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ETHNO-DIGITAL BLENDED LEARNING FOR STRENGTHENING TOLERANCE IN ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY IN SOUTH SUMATRA

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ABSTRAK

Pendidikan di era Revolusi Industri 4.0 dan Society 5.0 menghadapi tantangan signifikan terkait penguatan karakter generasi muda yang toleran dan mampu menghargai keberagaman sosial dan budaya. Perkembangan teknologi menuntut inovasi pembelajaran yang tidak hanya berfokus pada kompetensi akademik, tetapi juga pada pembentukan nilai-nilai toleransi dan kemampuan hidup dalam masyarakat multikultural. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi blended learning berbantuan media digital yang diperkaya dengan konten ETNO sebagai strategi mitigasi intoleransi di perguruan tinggi di Sumatera Selatan. Pendekatan mixed methods sequential exploratory digunakan untuk memperoleh pemahaman yang komprehensif. Data kualitatif dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan analisis dokumen, kemudian diperkuat dengan data kuantitatif melalui kuesioner yang diolah menggunakan teknik statistik. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa integrasi budaya lokal dalam pembelajaran digital dapat meningkatkan empati mahasiswa, mengurangi prasangka, serta memperkuat dialog antarbudaya di kampus. Hasil kuantitatif juga menunjukkan adanyahubungan yang signifikan antara model blended learning dengan tingkat toleransi mahasiswa dengan nilai korelasi r = 0,72. Penelitian ini memberikan rekomendasi strategis, di antaranya penguatan kurikulum berbasis budaya, peningkatan kapasitas dosen dalam pemanfaatan teknologi digital, serta pengembangan kegiatan kolaboratif lintas etnis. Kontribusi penelitian ini diharapkan dapat mendukung terwujudnya pendidikan tinggi yang inklusif, humanis, dan berkarakter di Indonesia.

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Keywords:
Blended Learning, Ethnic Content, Intolerance Mitigation, Higher Education, South Sumatra

ABSTRACTS
Education in the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0 faces significant challenges related to strengthening the character of a tolerant young generation capable of appreciating social and cultural diversity. Technological developments demand learning innovations that focus not only on academic competencies but also on the formation of tolerance values and the ability to live in a multicultural society. This study aims to analyze the implementation of blended learning assisted by digital media enriched with ETHNO content as a strategy to mitigate intolerance in universities in South Sumatra. A sequential exploratory mixed methods approach was used to gain a comprehensive understanding. Qualitative data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis, then reinforced with quantitative data through questionnaires processed using statistical techniques. The findings indicate that the integration of local culture in digital learning can increase student empathy, reduce prejudice, and strengthen intercultural dialogue on campus. The quantitative results also show a significant relationship between the blended learning model and student tolerance levels with a correlation value of r = 0.72. This study provides strategic recommendations, including strengthening culture-based curricula, increasing lecturers' capacity in utilizing digital technology, and developing cross-ethnic collaborative activities. The contribution of this research is expected to support the realization of inclusive, humanistic, and character-based higher education in Indonesia.

A. INTRODUCTION

This global development marks a major shift towards the era of Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0, where digital technology, artificial intelligence, and global connectivity are reshaping all aspects of human life, including the education system. Education is no longer merely oriented towards knowledge transfer, but also towards strengthening character, critical thinking skills, collaboration, and digital literacy that is adaptive to social and technological change. According to Schwab, the fourth industrial revolution demands an education system capable of producing human resources with creative, adaptive, and innovative competencies. In line with this (Schwab, 2018), UNESCO emphasizes that 21st-century education must prepare individuals to coexist harmoniously within a diversity of cultures and worldviews (UNESCO, 2021).

While global digital transformation presents significant opportunities for education, it also creates a paradox: increased access to information does not always equate to increased social and moral literacy. This raises new challenges in the form of social polarization and identity-based intolerance. Banks believes that increasing exclusivism in social spaces, including academic environments, is a

indicators of the crisis of human values in modern education (Banks, 2020). Therefore, today's education is not only required to be adaptive to digital innovation, but must also be a space for the formation of social awareness, empathy, and cross-cultural human values.

