

Digital Learning Pedagogy in Pesantren-based University: Issues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Pesantren-based university is an educational institution that uniquely integrates the strengths of both traditional pesantren and modern educational systems. It has become an intriguing subject of research, particularly in the realm of digital learning implementation. Despite the inherent advantages and challenges of digital learning, several questions arise regarding its impact on the learning process and institutional framework of pesantren-based universities. This study addresses whether digital learning implementation might disrupt the traditional learning processes and influence the institutional structure of pesantren-based universities. Several issues present significant challenges to the successful implementation of digital learning in pesantren-based universities, namely technology access, inadequate infrastructure, and social communication. Through qualitative descriptive methods involving observations and interviews within pesantren-based universities, this research aims to navigate these challenges and facilitate effective digital learning implementation without fundamentally altering institutional frameworks.

Keywords: Digital Learning; Pesantren Based-university; Challenges; Issues

INTRODUCTION

Digital education is often portrayed, and rightfully so, as a quickly growing subject where new technologies, issues, and developments emerge every year. This rapid pace of development is frequently cited as a reason for educators to adopt the latest technologies, with warnings that failure to do so may result in being left behind. In this context of educational transformation, traditional institutions like Pesantren-based universities face the dual challenge of embracing modern pedagogical methods while maintaining their unique cultural and religious heritage. (Weller, Martin, 2022)

Pesantren, a cornerstone of Islamic education, has long been admired for its emphasis on holistic learning, in which religious studies are intertwined with moral and character growth. (Zulmuqim and Martin, 2020). However, the advent of digital learning not only creates new opportunities, but it also presents substantial problems to these institutions. Balancing the integration of cutting-edge educational technologies with the preservation of time-honored values necessitates careful navigation as they attempt to remain relevant in the digital age without jeopardizing their fundamental beliefs.

Providing fair access to technology is one of the most significant difficulties that Pesantren-based colleges face as they embark on their digital transformation. Many students and educators may lack the requisite gadgets or consistent internet access, which is exacerbated by inadequate infrastructure within these schools. Furthermore, the traditional communal and social contacts that are so important to the Pesantren risk being lost in a digital environment, generating concerns about the preservation of the social and spiritual fabric that defines these educational environments. These problems emphasize the necessity for a comprehensive strategy that not just utilizes digital tools but also examines the infrastructural and social variables that are important to the success of digital learning at Pesantren-based universities.

Despite these considerable hurdles, Pesantren-based colleges have the potential to integrate digital learning in innovative ways that are consistent with their educational philosophy. By combining

conventional in-person teaching with digital resources, these institutions can improve educational outcomes while keeping their distinct cultural and religious practices. Strategic infrastructural expenditures, focused educator training, and the creation of culturally relevant digital content are all critical steps toward bridging the gap between tradition and modernity. Furthermore, building relationships with government agencies, corporate sector partners, and the larger educational community can provide the essential support and resources to guarantee that digital learning projects are both effective and long-lasting.

As a result, when technological breakthroughs disrupt educational environments around the world, Pesantren-based colleges must manage the complications of implementing digital pedagogies. This paper examines the major difficulties and challenges that arise when digital learning approaches are integrated into traditional educational environments. By exploring these obstacles, the study hopes to contribute to the continuing discussion about how Pesantren-based colleges may effectively integrate digital learning while maintaining their essential educational principles.

METHODS

This study utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach to investigate the issues and challenges associated with implementing digital learning pedagogies in Pesantren-based universities. This research method is particularly suited for this study as it enables a comprehensive comprehension of complex phenomena within their real-life context. By focusing on the experiences, viewpoints, and actions of educators and students within these establishments, the research seeks to reveal the complex interactions involved in the incorporation of digital learning into a traditional educational structure. Through interviews and observations, the study aims to provide a rich, detailed account of the current state of digital learning in Pesantren-based universities, shedding light on both the opportunities and obstacles encountered in this process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Through thematic analysis of open-ended survey data conducted with students, some lecturers, and interviews with staff implementers of the education system in pesantren-based-universities, three main themes were identified: (1) Technology Access, (2) Response to Digital Learning, and (3) Loss of Social Interaction.

1. Access to Technology

The theme of “Access to Technology” emerged as the most frequently mentioned issue by respondents. A total of 70% of respondents from student at Pesantren based-university indicated that unstable internet access is a major obstacle in the implementation of digital learning in the institution. For example, one respondent noted, “Slow internet connection causes me to miss lecture materials.” this analysis reveals that the limitations of technological infrastructure greatly affect the quality of learning. Based on interviews with several lecturers who teach at pesantren-based universities, it was found that the technological support provided by universities has not been maximized, especially in digital-based learning. This is one of the factors that make digital learning less effective.

