



DIGITAL ADAPTATION IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY AND PESANTREN IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

Digital transformation presents a dualism of opportunities and challenges for the sustainability of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). This qualitative multiple-case study analyzes technology integration at the Islamic University of Malang (UNISMA) and Sabilurrosyad Islamic Boarding School. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model. Findings show that UNISMA integrates technology via Learning Management Systems (LMS) to foster constructivist learning, while Sabilurrosyad adopts digital tools selectively to preserve *ta'dib* (moral discipline) and traditional values. This study demonstrates that effective PAI digitalization requires a synergy between technological utility and Islamic spirituality. Furthermore, it proposes an integration of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) with religious value dimensions and *ta'dib* principles as a theoretical framework for Islamic educational contexts. Ultimately, digital transformation in PAI must transcend instructional efficiency to actively reinforce the moral and spiritual dimensions of learners.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education, Technology Integration, Digital Adaptation, *Ta'dib*, *Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)*

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INTRODUCTION | مقدمة

In the modern era, ideal education must harmonize transcendental spiritual values with the rapid evolution of information technology. Within Islamic Religious Education (PAI), digital integration is expected to transcend mere instructional efficiency; it should serve as a conduit for the internalization of ethical and metaphysical Islamic principles. This shift compels Islamic educational institutions to design learning models that remain technologically adaptive without compromising their fundamental role as centers for *akhlak* (moral) and character development (Hajri, 2023).

Despite this potential, the global digital transformation of PAI faces significant hurdles. Current literature suggests that many educators struggle with technological adoption due to limited digital literacy and insufficient infrastructure (Juhairiah et al., 2024). More critically, scholars in the field of digital spirituality argue that the "impersonal" nature of technocratic online learning often erodes the traditional values of *adab* (etiquette) and *ta'dib* (holistic guidance). When the *murabbi* (educator)-student relationship shifts entirely to virtual spaces, there is a profound risk of losing the sacred essence of religious instruction (Idris & Adawiyah, 2023).

Recent international studies on technology acceptance in religious contexts indicate that while digital tools boost engagement, they may dilute affective learning if not anchored by a values-based pedagogical approach (Wahyudi et al., 2024). Furthermore, many institutions tend to adopt technology pragmatically rather than strategically, often neglecting the preservation of Islamic identity within the digital ecosystem (Suhilmiati et al., 2024). This gap highlights an urgent need to examine how diverse educational environments—ranging from formal academic settings to traditional communal ones—navigate the tension between innovation and tradition.

To understand this phenomenon, a comparative lens is essential to bridge the gap between varying institutional philosophies. The Islamic University of Malang (UNISMA) and the Sabilurrosyad Gasek Islamic Boarding School (Pesantren) represent two distinct yet complementary pillars of Islamic education: the modern higher education system and the traditional *pesantren* model. Choosing these two locations provides a unique contrast in how "modern-formal" and "traditional-grassroots" institutions negotiate digital adoption.

Consequently, this research seeks to address how these two institutions adapt to the digitalization of education while safeguarding traditional values. By analyzing their specific challenges and strategies, this study aims to identify learning patterns that successfully maintain a balance between technological advancement and the preservation of religious character, ensuring that the essence of Islamic education remains intact in a virtual world.

METHOD

منهج

This study employs a qualitative approach with a multiple case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the adaptations and challenges regarding digital technology integration in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). This design was selected because it allows researchers to examine the nuanced social and cultural contexts surrounding the digitalization of learning within two distinct institutional frameworks: the Islamic University of Malang (UNISMA) and the Sabilurrosyad Gasek Islamic Boarding School (Pesantren). Qualitative inquiry is oriented toward meaning-making rather than broad generalization, making it an appropriate lens through which to interpret complex, values-based educational phenomena (Guraya et al., 2023).

The research locations were selected purposively to represent two contrasting models of Islamic education: UNISMA, as a modern higher education institution that has implemented an extensive online learning system, and Sabilurrosyad Gasek, a traditional pesantren that adapts technology while strictly maintaining its spiritual core. The study participants include 12 key informants, comprising 4 PAI lecturers from UNISMA, 4 ustaz (teachers) from the pesantren, and 4 student representatives from both institutions. Furthermore, participatory observations involved two active classrooms in each institution to assess real-time digital interactions. Informants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure participants possessed direct experience and relevant insights into the focus of this study (Subedi, 2021).

Data were collected through three primary techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Observations provided a first-hand account of digital learning practices within both the academic classroom and the pesantren environment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow informants the freedom to articulate their perceptions and experiences with technology in PAI. Documentation analysis included an examination of curricula, instructional designs, and institutional digital archives. To ensure data credibility, the researchers employed source and method triangulation (Vera Nurfajriani et al.,

2024).

