

AI IN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL: STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in an Islamic boarding school setting, specifically focusing on students' perceptions and experiences. The study was conducted at Amanatul Ummah Islamic Boarding School, a prominent institution known for its commitment to quality education grounded in Islamic values. The primary aim of this research is to understand how junior high school students perceive the role of AI in enhancing their English language learning experience. In recent years, AI has emerged as a transformative force in education, offering innovative tools and resources that can enhance teaching and learning processes. However, the unique environment of Islamic boarding schools, characterized by their adherence to traditional educational values and practices, presents both opportunities and challenges for the integration of AI technologies. To achieve the research objectives, a descriptive qualitative approach was utilized. Data was collected through systematic observation and comprehensive documentation of the educational practices within the school. The participants of the study included junior high school students, whose insights were pivotal in understanding the impact of AI on their learning journey. The findings of the research reveal a nuanced perspective among students regarding the use of AI in their English education. While many students recognize AI as a valuable tool that can facilitate learning, they also encounter significant challenges in adapting to this new technology. Notably, students expressed concerns about balancing traditional learning methods, such as direct teacher instruction and peer collaboration, with AI-driven approaches that may prioritize efficiency over interpersonal interactions. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for a tailored implementation of AI tools that align with the educational philosophy of Islamic institutions. It emphasizes the importance of integrating AI in a manner that respects and upholds the values of Islamic education while also addressing the diverse learning needs of students. In conclusion, this research suggests that the thoughtful integration of AI into English teaching within Islamic boarding schools has the potential to enhance the educational experience significantly. However, it underscores the necessity for ongoing support and training for both students and educators to navigate the complexities of this integration effectively. By fostering a harmonious balance between traditional methods and innovative technologies, Islamic boarding schools can prepare

students for the demands of the modern world while remaining rooted in their educational principles.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Islamic Boarding School Education

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a revolutionary force within various sectors, with education being one of the most affected. AI tools and systems have been integrated into educational contexts worldwide, fundamentally transforming traditional teaching methodologies and learning experiences. The versatility of AI enables it to support personalized learning, provide real-time feedback, and foster engaging and interactive learning environments, especially in language acquisition (Baskara, 2023; Mabuan, 2024; Saadati et al., 2023; Setiamunadi, 2023). As a global language, English has benefited particularly from AI-enabled resources such as language translation tools, speech recognition, and adaptive learning platforms. For students, especially those from non-native English-speaking backgrounds, these technologies offer a valuable means to overcome language barriers and enhance their proficiency.

However, integrating AI into the educational system is not without challenges, especially in environments rooted in traditional values, such as Islamic boarding schools. These institutions, which emphasize moral and spiritual education alongside academic learning, present a unique setting where AI integration requires careful consideration (Firdaus et al., 2024; Huda, 2024; Islamic et al., 2024; Safinah et al., 2024; Saumantri et al., 2024). In such schools, the educational philosophy prioritizes interpersonal interactions, respect for teachers, and community learning—elements that are not always emphasized in AI-based learning. Thus, while AI offers substantial benefits, its adoption in Islamic educational settings demands a balanced approach that respects these traditional values and ensures that technology enhances rather than disrupts the educational experience.

The Islamic boarding school, or *pesantren*, system holds a central role in Indonesia's education landscape. Historically, *pesantren* have been the custodians of religious and cultural education, emphasizing character building and discipline (Asyari et al., 2024; Nurbaeti & Suharyat, 2024; Rozi & Poernamasari, 2024). These institutions have traditionally focused on developing students' spiritual and ethical foundations, which are viewed as equally important as academic achievement. Given this background, integrating modern educational technologies like AI within such a framework raises pertinent questions: How can AI coexist with the traditional values upheld by *pesantren*? Will AI be perceived as a complement to or a replacement for the established, teacher-centered learning model? Addressing these questions is essential, as they have significant implications for the future direction of educational practices within Islamic boarding schools.