Intolerance in Indonesia remains a serious issue that demands attention from the educational sector. The Setara Institute has noted an increase in cases of intolerance in higher education, particularly those related to discrimination based on religion and

ideology. Higher education, however, should serve as a center for national character formation and the affirmation of the values of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (Unity in Diversity). Azra emphasized that multicultural education is a crucial foundation for fostering awareness of plurality and social solidarity, particularly among students (Azra, 2020). Similarly, Tilaar emphasized that education must play a role in internalizing tolerant national values through contextual and reflective approaches (Tilaar, 2019).

Similar phenomena have been found in other multicultural countries such as Malaysia and Canada, where higher education faces the challenge of balancing digital innovation with strengthening multicultural values (Ahmad & Krishnan, 2022). This demonstrates that intolerance in the digital age is a global issue that demands a new pedagogical approach based on universal human values.

South Sumatra is a region with a high level of ethnic and cultural diversity, including Malay, Ogan, Komering, and Lematang, who live side by side with immigrant communities from various regions. This socio-cultural environment presents significant potential for the development of education based on local wisdom. However, initial observations at several universities indicate that learning still focuses on cognitive academic achievement, while paying little attention to students' social and cultural dimensions (Putra & Ismail, 2021). In fact, in several cases, friction between student groups due to differences in cultural and religious backgrounds remains. This fact highlights the urgent need for learning models that integrate local values into modern learning systems.

According to data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), there are more than 50 universities in South Sumatra with approximately 180,000 students from various ethnicities and religions. The digitalization of learning has increased significantly post-pandemic; however, most lecturers still use online models that are primarily instructional and have not integrated character values or local wisdom (Kemenag, 2024). A recent survey showed that only 32% of lecturers in Indonesia combine digital learning with values education or local content (Kemenag, 2024). This indicates the limited practice of digital pedagogy oriented towards building social awareness and intercultural tolerance.

One potential innovative approach is blended learning, a combination of face-to-face and online learning based on digital technology. According to Garrison and Vaughan, blended learning can increase interactivity, flexibility, and expand students' reflective space (Garrison and Vaughan, 2020). From the perspective of connectivism theory, Siemens explains that digital network-based learning enables cross-cultural collaboration and the enrichment of perspectives through online interactions. Furthermore, digital media is not merely an instructional tool but also a social space where students interact, engage in dialogue, and build collective awareness. Research by Chen, Huang, and Liu found that the use of digital media in learning can improve critical thinking skills, social literacy, and empathy for diversity (Chen, Huang, and Liu, 2022).

In the context of local values, the concept of ETHNOpedagogy refers to an educational approach that instills local values, norms, and wisdom in the learning process. According to Sutarto and Dardiri, it emphasizes the importance of integrating cultural values into education to shape students' character (Sutarto and Dardiri, 2020). In South Sumatra, cultural values such as mutual cooperation, deliberation, and a spirit

of togetherness reflect social characteristics that can be adapted to collaborative, project-based learning.