Research ethics were rigorously upheld throughout the process. The researchers obtained formal institutional approval from both UNISMA and Sabilurrosyad Gasek. All participants provided informed consent after being briefed on the study's objectives. To protect participant privacy, pseudonyms were used in all transcriptions and reports, and data confidentiality was maintained through encrypted storage.

Data analysis followed the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Raw data from interviews and observations were condensed to identify core themes, then organized into narrative displays before reaching interpretive conclusions. The validity of the findings was further strengthened through member checking—returning findings to participants for accuracy—and peer debriefing to ensure the results align with empirical reality (Ridder, 2014). This comprehensive design aims to produce a holistic description of institutional adaptation patterns toward PAI digitalization within diverse cultural and spiritual contexts.

RESULT

نتائج

The results of this study elucidate the multifaceted dynamics of digital technology integration within Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at two distinct educational archetypes: a formal higher education institution (UNISMA) and a traditional non-formal institution (Sabilurrosyad Islamic Boarding School). The empirical data categorize the findings into three pivotal thematic pillars: (1) structural and cultural barriers to integration, (2) divergent strategies for innovation, and (3) the subsequent transfiguration of student spirituality and character.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Digital Integration in IRE

No	Aspect	Unisma	Sabilurrosyad
1	Primary Barrier	Digital literacy gap & technical infrastructure.	Ideological resistance & cultural preservation.
2	Integration Model	Institutionalized Blended Learning (LMS).	Selective Adaptation (Value-Based Filtering).
3	Pedagogical Shift	From teacher-centered to self-regulated learning.	Preservation of talaqqi via digital tools.
4	Policy Focus	Human resource readiness & system optimization.	Digital morality & supervised accessibility.

Challenges: From Technical Literacy to Ideological Safeguarding

At UNISMA, the integration of technology is primarily hindered by a "digital divide" regarding proficiency levels between the digital native students and the digital immigrant faculty. While the Learning Management System (LMS) is mandatory, its utilization often remains superficial—limited to content delivery rather than fostering high-level cognitive engagement through interactive forums (Hidayatullah, 2024). This suggests that technical availability does not automatically translate into pedagogical quality.

Conversely, the challenge at Sabilurrosyad is fundamentally existential. The concern regarding the potential loss of talaqqi (face-to-face transmission) and adab (etiquette) highlights a fear that technology might de-sacralize the teacher-student relationship (Fuad, 2024). This cultural barrier results in a strict prohibition of personal devices, creating a paradox: while the

institution protects moral integrity, it risks creating a digital literacy vacuum for students who must eventually navigate a hyper-connected society.

Adaptation Strategies: Blended Learning vs. Value Filtering

UNISMA's strategy focuses on pedagogical affectivity. By integrating religious reflections into digital platforms and using interactive tools like Google Jamboard, the institution attempts to "humanize" the digital space. This demonstrates an effort to ensure technology serves as a bridge, rather than a barrier, to spiritual experience (Hidayatullah, 2024).

In contrast, Sabilurrosyad employs "Value Filtering." Adoption is driven by institutional outreach (e.g., YouTube for da'wah) rather than individual access. This strategic choice implies that for traditional institutions, technology is viewed as an extrinsic tool for dissemination rather than an intrinsic tool for personal discovery. The "Morals-Based Digital Madrasah" program serves as a critical buffer, ensuring technology is introduced only when it aligns with the values of simplicity and discipline.

Impact on Spirituality: Autonomy vs. Digital Morality

The integration of technology has reshaped the spiritual landscape in both settings. At UNISMA, it has catalyzed learner autonomy, where students actively curate religious content. However, the reported "thinning" of spiritual depth in distance learning suggests that digital platforms struggle to replicate the barakah (blessing) perceived in physical presence.

At Sabilurrosyad, the impact is visible in the emergence of digital da'wah awareness. Students are taught to view the internet as a tool for moral influence rather than entertainment. This shifts the focus from mere technical skills to "digital morality" (Zaimina et al., 2024)—the ability to manage technology with ethical and spiritual awareness.

DISCUSSION

مناقشة

Technology Integration in the Constructivism Perspective of Islamic Education

The constructivist paradigm positions students as active subjects in constructing knowledge through contextual learning experiences (Sulistiyono et al., 2021). In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), this theory is relevant because it requires the involvement of students and Islamic boarding school students (santri) in the process of reflectively discovering Islamic values through interaction with the environment and digital technology. Based on research at UNISMA, the blended learning approach implemented supports a reflective and collaborative learning process. Students are given space to critically interpret religious teachings while remaining grounded in spiritual principles. This aligns with Afanasenko's view, which emphasizes that technology integration in constructivist learning requires self-reflection and meaningful collaboration (Afanasenko et al., 2022).

