

TEACHERS' EXPERIENCE IN DIGITAL-BASED ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LEARNING MANAGEMENT INNOVATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation in education has driven significant changes in learning management practices, including in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Teachers no longer only play the role of material presenters, but also digital learning managers who must be able to design, manage, and evaluate technology-based learning processes. This research aims to understand the lived experience of teachers in innovating digital-based PAI learning management. The research uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods. The research participants consisted of PAI teachers who actively use digital platforms in learning. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, digital learning observations, and documentation, then analyzed using thematic phenomenological analysis techniques. The results of the study show that digital learning management innovations are carried out through: (1) digital platform-based learning planning, (2) virtual management of religious interactions, (3) technology-based evaluation strategies, and (4) pedagogical adaptation to the characteristics of the digital generation. The main challenges include teachers' digital literacy, limited infrastructure, and internalization of spiritual values in the digital space. This research emphasizes that digital innovation in PAI is not just the use of technology, but the transformation of pedagogic paradigms and religious learning management. These findings contribute to the development of a contextual and humanistic, digital-based PAI learning management model.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education, learning management, digital innovation, teacher experience, phenomenology.

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has become a global phenomenon that has significantly changed educational practices at various levels and disciplines. The integration of digital technology is no longer seen as a complement to learning, but as an integral part of the modern education ecosystem that shapes the way of learning, the way of teaching, and the way of managing learning as a whole. The digital revolution accelerated by the development of information technology, artificial intelligence, and internet connectivity has encouraged educational institutions to carry out pedagogic and managerial innovations simultaneously (Bond et al., 2020). In the context of 21st century education, teachers no longer function only as conveyors of information, but as learning experience designers who are able to manage technology-based learning environments. This change requires a transformation in the learning management aspect, namely how the process of planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating learning is carried out adaptively in a digital environment (Trust & Whalen, 2021). The digitalization of education has created a more flexible, collaborative, and student-centered learning model, but at the same time presents new complexities in pedagogical practices.



These changes also have a significant impact on Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Historically, PAI learning relied heavily on direct interaction between teachers and students as a medium for internalizing spiritual values and moral formation. Personal pedagogical relationships are considered the main element in the transfer of religious values. However, the development of digital technology has forced the reconfiguration of religious learning practices into virtual spaces that have different characteristics from conventional learning (Rahman & Hasanah, 2022). The digitization of PAI learning presents a pedagogical paradox. On the one hand, technology allows access to wider Islamic learning resources, cross-spatial interactions, and creative learning media innovations. On the other hand, there are concerns related to the reduction of the spiritual dimension, the decline in the depth of religious reflection, and the challenges in building teacher examples in the digital space (Hidayat et al., 2021). This condition shows that the use of technology in PAI is not sufficiently understood as a technical innovation, but rather as a transformation of religious learning management.

Learning management is a fundamental aspect in the success of the educational process. This concept includes learning planning activities, management of learning interactions, organizing learning resources, and systematic evaluation of learning to achieve educational goals effectively (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). In the digital context, the learning management function has undergone significant changes because teachers must manage virtual learning spaces that are dynamic, multimodal, and technology-based. Recent research shows that the success of digital learning is highly dependent on teachers' ability to carry out managerial innovations, not just mastery of technology (König et al., 2020). Teachers who are able to integrate technology with pedagogic strategies show higher levels of student engagement as well as better learning quality. This emphasizes the importance of understanding teachers' experiences as the main actors in digital education transformation.

In the international literature, the study of digital pedagogy has developed rapidly in recent years. The study of Bond et al. (2020) confirms that digital technology is able to increase student engagement through interactive learning design. Meanwhile, research by Trust and Whalen (2021) shows that teachers' experiences during online learning encourage the emergence of innovative practices in virtual classroom management. Other research also emphasizes the importance of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) competencies as the foundation for technology integration in learning (Schmid et al., 2021). However, most of the research focuses on aspects of technology effectiveness, digital competence, or student learning outcomes. Studies that explore teachers' subjective experiences in managing digital-based learning, especially in religious education, are still relatively limited. In fact, teacher experience is an important source of practical knowledge to understand how educational innovation really happens in real practice. In the Indonesian context, research on the digitalization of PAI is starting to develop, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic which accelerated the adoption of online learning. Rahman and Hasanah's (2022) study found that PAI teachers have experienced a change in learning strategies towards the use of interactive digital platforms. Other research shows that the use of digital media can increase students' learning motivation in PAI subjects (Sari & Nurhayati, 2023). However, the study still dominantly uses a quantitative approach that assesses the effectiveness of media or student perception.