The need for this research is underscored by the gap between the rapid development of AI in mainstream educational contexts and the relatively limited exploration of AI's role within Islamic educational institutions. Research into AI's impact on education often focuses on secular settings, where technology adoption is more straightforward due to fewer cultural or philosophical constraints. Conversely, pesantren-based education operates within a context that inherently challenges the notion of purely technology-driven learning. Here, the social and religious norms governing teacher-student relationships, peer interactions, and knowledge acquisition must be respected. For instance, AI-driven applications in language learning can sometimes reduce human interaction, as they prioritize efficiency over interpersonal engagement—a key component of the learning philosophy in pesantren. Therefore, understanding students' perceptions of AI in this unique environment is critical to determining whether AI can effectively support English language acquisition in a way that complements pesantren's traditional values.

This research is pivotal as it addresses a growing need for Islamic boarding schools to evolve while maintaining their identity. As globalization and technological advancement accelerate, there is increasing pressure on these institutions to modernize their curricula and methods. However, modernization does not necessarily mean abandoning traditional practices. Instead, it involves finding a harmonious balance that enables students to benefit from modern educational tools while preserving the values that define Islamic education. This research contributes to that balance by offering a nuanced understanding of how AI can be integrated into English language learning in a way that is both innovative and respectful of tradition. By focusing on junior high school students—who are at a formative stage in their educational journey—this research provides insights into the potential long-term impact of AI on learning experiences within pesantren and sets a foundation for further exploration of culturally aligned AI practices.

METHOD

This research employed a descriptive qualitative method to examine junior high school students' perceptions and experiences with AI in English language learning at Amanatul Ummah Islamic Boarding School. A qualitative approach was chosen for its suitability in capturing the complex social and cultural dynamics within an Islamic boarding school, where traditional educational values and practices strongly influence teaching and learning (Colorafi & Evans, 2016; Lambert & Lambert, 2013; Nassaji, 2015; Seixas et al., 2018). By focusing on students' subjective perspectives, this approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the nuances involved in integrating AI into a traditionally structured learning environment.

The research design centered on a case study of Amanatul Ummah, a well-respected Islamic boarding school known for its commitment to educational quality and adherence to Islamic values. This case study approach enabled a detailed exploration of AI's impact on a specific setting

that reflects the broader characteristics of pesantren-based education. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 36 junior high school students aged 12–15 who had prior exposure to AI-supported English learning tools. This age group was ideal for the research as their language skills and openness to new learning methods positioned them to provide valuable insights into the influence of AI in their education.

Data collection spanned four weeks and utilized three primary instruments: observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation review. Systematic observations were conducted in the classroom to capture real-time interactions between students and AI tools, providing a direct view of their engagement and behavioral responses (Ekka, 2021; Mirhosseini, 2020; Morgan et al., 2017). Semi-structured interviews followed, allowing students to share their personal experiences and opinions in depth, with questions focusing on their perceptions of AI's benefits, challenges, and compatibility with traditional learning values (Al Balushi, 2016; Kakilla, 2021; Mannan, 2019; Rahman, 2019). Each interview lasted 30–40 minutes and was conducted in a private setting to ensure comfort and confidentiality. Additionally, educational documents such as lesson plans and student progress records were reviewed to contextualize students' experiences within the school's curriculum and pedagogical goals (Amiraslani & Dragovich, 2022; Geiger et al., 2018; Shabazian, 2016). The combination of these three instruments enabled a comprehensive understanding of how students interact with AI within their specific cultural and educational context.

