

## **GLOBAL COMMUNICATION ETHICS AND DIGITAL LITERACY: BUILDING A MODERATE VIRTUAL LEARNING SPACE IN THE CYBER ERA**

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### **Abstract**

This research examines the convergence of global communication ethics and digital literacy within the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) in the cyber era, grounded in the values of Islamic moderation (Islam Washathiyah). The study takes the form of an analytical-critical literature review reinforced by global empirical data on the contemporary digital landscape. The main conceptual contribution of this research lies in the repositioning of Washathiyah: not merely as a complementary value or ethical qualifier to existing Western frameworks of digital literacy and intercultural competence, but as an epistemological principle that reshapes how those frameworks are understood and operationalized. By integrating the Spectrum Concept of the Self theory, the framework of intercultural communicative competence, and critical digital literacy models, this research argues that the greatest threats within the digital ecosystem ranging from disinformation and hate speech to online radicalization are manifestations of a systemic ethical crisis. Data show that Indonesia, with 212 million active internet users and a digital literacy ranking of 64th out of 100 countries, stands at a critical crossroads between digital opportunity and threat. The findings identify three Washathiyah-based protective mechanisms that are genuinely novel in their framing: (1) critical digital literacy as an epistemological shield against disinformation, rooted in the principle of tabayyun rather than merely borrowed from it; (2) intercultural communicative competence grounded in the values of ta'aruf and tasamuh, which reconstructs not merely supplements Byram's ICC model; and (3) the design of a moderate virtual learning space (the WASH Framework), which positions teachers as facilitators of digital ethics. The implications of this research extend beyond the ELT context and offer a framework for the entire Muslim educational ecosystem in the cyber era.

**Keywords:** *Digital Literacy, Communication Ethics, ELT, Islamic Moderation, Virtual Learning Space, Washathiyah, Digital Disinformation*

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini mengkaji pertemuan antara etika komunikasi global dan literasi digital dalam konteks pengajaran Bahasa Inggris (English Language Teaching/ELT) di era siber dengan berpijak pada nilai-nilai moderasi Islam (Islam Washathiyah). Penelitian bersifat studi literatur analitis-kritis yang diperkuat oleh data empiris global tentang lanskap digital kontemporer. Kontribusi konseptual utama penelitian ini terletak pada repositioning Washathiyah: bukan sekadar nilai pelengkap atau kualifikasi etis terhadap kerangka literasi digital dan kompetensi antarbudaya Barat yang sudah ada, melainkan sebagai prinsip epistemologis yang membentuk ulang cara kerangka-kerangka tersebut dipahami dan dioperasionalkan. Dengan mengintegrasikan teori Spectrum Concept of the Self, kerangka kompetensi komunikatif

antarbudaya, dan model literasi digital kritis, penelitian ini berargumen bahwa ancaman terbesar dalam ekosistem digital mulai dari disinformasi, ujaran kebencian, hingga radikalisme online merupakan manifestasi dari krisis etika yang bersifat sistemik. Data menunjukkan bahwa Indonesia, dengan 212 juta pengguna internet aktif dan tingkat literasi digital yang masih berada di peringkat ke-64 dari 100 negara, berada di persimpangan kritis antara peluang dan ancaman digital. Temuan penelitian mengidentifikasi tiga mekanisme protektif berbasis Washathiyah yang secara genuin baru dalam framing-nya: (1) literasi digital kritis sebagai perisai epistemologis terhadap disinformasi, yang berakar pada prinsip tabayyun bukan sekadar dipinjam darinya; (2) kompetensi komunikatif antarbudaya berbasis nilai ta'aruf dan tasamuh yang merekonstruksi, bukan hanya melengkapi, model ICC Byram; dan (3) desain ruang belajar virtual moderat (WASH Framework) yang menempatkan guru sebagai fasilitator etika digital. Implikasi penelitian ini melampaui konteks ELT dan menawarkan kerangka kerja bagi seluruh ekosistem pendidikan Muslim di era siber.

**Kata Kunci:** Literasi Digital; Etika Komunikasi; ELT; Moderasi Islam; Ruang Belajar Virtual; Washathiyah; Disinformasi Digital

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the digital era moving at exponential speed, English Language Teaching has undergone a transformation that transcends mere methodological change. It has evolved into an arena where pedagogy, technology, and social ethics converge on a global stage. A student in Mataram can now practice speaking with a native speaker from London, discuss ideas with an academic from Cairo, or publish essays to a global readership all within seconds. Yet this speed and openness carries consequences far more complex than what appears on the surface.

