

# A Phenomenological Study: An Exploration of the Meaning of Teaching Aqidah among Young Educators in Technology-Based Islamic Schools

Mulyawan Safwandy Nugraha

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia

[mulyawan@uinsgd.ac.id](mailto:mulyawan@uinsgd.ac.id)

## Article Info

### Article history:

Received 30-03-2025

Revised 05-05-2025

Accepted 17-05-2025

### Keyword:

Aqidah, Islamic Education, Phenomenology, Spiritual Pedagogy, Digital Pedagogy, Teacher Experience

## ABSTRACT

Islamic education in contemporary schools increasingly intersects with digital innovation, prompting pedagogical shifts in how theological subjects are taught. Within this landscape, the teaching of Aqidah—the core tenets of Islamic belief—poses unique challenges for young educators in technology-based learning environments. While much is known about digital pedagogy and curriculum adaptation, little is understood about how teachers personally experience and interpret the task of conveying Aqidah in such contexts. This phenomenological study investigates how eight young Islamic education teachers make meaning of teaching Aqidah in schools driven by digital technology. Using a descriptive phenomenological approach, this research explores the lived experiences of a purposive sample of eight teachers. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify essential meanings. Findings revealed that teaching Aqidah is perceived as a spiritual struggle, a negotiation of authenticity, and a conflict between institutional expectations and theological commitment. Participants described adapting digital tools with caution and intention, seeking to balance innovation with religious depth. These results extend current understandings of Islamic pedagogy by centering teacher experience as a source of pedagogical insight and ethical reflection. The study highlights the need for context-sensitive models of teacher training and encourages future research into the evolving intersection between faith and technology in education.



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## INTRODUCTION

In contemporary educational landscapes, the integration of technology has transformed teaching and learning across disciplines, including Islamic religious education. Digital platforms and interactive tools are increasingly normative in schools worldwide, reshaping how educators deliver content and how students engage with knowledge. Amid this shift, the teaching of Islamic theology (Aqidah) faces the challenge of balancing tradition with digital innovation.

Aqidah, as the foundational belief system in Islam, has traditionally been taught through face-to-face interaction grounded in textual study and mentorship. However, the rise of technology-mediated instruction demands that teachers adapt classical doctrinal content to virtual or hybrid environments. This transition raises critical questions about how theological concepts are effectively conveyed and internalized in these new settings.

For young teachers, the experience of teaching Aqidah in technology-based schools is not solely a professional obligation—it is a deeply personal and often spiritual encounter. Their pedagogical practices are shaped not only by institutional demands but also by their own convictions, anxieties, and aspirations in preserving the sanctity of faith-based content within digital formats. In this context, the phenomenon becomes socially and culturally significant, as it reflects broader tensions between tradition and modernity, spirituality and functionality, and personal faith and public instruction.

Despite the growing discourse on Islamic pedagogy and digital learning, limited attention has been given to the subjective experiences of teachers who embody this intersection. The nuances of what it means to teach Aqidah—as experienced, interpreted, and negotiated by young educators—remain underexplored. Understanding this lived experience is crucial for uncovering how religious meaning is preserved, transformed, or challenged in contemporary classrooms shaped by technology.

A phenomenological exploration of this topic offers an opportunity to grasp the depth of human experience behind pedagogical actions. By focusing on how young teachers make sense of their role, their methods, and their inner struggles, this study seeks to illuminate the existential and spiritual dimensions of teaching Aqidah in the digital age.

Research on the lived experiences of teachers has increasingly gained scholarly attention, particularly within the field of Islamic education, where teaching is deeply interwoven with spiritual identity and moral responsibility. In the context of Aqidah instruction, this experiential dimension becomes even more critical, as it involves not only the transfer of doctrinal knowledge but also the embodiment of faith-based values in pedagogical practice. Young teachers navigating this terrain within technology-based schools bring with them unique insights, tensions, and adaptations that are often invisible in traditional educational evaluations.

However, efforts to understand these complex experiences have been largely constrained by methodological limitations. Much of the existing research on religious instruction tends to rely on curriculum analysis, pedagogical models, or outcome-based assessments that emphasize observable behaviors and generalizable findings. These approaches—often rooted in quantitative paradigms—lack the conceptual tools to capture the depth of personal meaning, internal conflict, and spiritual reflection experienced by educators in real-world classrooms.