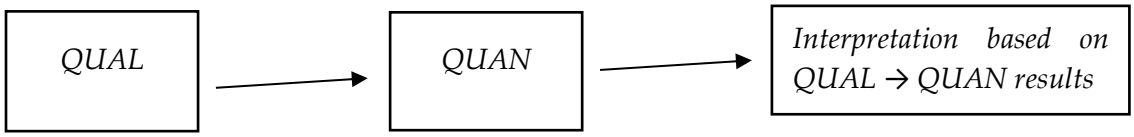
Previous research has highlighted the effectiveness of blended learning in improving learning outcomes. Research by Rahmawati, Lestari, and Nugroho found that blended learning can improve students' cognitive and motivational outcomes, but has not yet addressed affective and social aspects (Rahmawati, Lestari, and Nugroho, 2023). Meanwhile, research by Putra and Ismail highlights the importance of integrating local values into the curriculum but does not link it to the use of digital media (Putra and Ismail, 2021). On the other hand, Chen emphasizes the benefits of digital media for enhancing social interaction, considering local cultural dimensions (Chen et al., 2022). These studies demonstrate that the research gap is not only thematic, namely the lack of integration between blended learning, digital media, and ETHNO content, but also paradigmatic, namely the lack of a pedagogical approach that positions local wisdom as the foundation for character formation in the context of digital education. Therefore, this study proposes an ETHNO-digital pedagogy approach, a learning innovation that combines technological principles, socio-cultural values, and character education. This approach is expected to strengthen the values of tolerance, empathy, and social cohesion in the university environment, especially in South Sumatra.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of a conceptual model of blended learning based on ETHNO-digital pedagogy that emphasizes a balance between cognitive, affective, and social dimensions. Practically, this research is expected to produce an applicable learning model for universities in South Sumatra that is effective in increasing student engagement and instilling values of tolerance through digital media. Meanwhile, in terms of policy, the results of this research can form the basis for formulating strategies to strengthen character education based on technology and local wisdom in Indonesian higher education environments. Finally, this research seeks to reaffirm the function of higher education as a locus for the formation of a complete humanity that is not only digitally intelligent, but also empathetic, moderate, and has national character. Through the synergy between blended learning, digital media, and ETHNO content, it is hoped that a learning ecosystem will be created that fosters intellectual intelligence while strengthening social solidarity, humanitarian awareness, and intercultural tolerance in universities in South Sumatra.

B. METHOD

This study employed a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design (QUAL→QUAN). The design was selected because the study first sought to understand how blended learning, digital media, local ETHNO content, and tolerance-related values were enacted in Islamic higher education settings, and then used the qualitative findings to inform and interpret a quantitative survey. The research was conducted in selected Islamic higher education institutions in South Sumatra. The sequence consisted of problem identification and literature review; qualitative data collection through interviews, observations, and document analysis; qualitative coding and theme development; formulation of ETHNO-Digital indicators; questionnaire administration; correlational statistical analysis; and integration of QUAL and QUAN findings:

Figure 1. Creswell *Explaratory Type* Design

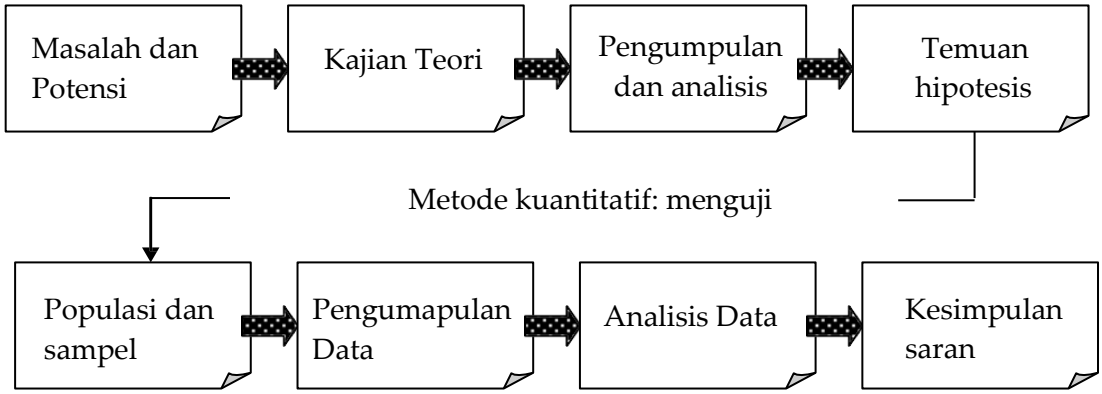


The qualitative phase used semi-structured interview guides, classroom-observation sheets, and document-review protocols. Participants were selected purposively from lecturers, students, and academic/program administrators who had direct knowledge of blended-learning practices and local-cultural integration. Selection emphasized participants' involvement in the relevant learning activities and their ability to provide information on digital media use, cultural content, intercultural interaction, tolerance, empathy, and reflective learning. Data credibility was supported through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. Qualitative data were reduced, coded, organized into categories, and interpreted thematically to identify recurring patterns and to develop indicators for the subsequent quantitative phase. The original manuscript does not provide the exact number of qualitative participants by category; therefore, this revision does not invent participant counts and these numbers should be inserted from the research records before submission.