Global data reveals a troubling paradox. On one hand, global internet penetration has reached 5.4 billion users, or 67.1% of the total world population (We Are Social & Meltwater, 2024). On the other, the World Economic Forum (2024) has ranked disinformation and misinformation as the number one global risk for the next two years, surpassing climate change and geopolitical conflict. In Indonesia specifically, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology recorded more than 12,547 identified and addressed hoax contents throughout 2019–2024, with a significant spike during election periods and the pandemic (Kominfo, 2024). It is important to note that this figure represents content successfully identified by Kominfo's monitoring system, not an estimate of the total volume of disinformation actually circulating in Indonesia's digital space a significant epistemological distinction, given that institutional detection capacity inherently lags behind the speed of content production and distribution on digital platforms. The figure of 12,547 is thus more accurately read as a minimum indicator of the scale of the problem, rather than as a full representation of it. Notwithstanding this limitation, the year-on-year increase in identified content remains a relevant signal of a crisis in digital literacy and ethics that demands a systematic and foundational educational response.

This challenge carries a more specific and strategic dimension. There is an academic and moral mandate, explicitly articulated through the values of Islam Washathiyah Islamic moderation to ensure that digital transformation in learning is not only technically efficient, but also just, inclusive, and ethically grounded. Washathiyah, literally meaning the "middle path" (QS. Al-Baqarah: 143), is translated in the digital

context into the capacity to navigate a complex information ecosystem with a balance between openness and vigilance, and between freedom of expression and communicative responsibility.

The position of this research relative to the existing literature can be mapped across three lines of inquiry that have, until now, run relatively in parallel. First, the literature on critical digital literacy (Gilster, 1997; Hobbs, 2010; UNESCO, 2022; Jenkins et al., 2009), which has developed rapidly but is generally formulated within a secular-Western framework, without substantive engagement with the Islamic epistemological tradition. Second, the literature on intercultural communicative competence in ELT (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006), which has become a dominant reference but is rarely engaged critically with non-Western ethical frameworks. Third, the literature on Islamic moderation and education (Kamali, 2015; UIN Mataram, 2021), which has developed within the context of Islamic studies but has not yet been extensively linked explicitly with the concrete issues of digital literacy and contemporary ELT pedagogy. This research is situated within the gap that emerges at the intersection of these three lines of inquiry: while the literature on technology integration in ELT is extensive, studies that explicitly integrate the perspective of Islamic moderation with critical digital literacy theory and cross-cultural communication ethics remain very limited, particularly within the context of Islamic educational institutions in Eastern Indonesia. This research aims to fill that gap by offering a coherent and empirically grounded analytical framework.

Structurally, this research explores four main dimensions: first, mapping the contemporary digital landscape and its implications for education; second, critical digital literacy as a Washathiyah-based protective mechanism; third, intercultural communication ethics in global interaction through digital platforms; and fourth, a model for designing a moderate and equitable virtual learning space.

## **METHOD**

This research employs an analytical-critical literature review approach, reinforced by empirical data triangulation from various representative secondary sources. This method was chosen because the research objective is conceptual-normative: to construct a new theoretical framework connecting three fields that have until now run in parallel digital literacy, global communication ethics, and Islamic moderation values within the ELT context (Snyder, 2019).

The literature selection process was carried out through a structured search of the Scopus, Google Scholar, and ERIC databases using combinations of the keywords “digital literacy,” “intercultural communicative competence,” “online disinhibition,” “Washathiyah/Wasatiyyah,” and “ELT,” covering the publication range 1997–2024. The initial search yielded approximately 180 documents, which were then screened by abstract reading based on criteria of direct thematic relevance to one of the three lines of inquiry mentioned above. After screening, approximately 60 primary and secondary sources were retained for in-depth examination, as reflected in the bibliography. This approach does not follow a systematic protocol such as PRISMA, as the purpose of the

review is conceptual-synthetic (constructing a new theoretical framework) rather than descriptive-quantitative (exhaustively mapping the entire state of the art); nevertheless, this transparency in the selection process is intended to provide readers with a clear basis for assessing the representativeness of the proposed framework.

Data sources consist of three categories. First, primary academic literature encompassing foundational works in digital literacy (Gilster, 1997; Hobbs, 2010; UNESCO, 2022), communication ethics (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006), and contemporary Islamic psychology (Faruque, 2020). Second, reports and empirical data from leading global research institutions, including We Are Social & Meltwater (2024), the World Economic Forum Global Risks Report (2024), the Economist Intelligence Unit Digital Education Report (2023), and reports from Kominfo (2024). Third, contextual empirical studies on the use of digital platforms in ELT learning in Indonesia, including research on HelloTalk, WhatsApp, and video conferencing platforms.