The limitations of this approach cause the dimension of teachers' reflective experience to be explored in depth. In fact, learning innovation is often born from the process of personal adaptation of teachers to pedagogic, technological, and educational challenges that they believe in. The phenomenological perspective allows researchers to understand the meaning of teachers' lived experiences in dealing with these changes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, previous research has tended to separate the discourse of educational technology and religious education. Educational technology studies focus on digital efficiency and innovation, while PAI studies emphasize more normative aspects and spiritual values. The integration of the two perspectives is still rarely studied comprehensively, so that a conceptual gap arises in understanding digital-based PAI learning management.

Based on the latest literature review, there are several *state of the art* that can be identified. First, global research shows an increasing attention to digital pedagogy and the transformation of the role of teachers in online learning (Bond et al., 2020; Trust & Whalen, 2021). Second, Islamic education studies have begun to explore the integration of technology in religious learning (Hidayat et al., 2021; Rahman & Hasanah, 2022). Third, the phenomenological approach is increasingly used to understand teachers' professional experiences in educational change (Van Manen, 2019). However, there is a significant *research gap*. First, there have not been many studies that have examined digital-based PAI learning management innovations specifically; most studies only address the use of learning media. Second, the subjective experience of teachers as a source of pedagogic innovation is still not explored phenomenologically. Third, there is no conceptual model that explains how Islamic spiritual values are internalized through digital learning management.

This research gap is important because the digitalization of education has not only changed teaching methods, but also the professional identity of teachers. PAI teachers face a dilemma between maintaining the authenticity of religious values and adapting to the demands of modern technology. Their experience in navigating this dilemma is a scientific phenomenon that needs to be understood in depth. In addition, the current generation of students are digital natives who have a different learning pattern from the previous generation. They are used to interactivity, quick visualization, and social media-based communication. This condition requires PAI teachers to innovate learning management so that Islamic values can be conveyed in a relevant and contextual manner without losing spiritual substance (Prensky, 2021).

From a theoretical perspective, this research also contributes to the development of the concept of digital religious learning management, which is the integration between digital pedagogy, learning management, and value education. This approach expands the study of Islamic education from a normative orientation to an empirical approach based on the experience of educational practitioners. Using a phenomenological approach, this study seeks to explore the essence of teachers' experience in innovating digital-based PAI learning management. The focus of the research is not only on what teachers do, but how they interpret those changes in their professional and spiritual practices. Based on this description, this study aims to: Uncover the experience of PAI teachers in managing digital-based learning, Identify forms of learning management innovations that develop in real practice and Understand the pedagogical and spiritual meaning of digital learning innovations in Islamic Religious Education. This research is expected to make a theoretical



contribution in the form of strengthening the phenomenological study of Islamic education as well as a practical contribution to the development of a digital-based PAI learning management model that is adaptive, humanistic, and contextual to the challenges of 21st century education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a field research with a qualitative approach using phenomenological methods. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to understand the meaning of teachers' subjective experiences in innovating digital-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning management in depth and contextually. Qualitative research allows the exploration of social realities based on the perspective of participants so that educational phenomena can be understood holistically (Merriam & Tisdell, 2022). Phenomenology is used as the main approach because the focus of research lies on teachers' lived experiences when facing digital transformation in learning practices. Phenomenology does not only describe events, but seeks to find the essence of meaning from human experience of a particular phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2021). In the context of this study, the phenomenon studied is the experience of teachers in designing, managing, and interpreting digital-based PAI learning management innovations. The phenomenological approach is relevant in educational research because it is able to uncover reflective, emotional, pedagogical, and spiritual dimensions that cannot be measured through quantitative approaches. The teacher's experience is understood as the construction of meaning formed through interaction between individuals, technology, and the social context of education (van Manen, 2023). Philosophically, this research is based on an interpretive-constructivist paradigm that views reality as the result of an individual's subjective interpretation of his or her experience. Therefore, researchers play a role as the main instrument in the process of data collection and interpretation.

