

INTEGRATING ISLAMIC NARRATIVES INTO DIGITAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

The incorporation of digital platforms in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction offers significant potential for embedding culturally relevant content, especially in settings emphasizing moral education. This study is one of the first to investigate the use of Islamic narratives in digital EFL instruction in South Sumatra, focusing on how junior high school English teachers perceive and utilize these stories to enhance language learning and character development. Employing a qualitative case study methodology with eight teachers from public and Islamic schools, the findings indicate that teachers view Islamic narratives positively as tools for increasing student engagement and internalizing moral values. They effectively employ digital tools such as YouTube and WhatsApp to create culturally responsive instruction. However, challenges persist, including limited infrastructure and insufficient training. The implications of this research highlight the necessity of professional development programs and curriculum designs that integrate Islamic storytelling into EFL pedagogy. By contributing to the global discourse on culturally responsive pedagogy, this study emphasizes the importance of teacher digital literacy and localized content adaptation in diverse educational contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

The integration of digital platforms in English language education has significantly transformed pedagogical approaches, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Tools such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Google Meet have made instruction more interactive, flexible, and culturally responsive. Furthermore, the growing emphasis on digital literacy among 21st-century educators highlights its necessity, particularly in regions characterized by diverse cultural and religious values (Er, 2024; Masitoh et al., 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated the adoption of these platforms, revealing their pedagogical potential alongside challenges related to equitable implementation.

In this evolving landscape, the incorporation of local narratives, especially Islamic stories, into language teaching has gained prominence as a means to bolster character education and moral development. Research indicates that Islamic storytelling not only enhances

linguistic competence but also fosters the internalization of ethical values such as honesty and compassion (Thoyib et al., 2023; Roslaini et al., 2023). Delivered via digital media, these narratives contextualize language learning and promote richer cultural engagement. A systematic review of Islamic-based materials in EFL classrooms points to a promising intersection between culturally responsive pedagogy and digital innovation (Sidqurrahman, 2024).

However, prevailing studies tend either to focus on general storytelling techniques or explore digital tools in isolation, thus creating a research gap concerning meaningful integration of Islamic narratives into EFL curricula. This integration is particularly pertinent to Indonesia, where Islamic values are embedded in the national curriculum, and moral education is emphasized. The blending of digital platforms such as YouTube and WhatsApp with Islamic narratives offers significant potential for enhancing both language comprehension and character formation. While research suggests that these digital tools enrich the learning experience (Kriswinahyu & Kastuhandani, 2024; Fauziah & Novita, 2023), few studies examine how EFL teachers practically combine these elements in real classroom settings.

A second critical gap concerns the geographical focus of existing studies, which predominantly examine urban or Islamic-school contexts. Research rarely documents the experiences and perspectives of teachers in non-urban regions such as South Sumatra, where access to digital resources, digital literacy levels, and contextual challenges may differ substantially. As noted by Muslimin (2023) and Dia (2024), teacher proficiency and infrastructure are key determinants of successful digital pedagogy, yet little is known about how these factors influence the implementation of digital Islamic storytelling in less-represented areas. Although prior studies highlight the benefits of digital storytelling for engagement, identity reflection, and linguistic development (Ridwan et al., 2024; Rahayu et al., 2023; Asnas, 2024; Sahril et al., 2023; Dewi et al., 2023), their application in non-urban junior high school EFL contexts remains underexplored.

Therefore, this study explicitly addresses these gaps by examining how underrepresented teachers in non-urban South Sumatra perceive and implement digital platforms for teaching Islamic narratives. This approach extends previous research by foregrounding teacher voices seldom included in existing literature and by analyzing the convergence of digital pedagogy and culturally grounded Islamic storytelling within authentic EFL classroom settings.

To address these issues, the study investigates the perceptions and practices of English teachers in South Sumatra regarding the use of digital platforms for teaching Islamic narratives in junior high school contexts. The research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of English teachers concerning the implementation of digital platforms for teaching Islamic stories in junior high school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms?
2. In what ways do English teachers incorporate digital platforms into their instructional practices while teaching Islamic narratives?
3. What perceived benefits and challenges do English teachers associate with the use of digital platforms for the instruction of Islamic stories?
4. Which specific digital tools or resources do English teachers favor for delivering Islamic narratives, and what contextual factors influence their preferences?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study design to explore English teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices in the culturally unique context of South Sumatra. This approach is particularly suitable for investigating the lived experiences of educators and understanding the nuances of their instructional choices and challenges. As noted by Creswell

(2014), qualitative case studies allow for in-depth exploration, making them ideal for examining complex phenomena within specific settings. Since this study aimed to understand teachers' perceptions, their preferred digital tools, and the challenges they face in their teaching context, the qualitative case study design was the most appropriate choice.