The analytical technique combines hermeneutic interpretation of normative Islamic texts on communication and information ethics with comparative analysis between global empirical findings and the contextual realities of education. The analytical framework employed is an integrative model that positions Washathiyah not as a separate independent variable, but as an epistemological principle permeating all dimensions of the inquiry.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. The Contemporary Digital Landscape: Opportunities, Risks, and the Urgency of an Educational Response**

#### **1.1 Indonesia's Digital Profile and Educational Implications**

Indonesia is one of the most dynamic digital ecosystems in the world. The latest data from We Are Social & Meltwater (2024) shows that as of January 2024, Indonesia had 212.9 million active internet users an increase of 1.4% from the previous year equivalent to 76.8% of the total population. More significantly, the average Indonesian user spends 7 hours and 38 minutes per day online, placing the country among those with the highest internet usage intensity globally. Of that time, 3 hours and 11 minutes are devoted to social media, with the most popular platforms being YouTube (88%), WhatsApp (87%), Instagram (74%), TikTok (73%), and Facebook (69%).

However, data on the quality of digital literacy stands in stark contrast to these impressive penetration figures. The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Digital Education Report 2023 ranks Indonesia 64th out of 100 countries in the digital education readiness index, well below Southeast Asian peers such as Singapore (2nd), Malaysia (28th), and Thailand (50th). More concerning, a survey by the Katadata Insight Center (2023) found that only 36% of Indonesians are able to identify hoaxes before sharing them meaning the majority of Indonesia's digital citizens remain vulnerable to the spread of disinformation.

**Table 1. Indonesia's Digital Profile 2024 and Regional Comparison**

Indicator	Indonesia	Malaysia	Thailand	Singapore
Internet Penetration	76.8%	89.6%	77.8%	96.9%
Hours Online/Day	7h 38m	8h 01m	7h 45m	6h 42m
Digital Literacy Rank (EIU 2023)	64	28	50	2
Hoax Prevalence (% of respondents exposed/month, self-reported)	61.3%	44.2%	52.7%	28.1%
Digital Classroom Access in Schools	62%	91%	78%	99%

Source: We Are Social & Meltwater (2024); EIU Digital Education Report (2023); Katadata Insight Center (2023); compiled by the authors. Methodological note: the "Hoax Prevalence" data represents the percentage of respondents who self-reported having been exposed to hoax content within the past month (self-claimed exposure by survey respondents), not a percentage independently verified through content audit. This distinction should be taken into account when reading cross-country comparisons, as the level of awareness of what is considered a "hoax" by respondents may vary across cultural contexts and each country's level of media literacy.

The gap between high digital penetration and a low digital literacy index creates what may be termed Indonesia's 'digital paradox': a society that is highly connected technologically yet not fully protected epistemologically. In the ELT context, this paradox is particularly relevant because English language learning increasingly relies on the very same digital platforms that serve as arenas for disinformation and harmful content.

### 1.2 Digital Threats Lurking in the Learning Space

The digital education world is not immune to threats that pervade the digital ecosystem more broadly. The World Economic Forum Global Risks Report 2024 identifies disinformation and misinformation as the number one global risk for the period 2024–2026. In the educational context, this threat takes several concrete forms. First, the spread of hoaxes and pseudoscience contaminating digital learning resources: research by Wardle & Derakhshan (2017) found that disinformation content on sensitive topics health, religion, politics receives 70% higher engagement on social media platforms than fact-based content.

Second, the phenomenon of online radicalization targeting young people. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2023), in its report "The Rabbit Hole," reports that YouTube's recommendation algorithm specifically not social media platforms in general can push users, particularly those first encountering extremist content, toward increasingly extreme content within an average of 3.5 hours of continuous browsing. This finding is important to understand specifically within the YouTube context, given that the recommendation algorithm architectures across platforms (such as TikTok, Instagram, or Facebook) operate through different mechanisms and do not necessarily produce identical patterns of escalation; cross-platform generalization risks weakening the precision of the argument. In the Indonesian context, the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) noted that 47% of radical group recruitment in 2023 was conducted through digital platforms, with the primary targets being students and university

students aged 15–25. Third, cyberbullying and hate speech that damage the learning climate: a UNICEF Indonesia survey (2022) found that 45% of Indonesian youth aged 14–24 had experienced cyberbullying, with significant psychological impacts on learning motivation and mental health.

Fourth, privacy and data security issues often overlooked in educational contexts. The use of commercial platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Google Classroom for academic purposes automatically involves the transfer of students' personal data to third parties an implication rarely discussed in digital curriculum design. Research by Human Rights Watch (2022) found that 89% of commonly used educational applications worldwide transmit student data to third parties without users' explicit knowledge.