Table 1. Population and Research Sample Size

No	College	Status	Number of Students	
			Population	Sample
1	STIT NU Sumber Agung East OKU	Active	± 600	10
2	Muara Enim Islamic College	Active	± 400	10
3	Al-Azhar University Lubuklinggau	Active	± 1.262	10
4	IAINU South Sumatra	Active	± 300	10
5	Raden Fatah State Islamic University Palembang	Active	± 22,256	10
6	STIT NU East OKU	Active	± 460	10
7	STIT STAIDA	Active	± 360	10
8	STIQ AN-NUR	Active	± 330	10
9	Darul Huda Islamic Institute (South OKU)	Active	± 300	10
10	Pagaralam Islamic Institute	Active	± 320	10
	Total Students		± 26,588	100

Diagram 2. Steps of Mixed *Methods Sequential Exploratory Design*
Qualitative methods: finding hypotheses



The qualitative findings were subsequently translated into quantitative indicators related to ETHNO-Digital learning implementation and tolerance-related attitudes. The survey involved 100 students drawn from 10 institutions, with 10 respondents represented from each institution as reported in Table 1. Institution and respondent selection followed the study's purposive logic, focusing on students with exposure to the blended-learning practices under investigation. The questionnaire was used to capture dimensions reflected in the qualitative phase, including digital-media-supported learning, acceptance of diversity, cultural empathy, and intercultural dialogue. Quantitative analysis examined the association between ETHNO-Digital implementation and tolerance-related attitudes using correlational analysis; the reported coefficient is r = .72. Because the source manuscript does not report the number of questionnaire items, response scale, pilot-test procedure, validity coefficients, Cronbach's alpha, p-value, normality results, or statistical software, these values are not fabricated in this revision and should be completed from the original dataset and instrument documentation. The QUAL and QUAN findings were integrated at the interpretation stage to identify convergence, complementarity, and areas requiring further investigation.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings indicate that stronger implementation of blended learning assisted by digital media containing ETHNO content was associated with higher tolerance-related attitudes, while qualitative evidence described patterns of empathy, intercultural dialogue, reflection, and reduced expression of prejudice among participating students.

1. Qualitative Research Results (QUAL)

Qualitative analysis was conducted through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and review of learning documents at several universities in South Sumatra, including STIT NU Sumber Agung, STIT Muara Enim, Al-Azhar University Lubuklinggau, IAINU South Sumatra, UIN Raden Fatah Palembang, STIT NU East OKU, STIT STAIDA, STIT Darul Huda South OKU, STIT Pagaralam, and STIQ An-Nur. Triangulation of sources and techniques was applied to maintain the consistency and credibility of the findings. The analysis shows that the integration of blended learning

assisted by digital media containing ETHNO content has been implemented in various universities, although the level of consistency still varies. The values of local wisdom have begun to be included in learning outcomes and RPS, but have not been standardized so that their implementation varies among lecturers. Observations show that student engagement increases when local cultural materials are introduced, as seen from active discussions and positive responses to the cultural topics of Komering, Ogan, Semendo, and Pasemah. Lecturer interviews emphasized the need for systematic guidance for optimal integration of ETHNO content.

Digital media analysis shows that cultural videos, student vlogs, ethnopedagogical infographics, and digital discussion forums enhance students' cultural understanding. Visual content facilitates student understanding of local cultural symbolic meanings and encourages higher participation in the LMS. Cultural vlog assignments also increase students' confidence in expressing their cultural identities. Learning activities such as cultural observation, cross-ethnic discussions, and digital reflection have been shown to open up more inclusive dialogue spaces, foster empathy, and reduce psychological barriers among students. Reflection documentation demonstrates the development of reflective attitudes and increased comfort in cross-ethnic dialogue.

This study also found four main impacts on mitigating student intolerance: increased intercultural empathy, reduced ethnic prejudice, a growing reflective attitude toward diversity, and increased courage to engage in dialogue. Cross-ethnic interactions in digital forums encouraged the clarification of stereotypes, while cultural content strengthened emotional closeness among students. Digital reflection demonstrated students' ability to reassess their cultural assumptions, while safe spaces on digital platforms increased participation in sensitive discussions about diversity.