Consequently, the subtle, introspective, and affective dimensions of teaching Aqidah are often overlooked or simplified. The reliance on structured instruments or pre-determined variables in previous studies restricts the emergence of rich, contextualized narratives that reveal how teachers interpret their roles in dynamic and morally charged educational spaces. This gap underscores the need for a methodological approach capable of honoring the fullness of the teachers' voices, particularly as they grapple with questions of authenticity, faithfulness, and pedagogical relevance in digital learning environments.

Phenomenology offers a compelling alternative by centering the research process on participants' subjective experiences, allowing for a more profound engagement with the meanings they assign to their professional and spiritual practices. In doing so, it addresses the methodological void left by prior studies and paves the way for a deeper understanding of the existential realities of teaching Aqidah in the modern era.

In the current discourse on Islamic religious education, particularly within the scope of teaching Aqidah, common solutions often focus on adapting existing pedagogical models to digital environments. Strategies such as multimedia-based instruction, interactive content development, or curriculum digitization have been widely promoted as practical approaches to enhance student engagement in technology-driven classrooms. While these methods offer structural benefits, they tend to prioritize surface-level accessibility over deeper spiritual engagement or pedagogical authenticity.

These practical approaches, although effective in delivering content, are limited in their capacity to capture the nuanced, subjective experiences of the teachers themselves—especially when it comes to interpreting how faith, identity, and pedagogy intersect in real-time teaching practices. Existing studies frequently emphasize instructional efficiency or technological fluency, thereby neglecting the existential dimensions of what it means to teach foundational Islamic beliefs in increasingly secularized and media-saturated learning environments.

This limitation leads to an impoverished understanding of how young educators internalize, negotiate, and give meaning to their roles as Aqidah teachers in schools driven by digital transformation. It remains unclear how they reconcile traditional theological commitments with modern expectations for innovation and student-centered learning. These unexplored tensions represent a critical gap in the literature, one that cannot be addressed adequately through outcome-based or behaviorist research paradigms.

To address this gap, phenomenology offers a necessary and insightful alternative. By foregrounding the lived experiences of teachers and focusing on the meanings they attach to their pedagogical practices, phenomenology enables a more holistic and human-centered exploration of the phenomenon. It moves beyond mere functionality to uncover the deep spiritual, emotional, and ethical currents that inform how Aqidah is taught and experienced in contemporary technology-based educational settings.

Previous research on Islamic education in digital contexts has primarily focused on curriculum development, digital media integration, and student learning outcomes. Studies such as Abdullah (2021)

and Yunus (2020) offer insight into how Islamic values are adapted for multicultural or globalized settings, but few address how young teachers experience teaching core theological subjects like Aqidah. Existing literature often fails to examine the internal, spiritual, and emotional experiences of educators as they navigate complex expectations. Although some research uses interpretive frameworks, it rarely captures the essential meaning of teaching Aqidah in technology-based schools. As a result, little is known about the lived experiences of these educators as they balance faith, pedagogy, and digital innovation.

This study adopts a descriptive phenomenological approach to explore the meaning of teaching Aqidah among young teachers in technology-integrated educational environments. Phenomenology was selected because it prioritizes subjective experiences and allows deeper access to the emotional and spiritual aspects of the phenomenon. The method enables a rich and detailed account of how these teachers make sense of their roles and spiritual commitments within changing instructional landscapes. Through in-depth interviews and reflective analysis, the study reveals how participants negotiate authenticity, theological integrity, and pedagogical adaptation. The findings directly respond to the knowledge gap identified earlier by offering a holistic view of meaning-making in a digital religious teaching context.

The article begins with an introduction that outlines the general and specific background of the study, followed by a review of related literature and identification of the research gap. The next section presents the research design, including the phenomenological method, participant selection, and data collection procedures. This is followed by a detailed description of the thematic data analysis and presentation of key results using narrative interpretation and participant quotations. The discussion section then interprets the findings in relation to existing theory and literature. Finally, the article concludes by highlighting the implications for practice and future research in Islamic education and teacher development.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of young Islamic education teachers in teaching Aqidah within technology-based school settings. Phenomenology, as a qualitative research design, focuses on uncovering the essential meanings embedded in the subjective experiences of individuals as they engage with specific phenomena. The aim of this approach is not to generate theory or test hypotheses but to understand how individuals interpret and make sense of their lived realities.

Descriptive phenomenology, grounded in the philosophical tradition of Edmund Husserl, was selected to guide the research process. This approach emphasizes bracketing or epoché, whereby preconceptions are intentionally set aside to allow the phenomenon to reveal itself through the voices of participants. It is especially suitable for examining the personal, emotional, and often spiritual dimensions of teaching Aqidah in an environment shaped by technological advancement and institutional expectations. The approach allows for a rigorous and in-depth investigation of how meaning is constituted in everyday pedagogical practices.