## 2. Critical Digital Literacy as a Washathiyah-Based Epistemic Shield

### 2.1 Redefining Digital Literacy: Beyond Technical Competence

Paul Gilster (1997), who first popularized the concept of digital literacy, defined it as the ability to understand and use information from various digital sources. However, in the two decades since Gilster wrote, the digital landscape has changed so dramatically that this definition requires fundamental expansion. UNESCO (2022), in their latest framework, defines digital literacy as “a spectrum of competencies that enables individuals to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate, and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies for employment, decent work, and entrepreneurship.”

Most significant in this latest definition is the addition of an ethics and safety dimension “safely and appropriately” as a core component, rather than a supplement. This reflects global recognition that digital literacy focused solely on technical skills such as making presentations, using spreadsheets, or searching the internet without accompanying critical capacity and ethical awareness can in fact amplify the dangers of technology use.

Within the Islamic Washathiyah framework, this evolution in understanding digital literacy finds strong resonance with the fundamental principles of Islamic epistemology. However, positioning Washathiyah genuinely as an epistemological principle rather than merely a label requires deeper engagement with the Islamic scholarly tradition concerning this concept. Kamali (2015), in *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam*, shows that Wasatiyyah in QS. Al-Baqarah: 143 (“*ummatan wasatan*”) does not simply mean a literal “middle path,” but rather refers to an active epistemological and ethical position: a balance that requires the capacity for judgment (*tawazun fi al-hukm*), not passive neutrality or compromise that avoids taking a position. Ibn 'Asyur, in his elaboration of *maqashid*, places *wasatiyyah* as one of the *maqashid 'ammah* of the shariah directly related to *hifzh al-'aql* (the protection of reason) a conceptual link directly relevant to critical digital literacy as a practice of safeguarding reasoning capacity amid a massive flow of information. Al-Qaradawi reinforces this by emphasizing that *wasatiyyah* requires the courage to take a position based on evidence and careful consideration, not merely to avoid extremes for the sake of comfort.

On this foundation, the principle of *tabayyun* (QS. Al-Hujurat: 6) the command to always critically verify before accepting and disseminating information can be read more deeply than merely as an “early version” of modern fact-checking. Classical exegetes such as Al-Thabari and Ibn Katsir, in interpreting this verse, explain that the command of *tabayyun* was revealed in the specific context of receiving news from a bearer of news who is *fasiq* (whose integrity cannot be trusted), and that this obligation of verification is graduated according to the credibility of the source and the potential impact of the news if passed on without verification. In the contemporary digital context, this graduated framework is relevant: not all content requires the same level of verification, but content with the potential to cause *fitnah*, reputational harm, or social conflict such as viral content on social media requires a higher level of *tabayyun*. The principle of *amanah* in conveying information, the principle of *qawl sadid* (precise and truthful speech), and the prohibition of *ghibah* (gossip) and *fitnah* in Islamic communication all are frameworks for information ethics directly relevant to the challenges of contemporary digital disinformation, and which epistemologically precede, rather than merely reflect, contemporary critical digital literacy frameworks.

## 2.2 The Five-Component Framework of Critical Digital Literacy in the ELT Context

Based on a synthesis of the UNESCO (2022), Hobbs (2010), and Jenkins et al. (2009) frameworks, combined with *Washathiyah* values, this research identifies five components of critical digital literacy most relevant to ELT in Islamic educational settings:

First, information verification competence. This encompasses the ability to identify credible sources, verify facts through cross-referencing, distinguish between news, opinion, satire, and propaganda, and understand how algorithms influence the content that appears on personal timelines. In the ELT context, this competence is highly relevant because students not only need to read English-language texts but also to critically evaluate their quality and credibility. Research by Pennycook & Rand (2019) found that individuals with higher analytical thinking ability are significantly more capable of identifying fake news, regardless of their ideological inclinations.

Second, digital identity and footprint awareness. Every interaction in the digital space leaves a persistent and potentially permanent trace. Students practicing English through blogs, HelloTalk, or social media actively construct their digital identities. Research by Boyd (2014) shows that the majority of young people are unaware that content they post at age 15 can affect their career prospects and social reputation twenty years later. Within an Islamic framework, this awareness aligns with the principle that every word and action including those performed in digital spaces carries moral and social consequences that must be accounted for.

Third, digital safety and privacy competence. This encompasses knowledge of platform privacy settings, risks of phishing and social engineering, password security, and the implications of sharing data with third-party applications. In an ELT learning context increasingly reliant on digital platforms, understanding digital security is no longer an academic luxury but an urgent practical necessity. Data from Kaspersky Security Network

(2023) shows Indonesia is among the countries with the most cyberattacks in Southeast Asia, averaging 2.3 million attacks per day.