The interpretivist paradigm underpins this research, aligning with the subjective nature of teachers' experiences and perceptions. It emphasizes understanding individual and collective meanings, which is crucial for examining how educators integrate moral and Islamic narratives in their English language instruction. This alignment strengthens the study's contribution to the field by providing rich, context-specific insights that can inform both theory and practice in multicultural EFL environments

Subject

The participants in this study comprised eight English teachers with over five years of teaching experience, selected from six junior high schools in South Sumatra, including both public (*negeri*) and Islamic-based private (*swasta Islam*) institutions. This selection was made using purposive sampling to ensure that educators with relevant pedagogical expertise in integrating Islamic narratives into English instruction were included.

The choice of participants is crucial for addressing the research gap, as teachers from South Sumatra are often underrepresented in EFL literature. By combining educators from both public and Islamic schools, the study aims to provide a richer understanding of how digital storytelling is employed across diverse institutional contexts. Teachers with more than five years of experience were deliberately chosen for their professional maturity, enabling them to offer insightful reflections on their pedagogical practices. This focus enhances the study's credibility and transferability, contributing to broader discussions in the field of EFL education that extend beyond local contexts.

Instruments

Data collection for this study utilized a triangulated qualitative approach, incorporating semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and classroom observations to investigate the perceptions and practices of English teachers regarding the integration of digital tools in teaching Islamic narratives. The semi-structured interviews served as the primary instrument, conducted face-to-face and lasting between 30 to 60 minutes. A structured protocol was employed to ensure consistency while allowing respondents the opportunity to express their individual teaching philosophies and experiences. Document analysis included a thorough review of teaching materials such as lesson plans, digital media artifacts, including videos and PowerPoint presentations, and worksheets. This analysis aimed to shed light on the pedagogical frameworks surrounding Islamic narratives and the selection processes for digital tools in instructional contexts. Classroom observations were conducted to capture real-time teaching practices. Each teacher was observed two to three times, with each session lasting 45–60 minutes, focusing on teacher–student interaction, media integration, student engagement, and the moral values highlighted during instruction. These details enhance the methodological rigor of the study.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. The analysis involved coding the data to identify patterns and generate themes that reflected teachers' experiences and practices. The coding process was conducted manually, allowing for close reading and comparison across participant transcripts, which facilitated the development of meaningful categories based on recurring patterns.

To enhance the study's credibility and trustworthiness, several strategies were employed. Member checking allowed participants to verify the accuracy of their transcripts and ensure

that their perspectives were accurately represented. Peer debriefing included independent researchers who assessed the coding and thematic development, helping to refine themes and mitigate researcher bias. Furthermore, an audit trail documented coding decisions and reflections throughout the analysis process.

The methodology was grounded in an interpretivist stance, enabling themes to emerge inductively from the voices of the teachers, thus ensuring that the findings reflect the complexities of their experiences. Ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to, with all participants providing informed consent, their identities anonymized, and data securely stored to maintain confidentiality.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

This section presents findings from semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and classroom observations exploring English teachers' perceptions, practices, and reflections on the use of digital platforms to teach Islamic stories in junior high school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Four central themes emerged: (1) positive perceptions toward digital Islamic storytelling, (2) integration practices within instruction, (3) perceived benefits and challenges, and (4) preferred digital tools and influencing factors. Insights from document analysis and classroom observations are also included to validate and expand on the interview findings.

1. Positive Perceptions Toward Digital Islamic Storytelling

All participating teachers expressed strong positive views regarding the use of digital Islamic narratives as a pedagogical tool in EFL classrooms. They perceived digital storytelling as highly engaging and beneficial for contextual vocabulary acquisition and moral education. For instance, one teacher commented, "When I use a story about honesty from Islamic history, students pay more attention. They also learn new words more naturally." (T1). Another teacher similarly emphasized the moral and linguistic synergy, noting that students "enjoy stories from our culture, and it helps them reflect while learning English." (T5).

These responses highlight that teachers value the ability of digital Islamic stories to connect learning with students' cultural and religious identities, thereby increasing motivation and deepening comprehension.