### **Participants**

Participants consisted of eight young Islamic education teachers (aged 23–29) who were currently teaching Aqidah in junior and senior high schools characterized by substantial integration of digital technologies. A purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure the selection of individuals with direct and meaningful engagement with the phenomenon under study.

Inclusion criteria required participants to: (1) have at least one year of teaching experience in Aqidah studies; (2) teach in institutions that regularly incorporate digital tools such as learning management systems, multimedia, or online teaching platforms; and (3) self-identify as actively engaged in conveying theological concepts in classrooms mediated by technology. Teachers with administrative roles or whose primary subjects were outside Aqidah instruction were excluded. Participants included five females and three males, with an average teaching experience of 2.5 years.

**Data Collection**

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted over a two-month period. Each interview was guided by a flexible protocol designed to elicit deep reflections on participants' spiritual, emotional, and pedagogical experiences. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in private settings chosen by participants to ensure comfort and confidentiality. Each session lasted between 60 to 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participant's consent.

The interview guide was developed based on existing literature in Islamic pedagogy and adapted to include probes related to technological integration and theological meaning-making. All interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis. Field notes and reflective memos were also documented to enrich the contextual understanding of each case.

**Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis adapted within a descriptive phenomenological framework. The analysis began with repeated reading of each transcript to gain familiarity with the data and identify significant meaning units. These meaning units were then coded and clustered into themes that captured the core of participants' experiences.

Thematic reduction was applied to distill the essence of each theme, guided by the principles of eidetic reduction to eliminate incidental content and retain only the invariant structures of the phenomenon. NVivo 14 software was used to assist in organizing and managing data, but thematic interpretation was conducted manually to preserve the integrity and nuance of participants' narratives.

The outcome of the analysis was a set of essential themes that represented the collective and individual meanings associated with teaching Aqidah in digitally mediated school environments.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. All participants were provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained prior to participation.

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and published findings. All data were stored securely and accessed only by authorized personnel. The study adhered to the ethical guidelines outlined by the Declaration of Helsinki and complied with national standards for research involving human subjects.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The phenomenological analysis of the lived experiences of young Islamic education teachers in technology-based schools revealed three essential themes: (1) Teaching Aqidah as a Spiritual Struggle in the Digital Age, (2) Navigating Pedagogical Authenticity through Technology, and (3) Internal Conflict between Religious Conviction and Institutional Expectation. These themes emerged from intensive and reflective interviews, capturing the subjective meanings and existential interpretations voiced by participants.

**Teaching Aqidah as a Spiritual Struggle in the Digital Age**

For the participants, teaching Aqidah was not merely an instructional duty but a spiritual journey marked by deep inner conflict and self-reflection. They described the challenge of preserving theological purity amid the distractions and fluidity of digital environments. The technological setting, while rich in resources, was often perceived as a terrain where faith competes with modernism.

"I often feel like I'm walking a tightrope. On one side, I want my students to understand Tawhid deeply, but on the other, they are more engaged with YouTube and TikTok than the Qur'an,"

(Participant 3, male, 26 years old)