Furthermore, the quality of online education programs is heavily influenced by the technology infrastructure in place. The difference in educational standards between public and private universities is frequently impacted by the presence of technological resources, which are now crucial for teaching. The significant challenge arises from the lack of available devices and reliable mobile data, particularly in rural regions. To tackle these differences, it is crucial to have a solid quality framework that covers all the factors affecting students' learning experiences (Lahiya, 2023).

Moreover, limited technological infrastructure not only restricts access to learning materials but also diminishes students' active participation in discussions and online learning activities. As Garad and Al-Ansi (2021) have emphasized, the successful implementation of digital learning heavily depends on the availability and stability of internet infrastructure. Without adequate internet access, efforts to integrate technology into the educational process are likely to face significant obstacles. Therefore, building a strong technological infrastructure, particularly in regions with limited access, is

a critical step in ensuring that all students, including those in pesantren-based universities, have equal opportunities to learn and develop in a digital environment."

Therefore, based on the interview with staff of implementers system in pesantren based university, as part of managing internet access within the pesantren environment, the institution has established policies that align with the values and routines of pesantren life. The placement of Wi-Fi is strategically done to ensure that it is available in most areas, excluding the dormitories, as these are designated for rest. The intention behind this restriction is to encourage students to use their rest time appropriately, while still allowing access to the internet for academic purposes in designated areas. The pesantren also impose time restrictions on internet usage, particularly during prayer times and after 10 PM. However, exceptions are made for urgent academic needs, where extended access can be granted with proper authorization.

These measures reflect the pesantren's commitment to maintaining a balance between embracing digital learning and upholding its traditional values. While these restrictions might limit immediate access to digital tools, they are designed to ensure that students remain focused on their spiritual and academic development without the distractions that unfettered internet access might bring. But, despite the structured approach to internet access, the enforcement of these rules presents significant challenges. Many students reportedly violate these regulations by secretly bringing in modems, undermining the intended purpose of limiting excessive or inappropriate communication. The violation of these rules, particularly the ban on modem usage in dormitories, disrupts the objective of providing students with adequate rest time and maintaining discipline. This issue illustrates the ongoing struggle to align the practical implementation of digital learning with the traditional values of the pesantren. Moreover, while pesantren-based universities are making strides in integrating digital learning, the challenges of managing technology access within a religious and traditional educational framework remain significant. The resilience and adaptability of the students, combined with the structured yet flexible policies of the pesantren, are key factors in overcoming these challenges. However, continuous efforts are needed to refine these strategies to better align with the educational and spiritual goals of the institutions.

Despite facing obstacles such as limited internet access and underdeveloped technological infrastructure, students at pesantren-based universities have shown impressive resilience and competitiveness in response to educational progress. These limitations haven't stopped them from excelling; instead, their perseverance and dedication to studies have become the main factors in their success. This is demonstrated by the many exceptional students who have accomplished notable academic and professional achievements, showing that the current system, although difficult, can be overcome. A student's success is not solely determined by the resources they have access to, but also by their dedication to learning and ability to overcome challenges.

2. Response to Digital Learning

Meanwhile, the response to Digital Learning indicates that some students and lectures enjoy the flexibility offered by online learning. About 30% of respondents mentioned that they feel "more comfortable learning with a flexible schedule." However, some students also pointed out that the lack of face-to-face interaction with peers and teachers reduces the quality of their learning experience. About lecturers consider that the provision of online classes is very helpful in implementing learning at other branch campuses because mobility and time are more efficient. This shows that digital learning has advantages in terms of time efficiency and mobility. Lecturers do point out that compared to in-person instruction, student engagement in online courses is lower. Because of this, the use of online learning is rarely entirely effective, particularly when learning involves practical experience.

Responses to digital learning are varied, reflecting both positive aspects and challenges. On the positive side, many students value the flexibility and accessibility that digital learning provides, allowing them to study at their own pace and from any location, and benefiting from a wider range of resources and courses (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012; Bates & Poole, 2003). However, challenges include issues with engagement and motivation, technical difficulties, and feelings of isolation, which can impact the overall learning experience (Kozma, 2003; Johnson et al., 2014). The effectiveness of

digital learning compared to traditional methods is debated, with some studies finding it equally effective and others highlighting potential drawbacks (Bernard et al., 2009). Additionally, the quality of interactions between students and instructors can vary, with some digital platforms facilitating meaningful engagement while others may fall short (Palloff & Pratt, 2007).

In the context of responses to digital learning, student engagement with technology is a fundamental aspect that plays a crucial role in supporting the effectiveness of the learning process. (Nkomo, Daniel, & Butson, 2021). This review delves into the ways in which student engagement with digital technologies is understood and assessed within pesantren based-university. It explores various tools such as learning method, social media platforms, and lecture capture technologies, emphasizing different dimensions of student engagement, including behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects. Following of student engagement in digital learning, the researchers assess both student satisfaction and performance in digital learning. According by Keržič D, Alex JK. (2021) there are a few things related to the data that has been obtained by researchers. They are (1) Quality of Digital Learning, (2) Teacher's Role, (3) Online Interaction. The quality of e-learning plays a crucial role in shaping student satisfaction and perceived performance. This encompasses the quality of the online platform, the effectiveness of the instructional methods, and the accessibility of resources. Furthermore, the active participation of teacher in digital learning is essential. Their capacity to engage students, offer prompt feedback and conduct interactive sessions significantly affect students' satisfaction. So, the last is online interaction that engaging with peers and instructors in the online setting is vital for sustaining motivation and involvement.