2. Integration Practices of Digital Storytelling

Teachers reported multiple strategies for integrating digital storytelling into instructional activities. A commonly described approach reflected principles of the flipped classroom, where students engage with narrative content before class. As one teacher explained, "I usually send a story video via WhatsApp before class. Then, in class, students retell it using English sentences." (T4). Another teacher shared the use of digital slides, stating, "I use Canva to present the story and highlight vocabulary, then students discuss it in groups." (T6).

These practices reveal intentional pedagogical planning, where teachers align storytelling with targeted language skills such as speaking, reading comprehension, and vocabulary building. Observational data supported this, showing students actively retelling stories using visual prompts and participating in guided discussions. Such integration demonstrates teacher agency and adaptability in merging digital tools with culturally grounded instructional content.

3. Perceived Benefits and Challenges

Teachers identified several benefits associated with digital storytelling, particularly increased student confidence, motivation, and oral fluency. As one teacher expressed, "Students are more confident when they retell a story they already know from their culture."

(T5). Stories featuring familiar Islamic figures or values reportedly enhanced students' willingness to speak and contribute.

Despite the benefits, teachers also experienced significant challenges. These included limited access to suitable Islamic stories in simplified English, inconsistent internet connectivity, especially in rural schools, and a lack of professional training in digital material development. For example, one teacher noted, "Sometimes I have to create the material myself because I can't find Islamic stories in simple English." (T2). This difficulty was reinforced during observations, where teachers occasionally reverted to printed visuals when internet access failed.

These challenges highlight the need for institutional support in developing culturally appropriate digital resources and improving technological infrastructure.

4. Preferred Digital Tools and Influencing Factors

Teachers reported clear preferences for certain digital tools based on usability, accessibility, and religious appropriateness. Canva was valued for visually appealing content creation, with one teacher explaining, "Canva helps me make stories look interesting, and it's easy to adjust the language level." (T6). YouTube was widely used due to its abundant digital storytelling content, though teachers exercised caution in selecting materials. As one teacher noted, "YouTube is useful, but we must choose carefully to match our values." (T3). WhatsApp was preferred for distributing pre-class materials, especially in contexts with weak internet bandwidth.

These findings illustrate that digital tool selection extends beyond technical preferences to reflect moral, cultural, and contextual considerations, demonstrating teacher agency in navigating resource constraints responsibly.

Insights from Document Analysis

Document analysis of lesson plans, Canva presentations, worksheets, and student assignments confirmed that digital storytelling was systematically embedded into instructional design. Most lesson plans integrated both linguistic objectives (e.g., vocabulary development, reading comprehension, speaking skills) and moral objectives based on Islamic values such as honesty, empathy, and patience. Lessons typically followed a structured three-stage sequence: (1) digital story input through video or slide presentations, (2) vocabulary or comprehension activities, and (3) student response tasks such as retelling or reflective writing. Many materials were self-developed by teachers, demonstrating creativity and curriculum innovation in the absence of suitable commercial resources.

Insights from Classroom Observations

Classroom observations further reinforced the interview and document findings. Teachers frequently used Canva slides and short video clips to introduce stories about Islamic figures such as Prophet Yusuf and Prophet Muhammad, which served as a basis for vocabulary introduction and classroom discussion. Students showed strong engagement and active participation, particularly during retelling activities using image sequences and key vocabulary. In several sessions, students related moral themes to personal experiences, revealing reflective and communicative language use.

Technical barriers such as unstable internet or inadequate audio systems occasionally disrupt lessons, prompting teachers to switch to offline or printed materials. These adjustments illustrated teachers' adaptability and persistence in maintaining lesson continuity.

Discussion

This study investigates how junior high school English teachers in South Sumatra perceive and integrate digital platforms for teaching Islamic stories, revealing four interconnected themes: teachers' perceptions, their integration practices, the benefits and challenges encountered, and the digital tools they prefer to use.

In general, the teachers expressed positive perceptions toward digital Islamic storytelling, recognizing its pedagogical value in supporting culturally meaningful learning. Their perspectives align with culturally responsive pedagogy, which emphasizes that culturally relevant materials enhance both emotional connection and cognitive engagement among students (Thoyib et al., 2023; Roslaini et al., 2023). These views also resonate with multiliteracy theory, positioning digital storytelling as an identity-affirming practice that broadens students' interpretive and expressive abilities (Sabari & Hashim, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024). Thus, the teachers' positive perceptions extend beyond general enthusiasm, demonstrating an awareness of how culture-mediated digital texts contribute to meaningful language learning. These perceptions ultimately shaped their classroom approaches and influenced their selection and implementation of digital tools.

