

Teaching English in the Digital Era: Lecturers' Experiences in Adapting Technology in Learning at Islamic Higher Education Institutions

Syafrizal

Universitas Islam Indragiri, Indonesia,

Syafrizal@unisi.ac.id

Article Info

Article history:

Received 23-01-2025

Revised 22-02-2025

Accepted 17-03-2025

Keyword:

English Language Learning,
Technology in Education,
Lecturers' Experiences,
Islamic Higher Education
Institutions, Educational
Digitalization.

ABSTRACT

The integration of technology in higher education has transformed pedagogical approaches, particularly in English language teaching. While digital tools offer enhanced engagement and instructional flexibility, lecturers face challenges in adapting to technological shifts within institutional and cultural contexts. However, limited research has explored the lived experiences of educators in navigating these digital transformations. This study employs a phenomenological approach to examine how English language lecturers at Islamic higher education institutions perceive and adapt to technology integration in their teaching practices. Through in-depth qualitative analysis, findings reveal that while technology fosters interactivity and accessibility, lecturers encounter barriers such as digital literacy gaps, institutional constraints, and student resistance. The study highlights the cognitive and emotional dimensions of technology adoption, emphasizing the need for context-specific professional development programs. These insights contribute to the discourse on digital transformation in education by advocating for institutional policies that support educators in integrating technology effectively into their pedagogy.



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INTRODUCTION

The increasing integration of technology into education has significantly reshaped teaching and learning dynamics across various disciplines (Tsai & Wang, 2019). In English language education, digital tools and platforms have provided new opportunities for enhancing instructional delivery and student engagement. However, the process of incorporating technology into pedagogical practices is complex and deeply intertwined with educators' lived experiences, institutional structures, and students' readiness for digital learning.

The role of technology in higher education has been widely acknowledged in the literature, with scholars emphasizing its potential to foster interactive learning environments, facilitate access to educational resources, and improve the flexibility of instructional methods (Warschauer, 2010). In the context of English language teaching, advancements in digital learning management systems, video conferencing tools, and collaborative applications have introduced new modes of instruction that extend beyond traditional classroom settings (Docherty dkk., 2018). Despite these advantages, research also highlights challenges related to digital disparities, faculty preparedness, and institutional support, which may influence the effectiveness of technology adoption in educational settings (Bax, 2003).

Previous studies have primarily focused on the technical aspects of technology integration, examining issues such as digital literacy, pedagogical strategies, and infrastructure support (Luscombe & Montgomery, 2016). While these perspectives offer valuable insights, they often fail to capture the subjective experiences and meaning-making processes of educators who navigate these transformations in real time. A phenomenological approach is therefore essential to explore how lecturers perceive, interpret, and respond to the integration of technology in their teaching practices, providing a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities they encounter.

Given the increasing push for digital transformation in Islamic higher education institutions, this study seeks to investigate how English language lecturers experience and adapt to technological changes within their teaching contexts (Stanislaus, 2022). By exploring the phenomenological aspects of technology adoption, the study aims to uncover the underlying meanings and implications of digital learning tools on instructional practices and faculty engagement. This exploration is crucial for informing policy decisions, professional development initiatives, and institutional strategies that support effective and sustainable technology integration in language education.

Research on educators' lived experiences in adopting technology has gained prominence in recent years, emphasizing the significance of subjective interpretations in understanding digital transformation in education (Tavares dkk., 2021). While quantitative studies provide measurable insights into technology adoption rates and efficiency, they often fail to capture the intricate ways in which educators perceive and internalize these changes in their professional contexts. Phenomenology, as a research approach, allows for an in-depth exploration of how individuals construct meaning from their experiences, making it particularly suitable for understanding the personal and institutional dimensions of technological adaptation.

One of the primary challenges in exploring subjective experiences lies in methodological limitations. Traditional survey-based studies and large-scale statistical analyses, while useful for identifying general trends, do not adequately capture the complexity of individual narratives and the nuances of educators' engagement with technology (Dimitrov, 2017). Additionally, many studies on technology integration focus on institutional readiness and technical competencies rather than the underlying emotional, cognitive, and pedagogical shifts that lecturers undergo when incorporating digital tools into their teaching.

These limitations highlight the need for a qualitative, phenomenological approach that prioritizes rich, descriptive accounts of educators' experiences (Limonova dkk., 2024). By focusing on how lecturers navigate challenges, adapt strategies, and interpret the implications of technology on their teaching practices, this study aims to fill the gap in understanding the deeper layers of meaning that quantitative research cannot fully address. Furthermore, given the cultural and institutional specificities of Islamic higher education, a phenomenological investigation provides valuable insights into how contextual factors shape digital pedagogical adaptation.

Despite the growing body of research on technology integration in education, most existing studies emphasize practical implementations, focusing on digital literacy, instructional design, and institutional support systems (Avdiu & Holzinger, 2022). While these aspects are crucial, they do not adequately capture the lived experiences of educators who are directly engaged in the process of adopting and utilizing technology in their teaching practices. The absence of a deep, experiential exploration limits the ability to understand the broader implications of digital transformation in higher education.