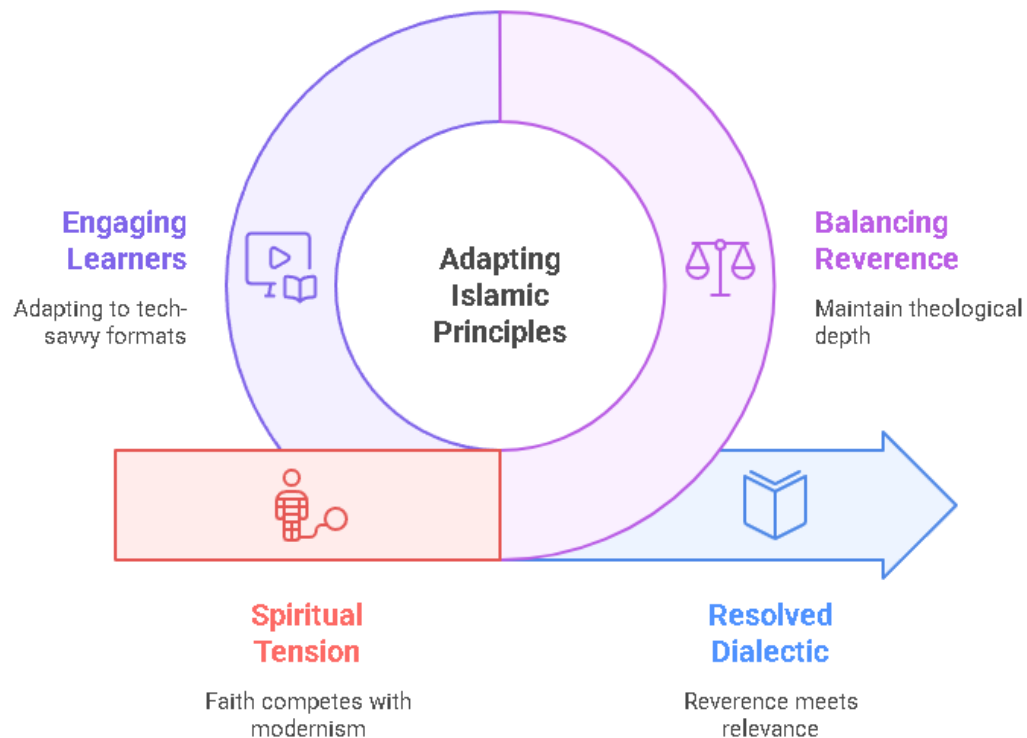
This spiritual tension was intensified by the immediacy and visibility of digital platforms. Participants found themselves in a constant struggle to adapt Islamic principles to formats palatable to tech-savvy learners without compromising theological depth.

“Sometimes I feel I’m diluting Aqidah when I use animations or gamification. Is it still sacred if it feels like entertainment?”

(Participant 1, female, 25 years old)

Such reflections indicate an unresolved dialectic between reverence and relevance — a core challenge in digital-era Islamic education.

### Bridging Faith and Digital Engagement



### Navigating Pedagogical Authenticity through Technology

Many young teachers viewed technology as a double-edged sword. While it provided innovative tools to visualize complex concepts such as Tawhid, Rububiyah, and Asma’ wa Sifat, it simultaneously raised concerns about authenticity and depth.

“I use digital mind maps to explain Allah’s attributes, and the students love it. But I question whether this visualization helps them internalize faith or just makes it ‘understandable’ on the surface,”

(Participant 4, male, 28 years old)

Participants often developed hybrid pedagogical identities, balancing between classical texts and modern devices. Authenticity, in their narratives, did not mean rejecting technology, but using it with *niyyah* (intention) rooted in *dakwah*.

“When I design a digital slide, I always begin with Basmallah. It’s a ritual for me. It’s how I remind myself that even Canva can become a form of *ibadah*.”

(Participant 6, female, 27 years old)

This illustrates how participants negotiated spiritual intentionality within technologically mediated instructional practices, crafting a space where faith and form could coexist.

### Internal Conflict between Religious Conviction and Institutional Expectation

Another recurring theme was the dissonance between participants' commitment to doctrinal integrity and the pragmatic demands of school institutions. Several participants reported being subtly encouraged to avoid "sensitive" Aqidah topics that might provoke discomfort among students or administrators, particularly in schools with a pluralistic or secular orientation.

"The school wants me to 'soften' the concept of shirk so it doesn't sound judgmental. But how do I explain Aqidah without talking about tawhid versus shirk?"

(Participant 5, male, 26 years old)

This tension created emotional burdens and moments of existential questioning among the teachers. Some coped by internalizing the idea of gradualism (*tadarruj*) in teaching, while others expressed fatigue and fear of spiritual compromise.

"I'm afraid I will lose the essence of my role as an Aqidah teacher. I teach, but sometimes I feel like I'm just conforming."

(Participant 2, female, 24 years old)

This theme reveals a poignant struggle for integrity and self-definition in an institutional landscape that may not fully support theological depth.

The lived experiences of young Islamic education teachers in technology-based schools unveil a deeply personal, complex, and often conflicted journey. Teaching Aqidah emerges not merely as a pedagogical act but as a profound negotiation between faith, form, and institutional realities. Through the themes identified, this study highlights the internal and external challenges these teachers face, offering a textured understanding of how Islamic theology is lived, taught, and transformed in digital educational contexts.

This study revealed that young Islamic education teachers perceive the act of teaching Aqidah in technology-based schools as both a spiritual mission and an ongoing negotiation between theological integrity and digital innovation. The core essence that emerged from their experiences centered on a continuous struggle to remain faithful to Islamic doctrinal principles while adapting to the pedagogical demands of modern, technology-driven classrooms. These findings directly address the guiding research question concerning how young teachers experience and make meaning of teaching Aqidah in digitally mediated educational settings.