Research Location and Context

The research was carried out on high school education units that have implemented digital-based learning in Islamic Religious Education subjects. The selection of location was carried out purposively by considering the intensity of the use of digital technology in the learning process. The research context is focused on the real practice of digital-based PAI learning, including the use of Learning Management System (LMS), video conferencing applications, educational social media, and online evaluation platforms. This contextual approach is important in phenomenological research because the meaning of experiences is always related to the social environment in which they take place (Saldaña & Omasta, 2021). In this study, research participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques with the following criteria: first, Islamic Religious Education Teachers have been actively teaching for at least three years. Second, utilizing digital technology in learning consistently. Third, have experience managing online learning or blended learning and fourth, Willing to become a voluntary research participant. The number of participants in phenomenological research generally ranges from 5–15 people to allow for an in-depth exploration of experiences (Neubauer et al., 2021). In this study, participants consisted of eight PAI teachers who were considered to be able to provide information-rich cases.



Data collection was carried out through three main techniques to obtain a comprehensive phenomenological understanding. The first one conducted an In-depth Interview. Semi-structured interviews are used as the primary technique to explore the subjective experiences of teachers. The interview questions focus on teachers' experiences in: planning digital learning, managing religious interactions online, conducting learning evaluations, dealing with pedagogical and spiritual challenges. Interviews are conducted online and offline with a duration of 60–90 minutes per session. This technique allows participants to reflect on their experiences narratively and deeply (Kallio et al., 2021).

The second is to conduct Digital Learning Observations, Observations are carried out on digital learning practices to understand the compatibility between the experiences told and real practices. Observations focused on teacher-student interaction patterns, virtual classroom management strategies, and the integration of religious values in digital learning. Observations in phenomenological research aim to capture the context of experience directly so as to increase the depth of data interpretation (Saldaña & Omasta, 2021). Third, conducting a Document Documentation Study that was analyzed including: digital lesson plans, online learning materials, LMS activity recordings, online evaluation instruments. Documentation is used as supporting data to strengthen source triangulation. Data analysis uses a thematic phenomenological analysis approach developed from interpretive phenomenological measures. The analysis process was carried out simultaneously from the data collection stage. The stages of analysis include: Data Horizontalization. All participant statements are treated as having the same value in the initial stage to avoid researcher bias. Meaning Units Identification is a significant statement identified to find units of meaning related to the experience of digital learning innovation. Thematic Clustering Units of meaning are grouped into the main themes of the experience. Textural Description (What) Describes what teachers experience in digital learning practices. Structural Description (How). Describe how the experience occurred in a particular context. Synthesis of the Essence of Experience Integrating the entire theme into the essence of the phenomenon of teacher experience (Neubauer et al., 2021). The analysis was carried out iteratively with a process of repeated reflection to ensure the depth of phenomenological interpretation.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

A phenomenological analysis of the experience of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers shows that digital-based learning management innovation is not just a change in the use of technological media, but a process of professional transformation that involves the reconstruction of pedagogic roles, managerial strategies, and the reinterpretation of religious education practices. Through the process of horizontalization and grouping of units of meaning, this research produces four essential themes of teacher experience, namely: First; Reconstruction of digital learning planning as an adaptive management practice. Second; Transformation of religious interaction in virtual space. Third; Reorientation of learning evaluation towards digital authentic assessment and the Fourth is the negotiation of teachers' professional identities in the digital ecosystem. These four themes form the essence of the teacher's experience in digital-based PAI learning management innovation.