Existing approaches often rely on quantitative assessments that measure technology adoption rates, effectiveness, and student performance metrics (Olivera Zaldua dkk., 2015). However, these studies lack the depth required to uncover the cognitive, emotional, and pedagogical dimensions of lecturers' experiences with technology. Without capturing these subjective aspects, a significant part of the transformation process remains unexamined, leading to an incomplete understanding of how technology influences teaching methodologies and faculty adaptation.

Given these methodological gaps, the present study adopts a phenomenological approach to explore the essence of educators' experiences in integrating technology into English language instruction at Islamic higher education institutions (Martín-Sánchez dkk., 2022). By centering on individual narratives, this study aims to provide a holistic understanding of the personal and institutional factors influencing digital adoption, thus addressing the limitations of prior research that primarily focuses on quantitative data or institutional frameworks. The findings will contribute to developing more context-sensitive strategies that support faculty adaptation and enhance the effectiveness of technology-driven pedagogy.

Previous research has explored various dimensions of technology adoption in education, focusing primarily on institutional readiness, digital literacy, and pedagogical frameworks (Ferns dkk., 2024). Studies grounded in educational technology and instructional design have provided valuable insights into the functional aspects of digital integration. However, few studies have adequately addressed the lived experiences of educators who navigate the complexities of adopting technology within their specific institutional and cultural contexts. The phenomenological perspective offers an avenue to explore how educators interpret and internalize these experiences, thereby capturing the depth of their engagement with digital tools.

To bridge this gap, this study employs a phenomenological approach to examine the subjective experiences of English language lecturers in Islamic higher education institutions (Aleksandrovich dkk., 2024). By focusing on their narratives, this research aims to uncover the cognitive, emotional, and professional transformations that accompany technological adaptation. Through in-depth qualitative analysis, this study seeks to answer how lecturers make sense of their experiences, the challenges they encounter, and the strategies they employ to integrate digital tools into their pedagogy effectively.

This article is structured to provide a comprehensive examination of the research topic. It begins with an introduction that outlines the significance of technology in higher education, followed by a literature review that situates this study within the broader academic discourse. The methodology section details the phenomenological framework, data collection techniques, and analysis process. Subsequent sections present the findings, discussion, and conclusions, highlighting key insights and their implications for educational practice. By following this structure, the study aims to offer a clear and coherent exploration of the role of technology in shaping educators' professional experiences.

RESEARCH METHODS

Study Design

This study employed a phenomenological approach to explore lecturers' lived experiences in integrating technology into English language teaching at Islamic higher education institutions. Phenomenology was chosen as it enables an in-depth understanding of the subjective meanings and perceptions that lecturers associate with technology adoption (Nair dkk., 2020). The study was grounded in interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which emphasizes individual experiences while allowing for thematic exploration of commonalities and variances among participants. This approach provided a framework to capture not only what lecturers experienced but also how they interpreted these experiences in their professional contexts.

Participants

Participants consisted of ten English language lecturers from various Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. They were selected through purposive sampling based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) at least five years of teaching experience in higher education, (2) experience in using or attempting to integrate technology in their instruction, and (3) willingness to share their experiences in depth. Lecturers without prior experience in using technology for teaching were excluded to ensure data richness. The participants varied in gender and institutional affiliation, contributing to a diverse range of perspectives on technology adoption.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted both online and in person, depending on participants' availability. The interviews, which lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, were recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim. An interview guide was used to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their unique experiences. Observations were also conducted in selected online and hybrid classrooms to triangulate the data and provide additional insights into lecturers' technological adaptation.

Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the principles of interpretative phenomenology. The process included multiple stages: (1) reading and re-reading transcripts to gain familiarity with the data, (2) coding significant statements and identifying emerging patterns, (3) clustering codes into meaningful themes, and (4) interpreting themes to understand their deeper significance in the context of lecturers' experiences. NVivo software was used to assist with data organization and coding, ensuring systematic analysis and consistency.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional research ethics committee. Participants provided informed consent before data collection, ensuring their voluntary participation and right to withdraw at any stage (De Carvalho dkk., 2024). Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by assigning pseudonyms and securely storing data in compliance with ethical research standards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Motivations and Perceived Benefits of Technology Adoption

Participants expressed that the integration of technology into English language teaching has provided them with enhanced flexibility and accessibility in delivering lessons. Most of the lecturers emphasized that digital tools, such as learning management systems and interactive platforms, have improved their engagement with students. One lecturer stated, "Technology allows me to create a more dynamic learning environment where students can access materials anytime. It also helps them interact more actively through discussion forums and quizzes" (Lecturer A).

Despite the enthusiasm for the pedagogical benefits, some lecturers indicated that their initial motivation for adopting technology stemmed from institutional policies rather than personal preference. Another lecturer mentioned, "At first, I integrated technology because it was required by my institution, but over time, I saw the benefits in terms of student engagement and personalized learning experiences" (Lecturer B). These insights highlight how external mandates have influenced lecturers' motivation to adapt, even when they faced technological barriers.