The data analysis followed a thematic approach, which was selected to identify and explore recurring themes within the qualitative data. Thematic analysis allowed for the categorization of students' insights into key themes that addressed the research questions, such as perceived benefits of AI, adaptation challenges, and concerns regarding balancing AI with traditional learning methods (Al Muqarshi & Kaparou, 2023; Qorihah & Hertiki, 2024; Tiwari, 2023; X. Zhang & Lütge, 2023; Zizanatin Nur Lailia & Ada Marie Mascarinas, 2023). First, the researcher familiarized himself with the data through repeated readings, which facilitated open coding to capture significant statements and ideas. Codes were then organized into categories that evolved into overarching themes, reflecting students' nuanced responses to AI integration. Key themes included “perceived benefits of AI in language learning,” “adaption challenges,” and “the role of traditional values in technology adoption.” This process ensured a detailed interpretation of students' perspectives while maintaining a coherent narrative grounded in the data.

Through this methodology, the research provided valuable insights into students' attitudes toward AI in an Islamic boarding school context. By analyzing how students perceive the role of AI in their learning, the study highlights the potential of AI to enrich language education while also identifying the need for culturally sensitive implementations. This research thus lays the groundwork for future studies aimed at adapting AI in a manner that respects and complements the values of Islamic educational institutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings from this research reveal a nuanced understanding of students' perceptions and experiences with AI in English language learning within the unique context of Amanatul Ummah Islamic Boarding School. Through a comprehensive thematic analysis, three main themes emerged: the perceived benefits of AI, adaptation challenges within the pesantren environment, and the struggle to balance AI with traditional teacher-centered instruction. These themes highlight both the potential of AI as a supplementary learning tool and the challenges inherent in integrating technology within a setting steeped in traditional Islamic educational values.

One of the most widely shared perspectives among participants was the perceived benefits of AI in enhancing language learning. Many students described AI as an effective tool for expanding vocabulary and practicing pronunciation, areas where they felt AI offered advantages over conventional methods. For instance, one student shared, *"AI helps me to find the meaning of words instantly, and it shows me how to use the words in sentences, which is helpful because I can see real examples."* Another student highlighted the AI's pronunciation feature, saying, *"When I use AI, I don't feel embarrassed about making mistakes. I can try as many times as I need to until I get it right."* Such responses demonstrate how AI can provide students with a personalized learning experience, allowing them to practice independently and repeat exercises until they feel confident.

Another perceived benefit, as shared by some students, was that AI made learning English feel more engaging and less intimidating. One participant noted, *"With AI, it's like having a game where I can test myself and see how much I've improved. It's not as boring as studying with books."* This sentiment suggests that AI's interactive elements may increase motivation among students, particularly for those who might otherwise struggle with the traditional approach to language learning. However, while these positive effects were frequently mentioned, students also pointed out challenges related to their experience with AI, particularly in the context of a pesantren.

The adaptation challenges faced by students when using AI were deeply connected to the pesantren's cultural and educational environment. Many students expressed difficulty in reconciling the self-guided nature of AI with the pesantren's emphasis on communal learning, teacher guidance, and interpersonal relationships. For instance, one student commented, *"AI feels like I'm learning by myself, and that's very different from how we usually learn here, where the teacher and classmates are always involved."* Another student added, *"When I use AI, I miss the chance to ask questions right away and get answers from my teacher."* These responses reflect a collective sentiment that AI, while useful, lacks the immediate human interaction that students have come to rely on within their educational context.

Furthermore, students voiced concerns about how AI might impact their ability to learn in a way that aligns with Islamic values. One student explained, *“In our pesantren, we are taught to learn from our teachers because they have wisdom and knowledge that we don’t get from machines. With AI, I feel like some of that guidance is missing.”* This concern about the “disconnect” between AI and traditional educational values was common, suggesting that while students see the value in AI’s capabilities, they feel it is essential that its use aligns with the principles and cultural practices of the pesantren.