The findings offer a nuanced and richly textured response to the research question by uncovering the lived tensions, reflections, and intentionalities embedded in the participants' pedagogical practices. Rather than treating Aqidah instruction as a mere academic content area, young teachers framed it as a deeply personal and spiritual responsibility—shaped by moral concerns, institutional limitations, and the desire for authentic transmission of faith. This phenomenological insight contributes uniquely to the existing discourse by illuminating how young educators internalize their theological roles and creatively adapt their methods without compromising core beliefs. It highlights the existential depth of religious pedagogy, a dimension often overlooked in both empirical educational research and practical discourse on digital learning.

These findings resonate with previous studies such as Hasan (2022), who emphasized the spiritual formation of Islamic teachers in secular school environments, but this study extends that insight by revealing how technological structures further complicate such formation. While Abdullah (2021) and Nurdin (2023) discussed Islamic value transmission in multicultural or urban schools, they did not focus on the inner experiences of teachers navigating digitized classrooms. Moreover, the tension between institutional expectations and theological fidelity found in this study aligns with Al-Makassari's (2024) exploration of ethical dilemmas in interfaith settings, yet contributes a novel dimension by showing how digital media serves both as a facilitator and disruptor of authentic religious engagement. Theoretically, this study supports the growing need for contextual Islamic pedagogy models that accommodate not just diversity in learner background, but also shifts in instructional mediums and spiritual intentionalities.

### **Implications of the Findings**

The findings of this study carry significant implications for both the academic and practical dimensions of Islamic education in modern contexts. On a professional level, they reveal the need for more reflective teacher training programs that address the spiritual, emotional, and ethical challenges faced by young educators in technologically advanced schools. These programs should not only equip teachers with digital competencies but also guide them in maintaining theological authenticity amidst institutional and cultural pressures. Culturally, the study underscores the evolving landscape of religious instruction, where technology both facilitates and fragments the delivery of sacred knowledge. Socially, the insights suggest that young Islamic educators are navigating a complex moral terrain, one that mirrors broader tensions between tradition and modernity within Muslim communities.

### **Limitations of the Study**

As with all qualitative research, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample size was limited to eight participants within a specific age range and teaching in selected urban, technology-based school environments. Consequently, the depth of individual narratives may not represent the full diversity of experiences among Islamic education teachers in different regions, school types, or sociocultural settings. Moreover, the reliance on self-reported experiences through interviews, while essential in phenomenology, may be influenced by personal reflection biases or situational interpretations. These constraints limit the generalizability of findings but do not diminish their value in generating in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Instead, they offer a focused entry point for more expansive future research.

### **Prospective Directions for Future Research**

The insights generated from this study open new avenues for future inquiry in the field of Islamic pedagogy and religious education. Further research could explore comparative experiences of Aqidah teachers across different generations, cultural contexts, or educational systems—both traditional and modern. Additionally, longitudinal studies may be valuable in examining how young teachers' theological and pedagogical orientations evolve over time in response to institutional change, technological advancement, or personal spiritual development. Future phenomenological research could also investigate students' perceptions of Aqidah instruction in digital classrooms to offer a more holistic understanding of the teaching-learning dynamic. Ultimately, this study lays the groundwork for constructing context-sensitive frameworks of Islamic instruction that honor both religious depth and technological relevance.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explored the lived experiences of young Islamic education teachers in teaching Aqidah within technology-based school environments. Using a descriptive phenomenological approach, the research revealed that teaching Aqidah is not merely a curricular task but a spiritual and existential responsibility marked by internal struggles, pedagogical adaptation, and institutional tensions. The findings highlighted how teachers strive to preserve theological authenticity while engaging with digital tools, reflecting a complex negotiation between faith and innovation. This study contributes to the literature by addressing a gap in understanding the subjective realities of religious educators in modern classrooms, which previous research often overlooked. Practically, the results recommend developing teacher training programs that emphasize both spiritual integrity and digital literacy, alongside institutional support to manage tensions between tradition and technology. Future research could expand this inquiry by including diverse educational settings and examining how students perceive the effectiveness of Aqidah instruction in digital learning environments. Moreover, future studies should explore longitudinal impacts of such pedagogical adaptations on both teacher identity and student spiritual development, thereby building on the foundations laid by the present study.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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