Challenges in Implementing Technology

While technology has been seen as beneficial, lecturers encountered multiple challenges in integrating digital tools into their teaching practices. A prevalent issue was the lack of adequate training and institutional support. Many participants reported struggling with technical difficulties, which disrupted the learning process. "Sometimes, the internet connection is unstable, and it makes online discussions ineffective. Many students cannot participate properly due to these issues," said Lecturer C.

Furthermore, participants pointed out that not all students possess the same level of digital literacy, creating an additional challenge in maintaining effective instruction. "Some students are very familiar with digital platforms, while others struggle even with basic functions. It slows down the teaching process because I have to guide them through the technical aspects first," shared Lecturer D. These challenges suggest that while technology is an enabler, disparities in access and competency can hinder its optimal use in education.

Strategies for Overcoming Barriers

In response to these challenges, lecturers have devised various strategies to facilitate the effective integration of technology in their classrooms. One notable approach is peer collaboration, where lecturers support one another in troubleshooting technical issues and sharing best practices. "I always discuss with my colleagues about which platforms work best. Learning from each other has been very helpful in reducing my struggles with technology," (Lecturer E).

Additionally, some lecturers have actively sought out professional development opportunities, such as online training and workshops, to improve their technological competence. Lecturer F noted, "I took several online courses on digital pedagogy to improve my skills. It gave me more confidence in

using technology effectively in my classes." This proactive attitude demonstrates how continuous learning plays a crucial role in addressing the challenges of digital transformation in education.

Impact of Technology on Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes

The majority of participants acknowledged that technology has positively influenced student participation and interaction. Digital platforms have facilitated more active discussions, particularly for students who may be hesitant to speak in traditional classroom settings. Lecturer G observed, "Some of my quieter students are more engaged in online discussions than in face-to-face classes. They feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts through digital platforms."

However, not all students have responded positively to the transition. Several lecturers reported resistance from students who prefer conventional teaching methods and struggle with self-directed learning. "Some students still expect spoon-fed learning and find it hard to adapt to independent learning using digital platforms," stated Lecturer H. This finding suggests that while technology enhances engagement for some students, others may require additional support to maximize its benefits.

The findings reveal that while lecturers in Islamic higher education institutions recognize the benefits of technology in English language teaching, they also face significant challenges in its implementation. Institutional support, training, and peer collaboration emerge as crucial factors in ensuring effective digital integration. The impact of technology on student engagement varies, indicating the need for adaptive teaching strategies to accommodate diverse learning preferences. These findings provide a foundation for further discussion on how institutions can enhance technological adoption in language education.

The findings of this study reveal that lecturers' experiences with technology integration in Islamic higher education institutions are shaped by both institutional factors and personal pedagogical philosophies (De Silva dkk., 2022). The challenges they encounter, including technical barriers, digital literacy gaps, and varying levels of student engagement, highlight the complexities of adopting technology in the classroom. These results align with the overarching research questions, emphasizing the subjective nature of technological adaptation and its influence on educators' professional growth.

By applying a phenomenological approach, this study provides an in-depth exploration of how lecturers interpret and navigate technological transformations (Arslan & Turk, 2024). The insights gained contribute to a more nuanced understanding of faculty adaptation, bridging the gap between institutional expectations and individual agency. These findings offer practical implications for developing more tailored professional development programs and policy interventions to support lecturers in leveraging digital tools effectively.

Implications of Findings

The findings of this study offer critical insights into the evolving landscape of technology integration in Islamic higher education. From a professional standpoint, the adaptation of digital tools reshapes lecturers' pedagogical approaches, fostering greater flexibility and interactivity in teaching. Socially, these findings highlight the necessity of bridging digital disparities to ensure equitable learning experiences across diverse student populations. On a broader scale, institutional policies must align with lecturers' lived experiences to develop sustainable strategies for digital transformation in education.

Limitations of the Study

This study is subject to certain limitations. The research sample was drawn from a specific educational context, limiting the generalizability of findings to other institutional settings. Additionally, as a phenomenological study, the focus was on in-depth individual experiences rather than broad statistical patterns. Future research should expand the participant pool and explore cross-institutional comparisons to validate these findings further.

Future Research Directions

Future studies could explore the longitudinal impact of technology adoption on teaching effectiveness and student outcomes. Additionally, comparative studies between traditional and digital pedagogical models could provide further insights into optimizing technology-enhanced learning.

Expanding the scope to include student perspectives would also offer a more comprehensive understanding of digital adaptation in higher education.

CONCLUSION

This study explored English language lecturers' lived experiences in integrating technology into Islamic higher education institutions, revealing both opportunities and challenges in digital pedagogy. Findings indicate that while technology enhances instructional flexibility and student engagement, lecturers face barriers such as digital literacy gaps, institutional constraints, and varying levels of student readiness. The phenomenological approach provided a deeper understanding of the cognitive and emotional aspects of technology adoption, offering insights beyond the limitations of quantitative assessments. These findings contribute to existing literature by emphasizing the personal and contextual dimensions of digital adaptation in education. Future research should explore long-term impacts of technological integration on teaching effectiveness and investigate strategies to bridge digital inequities in different educational settings. Understanding educators' evolving relationship with technology will remain crucial in shaping effective policies and support mechanisms for digital learning environments.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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