On the other hand, the Sabilurrosyad Islamic Boarding School exhibits a different dynamic. A learning process based on etiquette and exemplary behavior remains a top priority, even though technology is beginning to be utilized to support digital da'wah. Within the framework of Islamic constructivism, the religious experience of students through direct practice remains the primary source of knowledge formation (Apriliana et al., 2022). Technology does not replace the ustaz-student interaction, but rather serves as an instrument to strengthen the dissemination of Islamic values. These findings indicate that constructivism in Islamic education is not synonymous

with the secularization of technology, but rather demands alignment between digital instruments and the goals of spiritual education. (Kurniawan et al., 2024) .

The implementation of an LMS at UNISMA confirms the success of constructivist-based technology integration. Online discussion features, digital spiritual reflection, and collaborative projects facilitate students' development of understanding based on actual experiences. Through this approach, Islamic values are not only taught but also reconstructed through a digital context. Thus, Islamic Religious Education learning is not merely a transfer of knowledge but also a transformation of religious experience relevant to the challenges of the digital era (Masluhah, 2021) .

Meanwhile, Islamic boarding schools face an epistemological dilemma. The application of modern constructivism is often seen as potentially diminishing the power of traditional values transmission. However, observations show that the selective adaptation of technology at Sabilurrosyad Islamic Boarding School actually strengthens the process of internalizing values, as it allows for a more contextual dissemination of Islamic teachings without eliminating the principle of ta'dzim . This demonstrates that Islamic constructivism does not reject technology, but adapts it with principles of morality and spiritual oversight (Suwendi & Firdaus, 2025) .

The concept of meaningful learning , developed by Ausubel and synergized with Islamic values, is relevant in both institutions. At UNISMA, students construct knowledge through the integration of classical texts and modern discourse, while at Sabilurrosyad, students construct meaning through religious practices and guided digital reflection. Both contexts demonstrate that technology can serve as a means of pedagogical *ijtihad* for Islamic institutions to balance the rational and spiritual dimensions of education (Susanti et al., 2024) .

Thus, constructivism in the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) not only refers to the creation of active learning experiences but also emphasizes the process of integrating 'ilm (knowledge) and 'amal (practice). Technology integration becomes relevant when directed toward building rational and contextual spiritual awareness. This indicates that Islamic constructivism needs to be formulated within a monotheistic epistemological framework, where knowledge, faith, and practice form an inseparable whole in the digital learning process (Anwar et al., 2023) .

Technology Acceptance Based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Technology Acceptance Model)

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), traditionally anchored by Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) and Perceived Usefulness (PU), provides a foundational lens for understanding digital adoption at UNISMA. In this academic setting, acceptance is driven by institutional mandates and a pragmatic recognition of digital efficiency in Islamic Religious Education (IRE). This alignment with modern educational standards mirrors broader trends in global Islamic higher education, where digital readiness and infrastructure act as primary catalysts (Fadhilah & Husin, 2023). However, at Sabilurrosyad, the standard TAM variables are mediated by "Ideological Caution." While the utility of technology is acknowledged, its acceptance is contingent upon its alignment with moral conservation. This suggests that in religious contexts, the linear progression of PEOU to Behavioral Intention (BI) is interrupted by a "Value Filter," necessitating a more nuanced theoretical approach.

To address this complexity, this study proposes the Ethical-TAM (E-TAM) model. Unlike the original TAM, E-TAM incorporates Religious Compatibility (RC) and Moral Self-Efficacy (MSE) as

critical mediators. In this model, the "Usefulness" of a tool is not merely technical but teleological—it is judged by its ability to serve da'wah (outreach) without compromising ta'dib (character). Figure 1 illustrates this conceptual expansion, highlighting how religious norms function as a "gatekeeper" variable between perception and actual usage.

1. External Variables: Institutional Support & Digital Infrastructure.
2. Cognitive Perceptions: Perceived Ease of Use → Perceived Usefulness.
3. The Ethical Filter (New): Perceived Religious Compatibility X Moral Scrutiny.
4. Outcome: Behavioral Intention to Adopt → Ethical Technology Usage.