A third key theme was students’ concerns over balancing AI and teacher-led instruction, with many students articulating a strong preference for having teachers remain central to their learning experience. Students recognized the role of AI as a supplementary tool but repeatedly emphasized that it could not replace the guidance and support provided by teachers. One student expressed, *“My teacher knows exactly what I need help with, and they give advice in a way that AI cannot. It’s different when I can directly ask questions and get feedback from a person.”* Another student stated, *“AI is useful for practice, but when it comes to understanding difficult parts, I still rely on my teacher’s explanation.”* These statements underline the importance of interpersonal interaction in students’ learning, which they feel cannot be fully replicated by technology.

Some students also discussed how AI’s efficiency-oriented approach sometimes felt misaligned with the pesantren’s emphasis on deep understanding and thorough comprehension. A participant remarked, *“With AI, it sometimes feels like we are being rushed to get answers quickly, but in our school, we are taught to take our time and make sure we understand.”* This response suggests a possible cultural conflict between the fast-paced, efficiency-driven design of AI tools and the slower, reflective approach encouraged within pesantren education.

In contrast, students who initially felt insecure about their language abilities appreciated AI as a non-judgmental learning companion. One student who struggled with speaking English noted, *“When I use AI, I don’t feel shy because no one is watching. I can practice until I feel more confident to speak in front of my friends.”* This benefit was particularly noted by students who needed extra time to build confidence before participating in group activities. The AI provided these students with a “safe space” for practice, which they found helpful in preparing for more public, teacher-led sessions.

Overall, the findings indicate that while AI integration offers promising opportunities for enhancing language skills, it must be thoughtfully adapted to fit the pesantren’s educational framework. Several students suggested that AI could be more effective if it were integrated in collaboration with teachers, allowing them to retain the guiding role that students highly value. One student proposed, *“If our teachers used AI with us in class, we could ask questions and discuss what we’re learning. That way, AI would be like a tool, not a replacement for our teachers.”* This suggestion points toward a possible model of “blended learning” where

teachers and AI work in tandem, respecting both the technological benefits and the cultural values central to Islamic education.

The research findings reveal a complex, multifaceted view of AI integration within the pesantren context. Students see significant value in the practical benefits that AI offers, particularly for vocabulary building and pronunciation practice. However, they also face challenges in adapting to the independent nature of AI-driven learning, which contrasts with the collaborative and teacher-centered model they are accustomed to. These insights underscore the need for a balanced approach that maintains the integrity of traditional values while harnessing AI's potential as a supplementary resource. By incorporating teachers into the AI implementation process, pesantren can leverage technology in ways that enhance language learning without compromising their educational philosophy.

Discussion

This research offers a unique perspective on integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) in English language teaching (ELT) within an Islamic boarding school, or pesantren, setting. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on students' perceptions and experiences in a culturally and religiously unique environment, a context that has not been extensively explored in the existing AI and ELT literature. While previous studies have highlighted AI's potential in enhancing language acquisition through adaptive learning tools and personalized feedback, few have examined these advantages within an educational system (Krajka & Olszak, 2024; "Leveraging AI for Vocabulary Acquisition and Pronunciation Enhancement," 2024; Omar et al., 2024; Punar Özçelik & Yangın Ekşi, 2024; Wei-Xun & Jia-Ying, 2024; C. Zhang et al., 2024). By investigating how AI integration aligns—or conflicts—with pesantren norms, this research expands our understanding of AI's adaptability across diverse educational landscapes.

This study also contributes to existing theories of language learning and technology integration by highlighting the potential cultural challenges AI may face in traditional educational settings. Many of the literature on AI in ELT emphasizes efficiency and individualized learning (Himeur et al., 2024; Jiménez-García et al., 2024; Sallu et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2024; Zou, 2024). This research reveals a contrasting view. Students at Amanatul Ummah appreciated AI for practice and skill-building but expressed a strong preference for teacher-guided, collaborative learning. These findings challenge mainstream perspectives, such as those seen in constructivist theories that prioritize learner autonomy. In the pesantren context, students place high value on interpersonal interaction and community-based learning, suggesting that AI-based ELT practices may require adaptation to align with students' expectations of teacher involvement and peer interaction.