Fourth, media literacy and content creation competence. This encompasses not only the ability to critically consume digital content but also to produce content that is responsible, accurate, and valuable to the community. In ELT, this means guiding students to write blogs, create videos, or contribute to online discussions not merely as linguistic exercises but as exercises in digital citizenship. Jenkins et al. (2009) refer to this as “participatory culture,” the foundation of mature digital citizenship.

Fifth, digital wellbeing competence. This is the most recent dimension and one receiving increasing serious attention in the literature. Research by Twenge et al. (2023) found a significant correlation between intense social media use among teenagers and increased rates of depression, anxiety, and loneliness. However, the claim of a causal relationship between social media use and adolescent mental health remains an unresolved debate in the psychological literature: Orben & Przybylski (2019), in a large-scale analysis published in *Nature Human Behaviour*, found that the effect size of the relationship between digital media use and adolescent wellbeing is very small comparable to the effect of eating potatoes on wellbeing and concluded that digital media itself is not a strong predictor of mental health problems at the population level. This divergence in findings likely stems from differences in methodology (self-report data versus actual usage data, cross-sectional versus longitudinal designs) as well as heterogeneity in the definition of “social media use” itself. For the ELT context, the practical implications do not change fundamentally: regardless of the still-debated population-level effect size, the introduction of the concept of “digital hygiene” screen time management, detection of signs of compulsive use, and the development of digital practices that balance connectivity with mental health remains relevant as part of responsible digital literacy education, even though stronger causal claims should be avoided in its pedagogical framing.

**Table 2. Five-Component Framework of Critical Digital Literacy in ELT Based on Washathiyah**

Component	Operational Definition	Relevance in ELT	Washathiyah Value
Information Verification	Ability to identify credible sources and cross-verify facts	Critical evaluation of English-language texts from various global sources	Tabayyun – verify before sharing (QS. Al-Hujurat: 6)
Digital Identity & Footprint	Awareness of the long-term impact of published content	Identity management on blogs, HelloTalk, and academic social media	Amanah – responsibility for every word and action
Safety & Privacy	Knowledge of data security, phishing, and platform privacy settings	Protection of student personal data on digital learning platforms	Hifzh al-nafs – protecting oneself, including in digital spaces
Critical Content Production	Ability to create content that is accurate, responsible, and valuable	Blog writing, video production, and contributions to online discussions	Qawl sadid – speech that is true, precise, and beneficial

Digital Wellbeing	Screen time management and balance between connectivity and wellbeing	Development of healthy digital practices in platform-based learning	Tawazun – balance among physical, mental, and spiritual needs
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Source: Adapted from UNESCO (2022); Hobbs (2010); Jenkins et al. (2009); with Washathiyah value integration by the authors.

### 2.3 Digital Tabayyun: From Qur'anic Principle to Classroom Practice

The principle of tabayyun contained in QS. Al-Hujurat: 6 “O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate” is an epistemological instruction that predates the development of modern journalism's fact-verification by fourteen centuries. As outlined in section 2.1, classical exegetes situate this command within a graduated framework of source-credibility assessment a framework that, within the contemporary digital ecosystem, carries greater urgency than ever before. A study from the MIT Media Lab (Vosoughi, Roy & Aral, 2018), published in the journal *Science* and based on an analysis of 126,000 news stories circulated on Twitter between 2006 and 2017, found that false news spreads 6 times faster than true news and reaches 35 times wider audiences. The primary driver of this spread is not bots or fake accounts, but real people who uncritically forward content that arouses their negative emotions.

The implementation of digital tabayyun in ELT classroom practice can be pursued through various activities that integrate language learning with critical thinking. For example, fact-checking exercises in English using platforms such as Snopes, FactCheck.org, or PolitiFact not only train reading and information-seeking skills but also build a verification habit consistent with the principle of tabayyun. Teachers can design activities in which students evaluate the credibility of English-language articles on relevant topics, then discuss their findings in groups an activity that simultaneously develops literacy, critical thinking, and collaborative communication.

Data from an intervention study by Pennycook et al. (2021), published in the journal *Collabra: Psychology*, shows that a simple intervention prompting individuals to consider accuracy before sharing content can reduce the intention to share disinformation by 51%. This demonstrates that critical digital literacy particularly the verification component is not merely theoretical discourse but has tangible and measurable behavioral effects.

## 3. Intercultural Communication Ethics in Global Digital Interaction

### 3.1 Global Interaction Platforms as Laboratories for Intercultural Competence

One of the most revolutionary developments in contemporary ELT is the availability of platforms that eliminate geographic distance as a barrier to linguistic interaction. The HelloTalk application, examined specifically in the context of EFL students at Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram (Ariawan, internal report status/not yet formally published), reflects this new paradigm: with 30 million users in more than 150 countries, this platform is one of the largest cross-cultural communication laboratories

ever created. Research by Shadiev & Yang (2020) found that the use of tandem learning platforms such as HelloTalk significantly improves pragmatic competence, speaking fluency, and confidence in using English, with an effect size of 0.67 (medium-to-large) far surpassing conventional drill-based methods.