Field observations reveal that technology adoption at UNISMA is accelerated by managerial support and structured training, whereas at Sabilurrosyad, it is value-driven. Every innovation is subjected to a "Moral Scrutiny" that filters out features deemed distracting or spiritually erosive. This specific form of resistance differs from the technical resistance observed in secular institutions or other religious educational systems, such as the selective use of technology in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish yeshivas or conservative Christian schools, where "kosher" or "filtered" internet is employed to maintain community boundaries. This finding reinforces the view that in Islamic institutions, technology is never a neutral tool; it is a field of ethical negotiation (Wahyudi et al., 2024).

The Behavioral Intention (BI) of students at both institutions is significantly influenced by their teleological orientation. At UNISMA, students perceive technology as a platform for Intellectual Da'wah, aiming for global reach and academic rigor. Conversely, Sabilurrosyad students view it as a Service Tool, strictly for administrative or proselytizing functions, avoiding its use for entertainment. This divergence indicates that the E-TAM model effectively captures the "Spiritual Utility" of technology, where the value of ta'dib (moral discipline) serves as the ultimate benchmark. This contextual adaptation of TAM aligns with recent calls in the Middle East and Southeast Asian academic circles to decolonize technology theories by integrating indigenous and religious values (Nada & Setyono, 2023).

Evidence from both sites demonstrates that successful adoption depends on the intersection of digital competence and ethical awareness. When technology is framed as a medium to amplify Islamic values—rather than a threat to them—resistance decreases. Consequently, policy-makers in Islamic Higher Education (PTKIN) and Pesantren must transition from "technical-only" training to a "Digital Morality" curriculum. Recommendations for PTKIN include the development of LMS modules that emphasize digital ethics, while Pesantren should implement "Guided Digital Access" programs that empower religious teachers (ustaz) to lead by example in the digital sphere, ensuring that technological proficiency does not outpace spiritual maturity (Abubakari & Priyanto, 2021).

Digitalization and the Concept of Ta'dib in Islamic Education

The concept of ta'dib, as conceptualized by Al-Attas, remains the philosophical bedrock of these institutions, emphasizing that education is the instillation of adab (wisdom and right action). In the digital age, ta'dib faces a transformative challenge as the "sacred space" of the classroom shifts to the "profane space" of the internet. UNISMA mitigates this by cultivating a Digital Academic Ethos, where online spiritual reflections and ethical communication are formalized. This effort reflects a global shift in religious education, where institutions—much like contemporary Catholic universities—are re-evaluating how virtual presence impacts the formation of the soul (Suly Eraku et al., 2021).

At Sabilurrosyad, ta'dib is maintained through a strict hierarchy and the principle of simplicity. Digital literacy for teachers is intentionally paired with tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul) to ensure that the increased access to information does not lead to spiritual pride or distraction. By expanding the application of ta'dib into the digital realm, the school proves that traditional values are not static; they are adaptive frameworks capable of regulating modern complexity. This practice mirrors the "Digital Citizenship" curricula in modern secular schools but adds a critical theological layer of accountability to the Creator (Badi'ah et al., 2021).

The reformulation of ta'dib across both institutions highlights a crucial realization: Islamic education must balance the Technological Dimension with the Moral Dimension. Technology is no longer viewed as a peripheral tool but as a primary site for character building. When students manage digital platforms with ethical responsibility, the goals of ta'dib are contextually achieved. This suggests that for Islamic education to remain relevant, it must produce graduates who are not only digitally fluent but also spiritually anchored, capable of utilizing technology as a force for ethical and societal advancement (Akhyar et al., 2025).

CONCLUSSION

خاتمة

This study concludes that digital transformation in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is not a mere technical transition but a profound epistemological recontextualization where technological integration remains inherently bound to the spiritual essence of ta'dib. While UNISMA exemplifies a systematic adaptation through Islamic constructivism and institutionalized blended learning, Sabilurrosyad Islamic Boarding School maintains a value-driven approach that prioritizes adab over accessibility, demonstrating that digitalization success is determined by the continuity of ilm, amal, and akhlaq rather than device modernization. The empirical evidence necessitates a theoretical shift from the traditional Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) toward an Ethical-TAM (E-TAM) framework, which positions theological compatibility and digital morality as pivotal variables in religious technology adoption. However, this study is limited by its specific focus on two institutional archetypes in Malang and a predominantly educator-oriented perspective, which may not fully capture the diverse socioeconomic and student-centric nuances of the global Muslim world. Therefore, future research should pursue longitudinal investigations to measure the long-term impact of digitalization on student character and employ quantitative methodologies to validate the E-TAM instrument across broader geographical contexts. Ultimately, the transformative power of digital IRE remains highly context-dependent, requiring a delicate balance between digital rationality and tauhidic spirituality to ensure that pedagogical innovation strengthens, rather than erodes, the divine values of Islamic education.

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