3. *Loss of Social Interaction*

Loss of social interaction, was expressed by some respondents who felt that digital learning reduces the social aspect of pesantren education. One respondent mentioned: "I miss the direct discussion with friends and lecture, it's not the same in online classes." This theme highlights the importance of social interaction in the context of traditional pesantren-based education. In online classes, the amount of interaction between instructors and students has not been optimized. A contributing factor is insufficient bandwidth support. Additionally, there is an unequal distribution of technology use between instructors and students, which further reduces the efficacy of online education.

In digital learning, the loss of social interaction can have several detrimental effects. Without physical presence, students may feel isolated, affecting their sense of community and belonging. Limited interactions can impede the development of both verbal and non-verbal communication skills that are typically honed through in-person exchanges. Reduced social interaction often leads to lower engagement and motivation, as students miss out on spontaneous discussions and collaborative opportunities. Additionally, the absence of face-to-face contact can hinder the formation of support networks among students and between students and instructors, impacting the overall learning experience. Furthermore, the quality of feedback and the ability to build strong, supportive relationships with instructors may be diminished, potentially affecting learning outcomes and student satisfaction.

The reduction in social interaction significantly impacts various aspects of the learning experience. Students often feel isolated, which can diminish their sense of community and belonging, as highlighted by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2001) in their study on cognitive presence and computer conferencing. Communication skills may also suffer due to the lack of face-to-face interactions, with Swan (2002) noting that asynchronous communication can limit skill development compared to traditional settings. Engagement and motivation can decrease as students miss out on spontaneous discussions and collaborative opportunities; a concern raised by Kozma (2003). Additionally, the formation of support networks is hindered, as Palloff and Pratt (2007) discuss the limitations of online environments in establishing effective peer and instructor support systems. Lastly, the quality of feedback and relationship-building with instructors may be compromised, with Rice and Smerdon (2000) observing that students may receive less personalized feedback and fewer meaningful connections in online learning.

CONCLUSION

The thematic analysis of open-ended survey data from students, lecturers, and staff at pesantren-based universities highlights several critical themes that impact the effectiveness of digital learning. Access to Technology emerged as the most significant challenge, with unstable internet connections being a major obstacle. This technological gap not only limits students' access to educational materials but also reduces their active participation in online learning activities. Despite efforts by pesantren to balance digital learning with traditional values, such as strategic Wi-Fi placement and internet usage policies, enforcement remains a challenge. Students often find ways to circumvent these restrictions, indicating a need for a more robust technological infrastructure that can support digital learning while respecting the unique educational environment of pesantren.

In terms of Response to Digital Learning, the feedback was mixed. Some students and lecturers appreciate the flexibility and efficiency that online learning offers. However, concerns about reduced engagement and the effectiveness of digital learning in delivering practical experience were also prevalent. The quality of digital learning, the role of instructors, and the nature of online interactions were identified as crucial factors influencing student satisfaction and performance. The effectiveness of digital learning depends greatly on the quality of the technological infrastructure, instructional methods, and the ability to keep students engaged in a virtual setting, despite offering numerous advantages. Ultimately, the transition to digital education has resulted in a notable decline in social engagement, a key element of conventional pesantren schooling. Lack of in-person interaction impacts students' feeling of connection and inclusion, which may result in decreased involvement and drive. Furthermore, the lack of in-person connection impedes the development of communication skills and the formation of crucial support networks, both of which are necessary for a well-rounded educational journey. This issue emphasizes the importance of social contact in educational settings, particularly in areas like pesantren, where community and interpersonal connections play a critical role in learning.

Despite these hurdles, students at pesantren-based universities have demonstrated exceptional endurance and competitiveness in the face of educational advancement. Limited internet connection and inadequate technological infrastructure have not hindered students from achieving; rather, their patience and dedication to their studies have emerged as critical determinants in their success. This resilience is illustrated by the accomplishments of many excellent students who have achieved significant academic and professional milestones, indicating that the existing system, while challenging, can be surmounted. Finally, a student's success is decided not just by the resources available to them, but also by their willingness to study and ability to navigate and overcome obstacles.

To summarize, addressing the challenges of digital learning in pesantren-based universities necessitates a comprehensive approach that improves technological infrastructure, maintains engagement and communication in the online environment, and preserves the social and cultural values of the pesantren educational system. The experiences of these resilient kids highlight the significance of a balanced strategy that addresses constraints while also leveraging the pesantren community's strengths to promote academic and personal improvement.

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