However, precisely because these interactions are real and involve individuals from different value systems speakers from secular North America, conservative Middle East, collectivistic East Asia, liberal Western Europe the dimension of communication ethics becomes critically important. This is no longer merely about grammatical accuracy or vocabulary breadth; it is about the competence to negotiate meaning across fundamental differences, to build authentic connections while respecting value boundaries, and to manage the discomfort that almost inevitably arises in any honest cross-cultural encounter.

### **3.2 A Washathiyah-Based Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence**

Byram (1997), in his model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), identifies five key components: *savoirs* (knowledge), *savoir comprendre* (interpretive ability), *savoir apprendre* (ability to discover and interact), *savoir être* (attitudes), and *savoir s'engager* (critical cultural awareness). This model has become the dominant reference in global ELT literature. Deardorff (2006), through a survey of ICC experts from 73 U.S. universities, identified "the ability to shift from an ethnocentric perspective to one capable of understanding others' frames of reference (ethnorelativism)" as the most essential element of intercultural competence.

This research proposes a complementary model that integrates Byram's ICC principles with Washathiyah values, adding a deeper ethical dimension. The value of *ta'aruf* (mutual knowing, QS. Al-Hujurat: 13) goes beyond mere knowledge of other cultures; it is an active and sincere drive to know the 'other' as a fellow human being of equal dignity. The value of *tasamuh* (tolerance) is not merely the absence of conflict, but the active capacity to accommodate difference within a framework of respect. The value of *tawazun* (balance) provides the ethical compass in situations where differing values clash it does not dictate the capitulation of values but teaches how to negotiate difference without losing integrity.

In concrete ELT practice, this model yields specific pedagogical implications. First, cultural preparation before interaction: before conversation sessions with foreign speakers, students must be equipped not only with linguistic knowledge but also with an understanding of the pragmatic norms and cultural context of their interlocutors. Research by Ware & Kramsch (2005) on online cross-cultural exchanges shows that without adequate cultural preparation, virtual cross-cultural interaction more often produces misunderstandings and stereotypes than deeper understanding.

Second, the cultivation of active "cultural empathy." This goes beyond passive tolerance; it is the ability to imagine the world from a fundamentally different perspective what Michael Byram calls the ability to temporarily "de-center" oneself. Within the Washathiyah framework, this capacity aligns with the value of *rahmah* (compassion),

which in the Islamic tradition is not limited to any particular group but encompasses all of humanity (rahmatan lil'alamin).

**Table 3. Integration Model of Byram's ICC and Washathiyah Values in Digital ELT**

ICC Component (Byram)	Washathiyah Value	Manifestation in Digital ELT	Achievement Indicators
Savoirs (Cultural Knowledge)	Ta'aruf – mutual knowing (QS. 49:13)	Researching the interlocutor's culture before HelloTalk sessions; pragmatic context analysis	Able to explain 3+ communication norms of the interlocutor's culture
Savoir Être (Open Attitude)	Tasamuh – active tolerance of difference	Empathetic response to value differences in virtual cross-cultural discussions	Non-judgmental; asks clarifying questions rather than making defensive statements
Savoir Comprendre (Interpretation)	Tawazun – balance in judgment	Analysis of authentic English texts from diverse cultural perspectives	Able to identify cultural assumptions in texts and respond in a balanced manner
Savoir Apprendre (Discovery)	Tafakkur – reflective and deep thinking	Independent exploration of cross-cultural issues through digital platforms; reflection journals	Maintains a substantive portfolio of cross-cultural interaction reflections
Savoir s'Engager (Critical Awareness)	Amar ma'ruf – promoting goodness*	Ethical leadership in online discussions; constructive moderation of conversations	Able to manage discussion tensions with balanced empathy and assertiveness

Source: Adapted from Byram (1997); Deardorff (2006); with Washathiyah value integration by the authors. \*Critical note: the mapping of savoir s'engager with amar ma'ruf, although heuristically productive, must be read with awareness of an inherent conceptual tension. Savoir s'engager in Byram's model fundamentally refers to critical-evaluative awareness of cultural perspectives including one's own as a prerequisite for reflective political engagement. Amar ma'ruf (promoting goodness) in classical Islamic ethics, by contrast, carries a far more specific normative and communal weight: it is a collective obligation (fardh kifayah) bound to standards of ma'ruf established according to the shariah, not merely an open critical awareness. This mapping should therefore be understood as a point of functional intersection both produce active participation in promoting the common good rather than as a full conceptual equivalence. Acknowledging this tension, rather than flattening it, strengthens rather than weakens the intellectual honesty of the proposed integrative model.