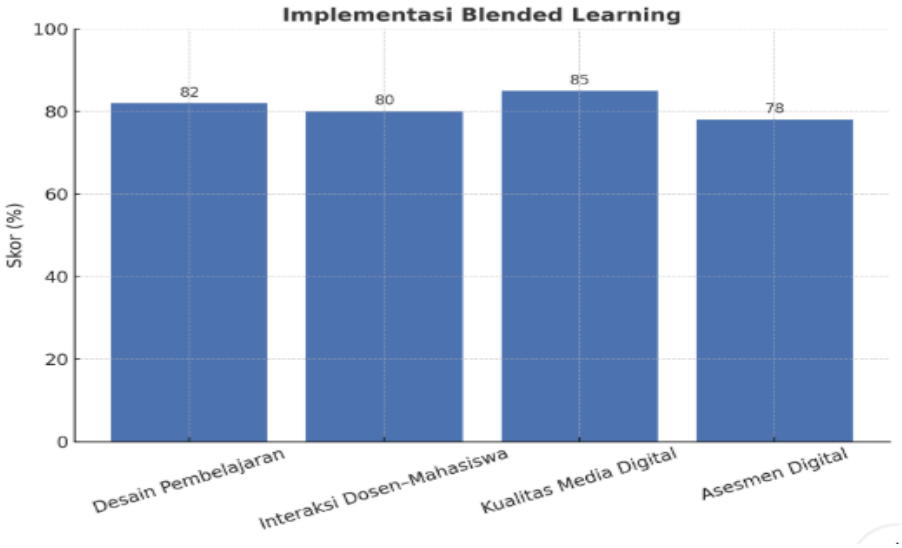
Campus follow-up strategies include strengthening the ETHNO-digital curriculum through standardization of the RPS (lesson plan) and the development of multicultural digital modules, training lecturers in creating digital ethnopedagogical content, interethnic and intercampus collaboration through cultural projects, and regular evaluations to monitor the development of student tolerance. The implementation of these strategies demonstrates the significant potential of ETHNO content-based blended learning as an effective approach to creating an inclusive and harmonious academic environment.

2. Quantitative Research Results (*QUAN*)

Quantitative data were collected from 100 student respondents to describe ETHNO-Digital blended-learning implementation and examine its relationship with tolerance-related attitudes. The available manuscript reports a correlation coefficient of r = .72; detailed validity, reliability, and significance statistics should be completed from the original instrument and dataset before submission. Statistical reporting note: N = 100; reported correlation r = .72. The source manuscript does not provide the p-value, confidence interval, means, standard deviations, normality test, questionnaire item count, or Cronbach's alpha. These should be inserted from the original dataset rather than estimated.

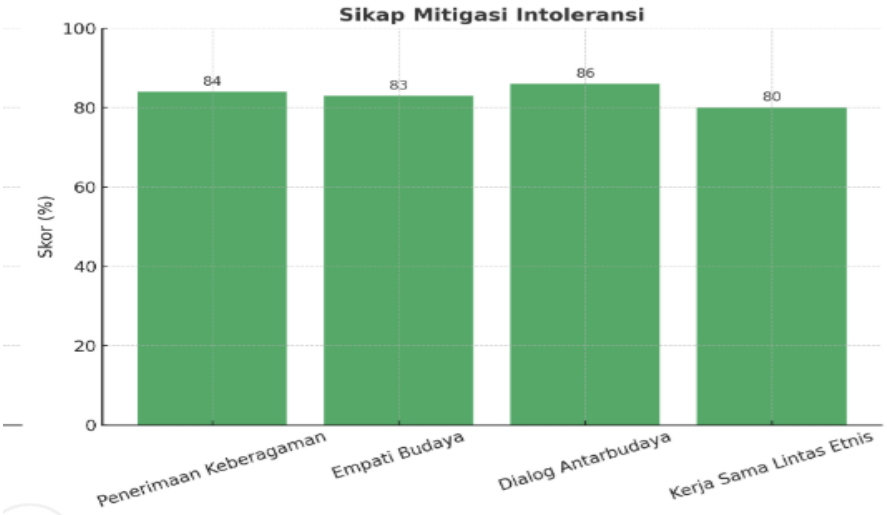
a. Implementation of *Blended Learning:* The results of the analysis show that the implementation of blended learning as a whole is in the "Very Good" category.