Learning Planning Reconstruction: From Administrative to Learning Experience Design

The research findings show that teachers no longer view learning planning as an administrative activity, but as a process of designing digital learning experiences. Teachers reflexively transform conventional lesson plans into flexible learning structures based on digital platforms such as LMS and collaborative applications. Phenomenologically, teachers experience a shift in their way of thinking from *teaching planning* to *learning design*. They began to consider: the flow of digital interactions, the emotional engagement of students, the integration of multimodal media, and the flexibility of learning access. These findings strengthen the argument that digital pedagogy requires teachers to be learning architects who design learning ecosystems, not just material presenters (Trust & Whalen, 2021). From a learning management perspective, this change shows the emergence of adaptive management, which is the ability of teachers to dynamically adjust learning strategies according to the digital context. The study of Bond et al. (2020) confirms that digital learning is effective when learning design is centered on the student experience, not the technology itself. Analytically, teachers' experiences show that innovation is born from the practical need to face the limitations of face-to-face interaction. Teachers develop pedagogic creativity through repetitive experimentation, which in phenomenology is understood as the process of forming meaning through reflective experience.

The Transformation of Religious Interactions: Spirituality in Virtual Space

One of the most significant findings was a change in the way teachers constructed religious interactions. Teachers initially experienced doubts about the effectiveness of online religious learning due to the absence of emotional closeness. However, practical experience shows the emergence of new strategies, such as: digital religious reflection, online worship journals, discussion of Islamic values based on life cases, spiritual mentoring through online communication platforms. This phenomenon shows that spirituality is not lost in the digital space, but undergoes a transformation of the form of interaction. These findings are in line with the research of Holmes et al. (2022) who stated that digital technology can expand reflective learning practices if designed dialogically. Teachers in this study play the role of facilitators of religious meaning, not just conveyors of doctrine. Phenomenologically, teachers interpret technology as a "new da'wah space" that allows the internalization of Islamic values through a participatory approach. This shows the integration between constructivist pedagogy and value education. Thus, digital-based PAI learning management innovations lead to a *relational model of digital pedagogy*, which is learning that maintains spiritual connections even though it takes place virtually (Greenhow et al., 2020).

Reorientation of Evaluation: From Cognitive Tests to Digital Authentic Assessments

The next theme shows significant changes in learning evaluation practices. Teachers are starting to move away from the dominance of multiple-choice tests towards reflective activity-based assessments. Emerging forms of evaluation include: worship practice videos, digital portfolios, Islamic value reflection projects, online argumentative discussions. Teachers consider that digital evaluations actually provide an opportunity to assess affective aspects and religious practices more authentically than conventional exams. These



findings are consistent with the study of Redecker and Punie (2020) which showed that digital technology enables more personalized and contextual continuous formative assessments. Analytically, this change in evaluation reflects a paradigm shift from assessment of learning to assessment as learning, where evaluation is part of the process of forming the meaning of learning. In the context of PAI, evaluation is no longer just a measure of religious knowledge, but a process of internalizing religious values.

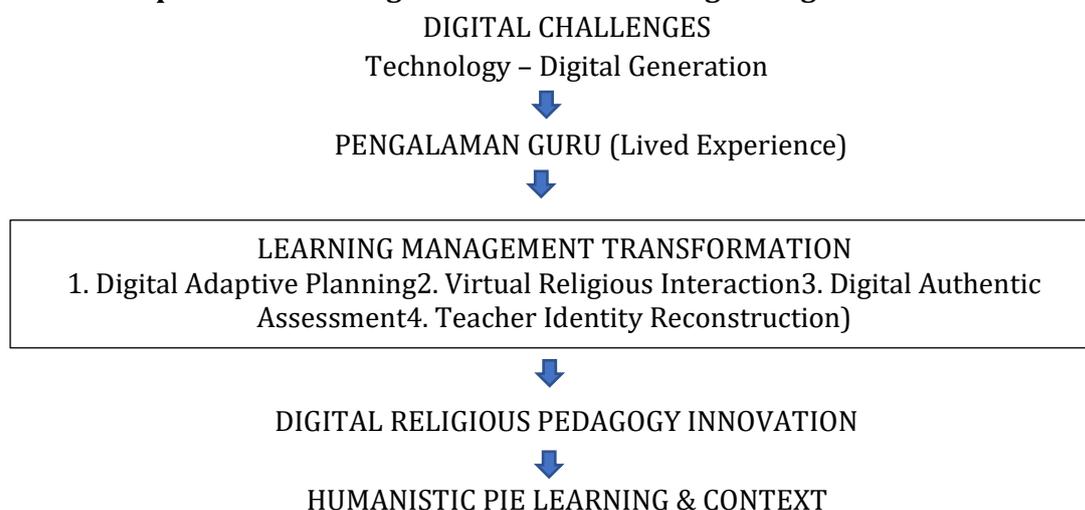
Negotiating Teachers' Professional Identities in the Digital Era