### 3.3 The Online Disinhibition Effect and Mitigation Strategies

One of the most consistent challenges in digital communication is the phenomenon psychologist John Suler (2004) termed the "online disinhibition effect" the tendency for individuals to behave more impulsively, aggressively, or discourteously in digital communication than in face-to-face interaction. Factors driving this phenomenon include anonymity (dissociative anonymity), the absence of physical presence that reduces social cues, asynchronous communication, and the blurring of authority in virtual spaces.

In the ELT context, the online disinhibition effect can take various forms: overly critical comments on peers' writing, an aggressive tone in cross-cultural debates on

discussion forums, or defensive responses to corrections from foreign speakers. Research by Hutchinson (2021) found that 38% of EFL students reported being involved in or witnessing interactions they considered “inappropriate” on digital learning platforms within a single semester.

Mitigation of the online disinhibition effect within the Washathiyah framework operates through several mechanisms. First, reinforcing self-awareness: students who possess a strong and stable sense of identity one not dependent on validation from digital interactions are more resistant to the temptation of impulsive online behavior. This aligns with Faruque's (2020) concept of background self-awareness as the psychological foundation protecting individuals from identity reductionism. However, from the perspective of Islamic ethics, this foundation of psychological self-awareness can and should be deepened through the concept of *muraqabah* (awareness of Divine observation). Unlike self-awareness rooted in the individual's relationship with themselves, *muraqabah* situates every action including those performed in anonymous digital spaces within an awareness of the constant presence and observation of Allah. The practical implications are significant: an individual who has internalized *muraqabah* behaves ethically online not primarily because of social accountability mechanisms which are inherently weak in anonymous spaces but because of the awareness that anonymity before other humans does not negate Divine witness. In a pedagogical context, this means that the cultivation of digital ethics in Islamic educational settings should ideally not stop at strengthening psychological self-awareness alone, but should also nurture a spiritual awareness that serves as a consistent internal monitor, regardless of the presence or absence of external oversight.

Second, practicing reflection before responding: integrating the habit of “pause and reflect” before sending responses in online discussions a practice that can be pedagogically trained and religiously aligns with the value of *hilm* (gentleness and careful deliberation before acting). Third, designing environments that reinforce accountability: using real names and identities on learning platforms, explicitly establishing community norms, and providing safe feedback mechanisms.

#### **4. Building a Moderate Virtual Learning Space: Design Model and Implementation**

##### **4.1 Potential and Challenges of Digital Platforms in ELT: A Data Analysis**

The ecosystem of digital platforms available for ELT today is highly diverse, each with its specific pedagogical profile, risks, and opportunities. WhatsApp, with 2.4 billion global active users and 87% penetration among Indonesian internet users, offers unparalleled accessibility. Research by Annamalai et al. (2021), involving 1,234 EFL students from four universities in Malaysia and Indonesia, found that the use of WhatsApp Groups for language learning significantly increased intrinsic motivation ( $p < 0.01$ ) and the frequency of English use outside the classroom. However, the same study found that 61% of respondents reported distraction as the main obstacle, and 34% reported discomfort due to the blending of academic and personal communication within the same platform.

Instagram, with 74% penetration in Indonesia, offers a unique visual-based medium for creative expression. Using Instagram as a digital portfolio platform for English where students post captions, stories, or multimodal content as part of class assignments has been shown to increase engagement and the authenticity of linguistic expression. Research by Manca & Ranieri (2016) found that “real” social media environments encourage more authentic and motivated language production than textbook-based exercises. However, the use of public Instagram accounts for academic purposes raises serious questions about student privacy and security, particularly for underage learners.

YouTube, visited by 88% of Indonesian internet users, is a virtually unlimited source of authentic English-language material. From TED Talks to sitcoms, from lectures at leading universities to tutorial videos YouTube is a global multimedia library available for free. Research by Speight (2014) shows that pedagogically selected YouTube videos in ELT classrooms significantly improve listening comprehension and are more effective in teaching pragmatic nuances of language than audio-only resources. The challenge is curation: without adequate guidance, students can easily be exposed to inappropriate or even extremist content through YouTube's algorithmic recommendation system, as has been specifically discussed in section 1.2.