Picture 1. Implementation of *Blended Learning*



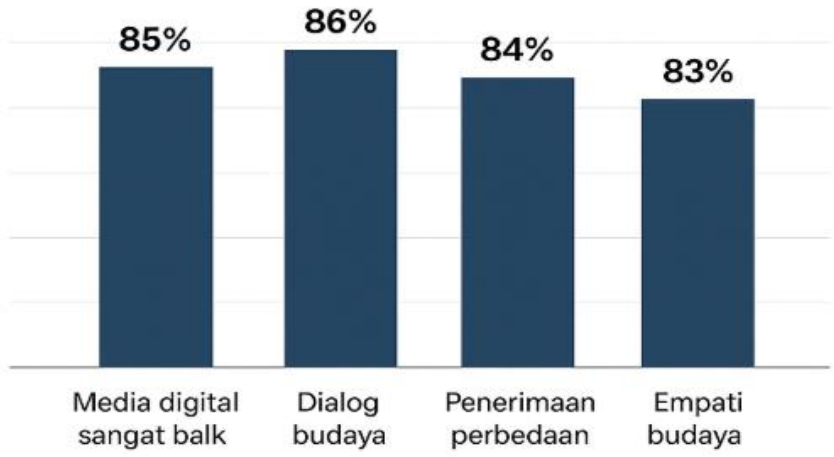
b. Measurement of Intolerance Mitigation Attitudes: Measurement of students' attitudes towards intolerance mitigation using a scale of 1–100 shows high to very high scores.

Picture 2. Measuring Attitudes to Mitigate Intolerance



c. Integration of QUAL → QUAN Results **:** Integration of qualitative and quantitative data shows the consistency of findings across methods, thereby strengthening the validity of the *ETHNO digital blended learning -based learning model* in mitigating intolerance.

Picture 3. Integration of QUAL Results → QUAN



Overall, the integrated findings show convergence between qualitative patterns of intercultural dialogue, empathy, reflection, and reduced stereotyping and the quantitative evidence of a strong positive relationship between ETHNO-Digital implementation and tolerance-related attitudes (r = .72). These cross-method findings provide preliminary empirical support for ETHNO-Digital Pedagogy as a framework for inclusive learning, but they should not be interpreted as proof of causal effectiveness.

Analysis/Discussion

The integrated findings suggest that ETHNO-Digital learning operates through interconnected cognitive, affective, social, and ethical processes. Cognitively, local cultural narratives, artifacts, and cases make abstract discussions of diversity more contextual. Affectively, audiovisual cultural representations and personal narratives provide opportunities for students to recognize experiences beyond their own cultural background. Socially, synchronous and asynchronous interaction broadens opportunities for cross-ethnic contact. Ethically, the Islamic higher-education context provides a value framework through which such encounters can be interpreted as part of character formation rather than merely as exposure to diversity.

From an Islamic educational perspective, intercultural dialogue in the findings can be interpreted through ta'aruf, namely the educational process of mutual recognition across differences. Tolerance-related attitudes correspond with tasamuh, while the strengthening of social connectedness reflects ukhuwah. Students' efforts to understand the experiences of others resonate with rahmah, and reflective engagement with difference is compatible with wasatiyyah as a balanced orientation that avoids exclusivism and hostility. This interpretation shifts the role of Islamic values from contextual labels to analytical concepts that explain why culturally grounded dialogue matters within Islamic higher education.

The digital dimension is equally important. Cultural videos, student vlogs, infographics, and discussion forums did not function only as delivery media; they created representational and dialogical spaces. Student-generated cultural content enabled cultural actors to represent their own experiences, while asynchronous forums

provided additional time for reflection before responding to sensitive issues. In Islamic educational terms, this digital space requires adab in communication: responsible expression, respect for others, verification, and avoidance of demeaning discourse. Consequently, ETHNO-Digital Pedagogy should be understood as an integration of technology, culture, and ethical learning rather than as technology-enhanced content delivery alone.