In practice, teachers employed varied strategies to integrate digital storytelling within their EFL instruction, illustrating developing digital literacy and alignment with constructivist and TPACK-based frameworks. They utilized both curated online materials and original teacher-created content to maintain cultural relevance while leveraging multimodal features of digital platforms, an approach consistent with Saili and Taat (2023). The use of imagery, audio, and video to increase comprehension and engagement supports earlier research that emphasizes the benefits of multimodal instruction in EFL classrooms (Dewi et al., 2023; Khasanah et al., 2023). These integration practices reflect teachers' efforts to operationalize the intersection of technology, pedagogy, and culturally grounded narratives.

The findings also highlight substantial benefits associated with digital storytelling, including enhanced vocabulary development, increased speaking confidence, and elevated student participation. These outcomes parallel research showing digital storytelling's ability to create enjoyable, motivating learning environments (Jwair, 2023) and demonstrate strong positive effects on engagement and learning motivation (Phan et al., 2024; Sahril et al., 2023). Dewi et al. (2023) further frame these benefits within multiliteracy development, demonstrating that digital storytelling fosters both linguistic proficiency and digital skill-building. Nevertheless, teachers encountered notable challenges, particularly restricted internet access and the heavy preparation burden of producing digital materials. Such obstacles are common in Islamic educational settings where infrastructural limitations hinder technology implementation (Sahril et al., 2023; Vice et al., 2023). These constraints underscore broader issues of digital inequality and highlight the urgent need for institutional support and professional development (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Teachers expressed a preference for practical and accessible platforms such as Canva, YouTube, and WhatsApp. These tools were selected for their ease of use and adaptability to Islamic educational contexts. Canva, for example, is widely recognized for its ability to support the creation of visually engaging Islamic learning materials (Nabillah & Tanjung, 2023). Meanwhile, teachers used YouTube selectively to ensure cultural and religious appropriateness (Dewi et al., 2023). The integration of such tools has been shown to enhance pedagogical competence while maintaining traditional values (Wicagsono et al., 2023; Huda et al., 2024; Ali et al., 2024). Additionally, digital platforms support students' ethical engagement with media aligned with Islamic principles (Hyangsewu et al., 2024).

These findings carry significant implications for teacher training and policy development. Teacher education systems should embed culturally responsive digital storytelling within both pre-service and in-service training programs. Preparing teachers to meaningfully engage with diverse learners strengthens cognitive, emotional, and identity development (Pedroso et al.,

2023; Levine & Tamburrino, 2024). Finn (2023) further emphasizes that such preparation must include practical implementation models. Given the technological demands of digital storytelling, continuous professional development is essential to enhance digital proficiency (Ismail, 2023) and to address ongoing infrastructural disparities, particularly in rural or semi-rural regions (Dancsa et al., 2023). Recommended initiatives include structured modules for transforming Islamic narratives into multimodal materials, low-bandwidth workshops on Canva, YouTube, and WhatsApp, and micro-teaching laboratories focused on culturally rooted digital storytelling.

By foregrounding the voices of teachers in South Sumatra, an underrepresented region, this study contributes to the broader literature on culturally grounded digital pedagogy. As Asmawati and Asmara (2023) suggest, future research should explore student perspectives and employ longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches to better understand the long-term linguistic and moral impacts of digital storytelling. Such research can deepen theoretical insights into how cultural narratives shape digital learning experiences across varied educational settings.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that teachers perceive digital Islamic storytelling as both pedagogically valuable and culturally meaningful within junior high school EFL classrooms in South Sumatra. Their integration practices reveal an emerging alignment with culturally responsive pedagogy, though structural and digital literacy-related barriers remain evident. The implications of this study suggest a need for curriculum designers and policymakers to more deliberately embed cultural relevance and digital competence within teacher education frameworks. Future research should include cross-regional comparisons, student-centered inquiries, and longitudinal investigations to capture the sustained effects of digital storytelling on linguistic and moral development. To maximize pedagogical impact, professional development programs must advance teachers' digital literacy, equip them with design principles for culturally grounded digital materials, and provide ongoing mentoring supported by adequate technological infrastructure. Such efforts are vital to cultivating equitable, culturally sustaining, and technologically robust EFL learning environments.

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