Additionally, this research fills a gap in understanding the balance required between traditional teaching methods and AI-driven approaches in culturally specific contexts. Findings indicate that students experience a

sense of dissonance when AI learning tools are perceived to be at odds with their school's philosophical emphasis on teacher-led guidance. These insights suggest that integrating AI in pesantren education should involve a blended learning approach that retains core elements of traditional pedagogy, such as teacher feedback and collaborative exercises. This blended model offers a potential framework for implementing AI in other culturally conservative educational environments where technology might otherwise be met with hesitation.

In terms of theoretical impact, this research calls for an expansion of existing models of technology integration in ELT to include cultural and religious dimensions. A culturally inclusive model could help educators anticipate potential conflicts between AI-driven learning and the communal, interpersonal values central to Islamic boarding schools. Such adaptations are essential for ensuring that technology aligns with students' cultural and religious needs, fostering both engagement and respect for traditional values.

Practically, this research underscores the need for educators and policymakers to approach AI integration with cultural sensitivity, particularly within religiously grounded institutions. For ELT practitioners, this study suggests that AI can be highly beneficial as a supplementary tool for language practice, especially for vocabulary and pronunciation. However, teachers should remain actively involved to address complex aspects of language learning and ensure alignment with students' values and expectations. Schools could consider adopting a co-facilitated model where teachers integrate AI alongside traditional teaching methods, enabling students to benefit from both the efficiency of AI and the relational aspects of human interaction.

This research emphasizes that for AI to be effective in Islamic educational settings, it must be implemented thoughtfully, respecting the institution's cultural framework. By bridging traditional teaching with AI innovations, pesantren can utilize technology to enhance language learning outcomes without compromising their educational principles. This approach holds promise not only for pesantren but also for other educational institutions worldwide that seek to balance technological progress with cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

This research has explored the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in English language teaching (ELT) at Amanatul Ummah Islamic Boarding School, focusing on the perceptions and experiences of junior high school students. The findings highlight both the potential benefits, and the challenges associated with using AI as a supplementary learning tool within a traditional educational framework. Overall, the study underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity in the integration of technology in educational practices, especially in settings deeply rooted in Islamic values.

The research revealed that students perceive AI as a valuable resource for enhancing their English language skills, particularly in

vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation practice. Many students appreciated the personalized and non-judgmental nature of AI, which allowed them to practice independently at their own pace. However, despite these advantages, students also expressed concerns regarding the disconnection between AI-driven learning and the collaborative, teacher-centered approach they value in their education. This disconnect raises critical questions about the effectiveness of AI in promoting meaningful language learning in culturally specific contexts.

Moreover, the study found that students face adaptation challenges when integrating AI into their learning environment. The traditional pedagogical methods prevalent in pesantren education emphasize direct interaction with teachers and peers, fostering a communal learning atmosphere. As such, while students recognized the efficiency of AI, they felt that the technology could not fully replace the guidance and support provided by their teachers. This highlights the necessity for a blended learning model that harmoniously combines AI tools with traditional teaching practices, ensuring that the integration of technology does not compromise the core values of Islamic education.

The implications of this research extend to both theory and practice. The findings contribute to existing literature by illustrating the need to consider cultural dimensions when implementing technology in education. Additionally, this research offers a framework for educators to develop AI integration strategies that respect and uphold traditional educational principles while leveraging the benefits of technology.

The thoughtful integration of AI in English language teaching within Islamic boarding schools can significantly enhance the educational experience for students. However, this requires ongoing collaboration between educators and technology to create an inclusive learning environment that balances innovative practices with established values. By fostering such a balance, pesantren can effectively prepare students for the demands of modern language learning while remaining true to their educational philosophy. The insights garnered from this research provide a foundational understanding for future inquiries into technology integration in similar cultural contexts, emphasizing the importance of aligning educational practices with the cultural and religious frameworks of the institutions involved.

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