The quantitative findings complement this interpretation. The manuscript reports digital-media quality at 85%, diversity acceptance at 84%, cultural empathy at 83%, intercultural dialogue at 86%, and a correlation of r = .72 between model implementation and intolerance-mitigation/tolerance-related scores. Assuming the reported coefficient is based on an appropriate correlation procedure, r = .72 represents a strong positive association. It does not, however, demonstrate that ETHNO-Digital learning caused changes in tolerance. The relationship may also be influenced by institutional characteristics, lecturer practices, students' prior attitudes, self-selection, and common-method effects. Accordingly, the statistically defensible conclusion is that stronger ETHNO-Digital implementation was associated with stronger tolerance-related attitudes.

This cautious interpretation is consistent with recent scholarship on religious moderation in Indonesian higher education. Mukhibat et al. (2024) emphasize that higher-education curricula can connect tolerance, non-violence, national commitment, and accommodation of local culture, while Purwanto et al. (2024) show the educational value of reflective and experiential activities for developing awareness of religious tolerance among pre-service Islamic educators. The present study extends this conversation by highlighting the potential role of blended digital environments and local ETHNO content as a bridge between cultural experience and Islamic moderation values.

The study therefore proposes ETHNO-Digital Pedagogy as a preliminary framework rather than an already validated causal model. Its conceptual sequence can be expressed as: local wisdom/ETHNO content and Islamic educational values → digital media and blended-learning activities → intercultural interaction and reflection → empathy, tasamuh, ta'aruf, ukhuwah, rahmah, and wasatiyyah → tolerance-related attitudes and an inclusive Islamic higher-education environment. This framework provides a testable basis for subsequent quasi-experimental, longitudinal, or multi-level studies.

Several implementation constraints remain. The integration of ETHNO content in lesson plans was not uniform across lecturers; lecturers' capacity to produce and curate interactive digital materials varied; and internet infrastructure was uneven. These conditions imply that institutional adoption requires standardized guidance, professional development in inclusive digital pedagogy, quality assurance for cultural content, and learning designs that remain accessible under bandwidth limitations. Cross-campus cultural projects may also broaden intergroup contact while allowing students to compare local wisdom within a shared framework of Islamic ethical values.

Methodologically, the study should be read as exploratory and associational. Its strength lies in the sequential integration of qualitative insights with a student survey across multiple institutions, whereas its limitations include the absence of an experimental comparison, incomplete statistical reporting in the available manuscript, equal allocation of only 10 survey respondents per institution, and the lack of detailed

qualitative participant counts in the source document. Future research should validate the questionnaire more transparently, report reliability and inferential statistics in full, use larger probability-based or stratified samples where feasible, and test the ETHNO-Digital framework using longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate a strong positive relationship between ETHNO-Digital blended-learning implementation and students' tolerance-related attitudes in Islamic higher education institutions in South Sumatra ($r = .72$). Qualitative evidence complements this association by showing that culturally grounded digital media, intercultural discussion, student-generated cultural content, and reflective activities created meaningful spaces for recognizing difference, expressing empathy, and engaging in dialogue. These findings should be interpreted as associational rather than causal because the study did not employ an experimental or quasi-experimental design.

The principal contribution of the study is the proposal of ETHNO-Digital Pedagogy as a preliminary framework that integrates local wisdom, blended digital learning, and Islamic educational values. Within this framework, tolerance and intercultural dialogue are interpreted through tasamuh, ta'aruf, ukhuwah, rahmah, and wasatiyyah, thereby positioning the model more explicitly within Islamic educational pedagogy. For institutional practice, the findings support the development of culturally contextualized digital modules, lecturer capacity building, cross-ethnic collaborative learning, and systematic monitoring of tolerance-related learning outcomes. Further studies should validate the framework with larger samples, complete psychometric reporting, and longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs before claims of intervention effectiveness are made.

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