The most profound experience that emerges in the interview is the process of negotiating the teacher's professional identity. Teachers experience phases: initial resistance to technology, practical adaptation, pedagogic reflection, acceptance as digital educators. This transformation shows that learning innovation is not just a technical change, but a change in professional identity. Research by König et al. (2020) explains that teachers' digital adaptation is closely related to pedagogical self-efficacy. Teachers who are able to reflect on experience tend to develop sustainable innovation. In this study, teachers interpret technology not as a threat to religious values, but as a means of expanding the role of education and da'wah. Phenomenologically, the essence of the teacher's experience can be formulated as: *"The transformation from religious educator to digital religious learning experience manager."*

Synthesis of Findings: The Essence of Digital PAI Learning Management Innovation

The integration of the entire theme results in an understanding that digital-based PAI learning management innovations take place through three layers of transformation: Pedagogic Transformation → a change in teaching strategy, Managerial Transformation → learning management change, Existential Transformation → Changing the Meaning of the Teacher Profession. These findings expand the concept of digital learning by including a spiritual dimension as an element of learning management. The following is a conceptual model resulting from the phenomenological synthesis of the research.

Conceptual Model of Digital-Based PAI Learning Management Innovation



This model shows that innovation does not start from technology, but from the reflective experience of teachers in the face of educational changes. This experience triggered a learning management transformation that then resulted in a more adaptive and humanistic digital religious pedagogy. This model is a theoretical contribution to the research because it integrates: learning management, digital pedagogy, values-based Islamic education.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that digital-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning management innovation is a pedagogic transformation process that is multidimensional and rooted in the reflective experience of teachers as the main actors of educational change. Through a phenomenological approach, this study succeeded in identifying the essence of teachers' experiences in dealing with the digitalization of learning, which is not only related to the use of technology, but also involves the reconstruction of the meaning of professions, pedagogic strategies, and the practice of internalizing religious values in virtual learning spaces. The findings of the study show that digital-based PAI learning management innovation takes place through four main forms of transformation, namely: (1) reconstruction of learning planning from administrative orientation to adaptive digital learning experience design, (2) transformation of religious interaction through the development of a dialogical and reflective virtual spiritual space, (3) reorientation of learning evaluation towards technology-based authentic assessments that emphasize process internalization of values, and (4) negotiation of teachers' professional identities in adjusting their role as religious educators in the digital era.

Conceptually, this study emphasizes that the digitization of PAI learning cannot be understood as a technological change alone, but as a transformation of religious learning management that integrates pedagogical, managerial, and spiritual dimensions simultaneously. The teacher's experience shows that digital technology can actually become a new medium in strengthening Islamic values if managed through a humanistic and reflective pedagogical approach. Thus, digital-based learning innovations do not reduce the substance of religious education, but open up new opportunities for the development of learning practices that are more contextual and relevant to the characteristics of the digital generation. The theoretical contribution of this research lies in the development of the concept of digital religious learning management, which is a framework of understanding that integrates digital pedagogy with value education in the context of Islamic Religious Education. The resulting conceptual model shows that teachers' life experiences are a key factor that mediates technological transformation into meaningful pedagogical innovation.

Practically, the results of this study imply that strengthening the digital competence of PAI teachers needs to be directed not only to the technical aspects of the use of technology, but also to the ability to design learning, virtual interaction management, and strategies to internalize spiritual values in the digital environment. Therefore, teacher professional development programs need to adopt an integrative approach between digital literacy, reflective pedagogy, and religious character education. However, this study has limitations in the scope of participants that are limited to specific contexts so generalization of the findings needs to be done carefully. Further research is recommended to develop cross-regional comparative studies or use a mixed methods approach to expand the



empirical validity of the resulting digital-based PAI learning management model. Overall, this study emphasizes that the future of Islamic Religious Education in the digital era is not determined by technological sophistication, but by the ability of teachers to interpret and manage technology as a means of religious learning that is humanistic, reflective, and transformative.

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