareness but also as a sustainable and contextually grounded pedagogical (Fu & Satrianawati, 2022).

5. Conclusion

This research affirms that the integration of digital technology in English language teaching within *pesantren* is not merely a matter of technical adoption, but a complex process of moral and cultural negotiation. Technology is interpreted and practiced within a strong religious value framework, such that its use is continuously mediated by ethical considerations, institutional authority, and teachers' spiritual responsibility. In this context, English teachers function as cultural agents who reflexively interpret, filter, and recontextualize technology to remain aligned with *pesantren* identity, while simultaneously facilitating the development of students' language competence and global awareness.

The findings further demonstrate that institutional restrictions do not entirely suppress innovation, but instead give rise to adaptive pedagogical practices that shape a form of value-based digital literacy. Meaningful technology integration in *pesantren* depends less on regulatory flexibility than on teachers' ethical awareness, reflective dialogue, and pedagogical autonomy. Accordingly, policy development and teacher education should be oriented toward a contextualized, value-driven digital literacy framework, enabling technology to serve as a medium for reinforcing *pesantren's* educational aims rather than as a disruption to the traditions that constitute its foundation.

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