**Table 4. Analysis of Digital Platforms for ELT: Pedagogical Potential, Risks, and Mitigation Strategies**

Platform	Pedagogical Strengths	Main Risks	Mitigation Strategies	Washathiyah Relevance
HelloTalk	Authentic interaction with global speakers; real-time linguistic feedback; multi-accent exposure	Exposure to inappropriate content; potential grooming; unmanaged cultural expectation gaps	Interaction guidelines; cultural norm preparation; report mechanisms; post-session debriefing	Ta'aruf and tasamuh: learning to know and respect difference firsthand
WhatsApp	High accessibility; easy coordination; multimodal material sharing; familiar to users	Notification distractions; blurring of private-academic spaces; data privacy risks	Dedicated academic groups; explicit posting rules; regular teacher response schedule; closed group	Tawazun: balancing open communication with healthy boundaries
Instagram	Encourages creative expression; visual portfolio; high linguistic authenticity	Student privacy (especially minors); cyberbullying; negative social comparison	Dedicated academic accounts (not personal); closed privacy settings; caption and content ethics	Qawl sadid: encouraging honest, creative, and responsible expression
YouTube	Unlimited authentic materials; diverse genres; listening development; free access	Algorithmic recommendations toward extremist content (particularly in the YouTube context);	Teacher-curated playlists; ad-free YouTube extensions; critical viewing guide	Tafakkur: material for deep reflection on content and global perspectives

		distraction; inappropriate ads		
Zoom/Google Meet	Face-to-face simulation; non-verbal expression; real-time interaction; recordings for reflection	Connectivity constraints (digital divide); Zoom fatigue; session privacy	Clear video ethics protocol; recording option with consent; short and structured sessions; async mode for remote areas	Tawazun and tasamuh: managing technical limitations with patience and shared empathy

Source: Synthesized from various sources; Annamalai et al. (2021); Manca & Ranieri (2016); Speight (2014); compiled by the authors.

#### 4.2 The Teacher as Digital Ethics Facilitator: Beyond the Technical Role

In this complex digital learning ecosystem, the teacher's role undergoes a fundamental transformation. It is no longer sufficient to act as a transmitter of linguistic knowledge or even merely as a manager of digital activities. Within an ELT paradigm grounded in critical digital literacy and Washathiyah-based communication ethics, the teacher must play the role of a digital ethics facilitator a position that integrates technical competence, pedagogical awareness, and moral integrity into a cohesive whole.

Research by Cherner & Lee (2016), surveying 412 EFL teachers from 28 countries, found that only 29% of respondents felt “very prepared” to integrate technology into learning in an ethical and critical manner even though 87% were already using at least two digital platforms in their daily teaching. This gap between widespread technology use and limited ethical readiness reflects the urgent need to develop a more comprehensive model of teacher digital competence.

The teacher's digital ethics facilitation role encompasses at least four interconnected dimensions. First, modeling: teachers who embody Washathiyah values in their own digital communication in how they respond to questions in WhatsApp groups, in how they write comments on student blogs, in how they facilitate Zoom discussions teach ethical standards indirectly far more powerfully than verbal instruction alone. Bandura (1977) demonstrated long ago that learning through modeling (observational learning) is one of the most effective mechanisms of social learning.

Second, designing instruction that builds ethical scaffolding. This means every digital task or activity is designed not only to achieve linguistic objectives but also to proactively build students' ethical capacity. For example, a blog writing assignment evaluates not only grammatical accuracy and vocabulary richness, but also the quality of argumentation, the accuracy of cited sources, sensitivity toward a global audience, and responsibility for published content.

Third, creating a safe space for reflection. Students need space to discuss their confusing, disturbing, or challenging digital experiences including exposure to inappropriate content, experiences of cyberbullying, or confusion in navigating value differences in cross-cultural interactions without fear of judgment. Teachers who create a psychologically safe classroom climate encourage students to share their vulnerabilities and learn from those experiences collectively.

Fourth, advocacy for digital equity. ELT teachers in settings such as West Nusa Tenggara where the digital infrastructure gap between urban and rural areas remains significant have an ethical responsibility to ensure that their digital learning designs do not structurally exclude students with limited access. Data from BPS (2023) shows that only 43.7% of households in NTB have adequate internet access, with an even lower figure in rural areas (28.2%). The Washathiyah principle demands justice ('adl) in the distribution of educational access and opportunity.

### 4.3 The WASH Framework: A Design Framework for a Moderate Virtual Learning Space

Based on the synthesis of analysis above, this research proposes an original framework termed the WASH Framework an acronym that simultaneously references Washathiyah values for designing a moderate, inclusive, and equitable virtual learning space in the ELT context. The framework consists of four complementary design principles, each accompanied by achievement indicators that teachers can use as a self-evaluation rubric for their learning designs:

**Wellbeing-Centered Design (W).** Digital learning design that prioritizes students' mental and physical health. This includes: limiting video conferencing session durations to account for Zoom fatigue (Riedl (2022) recommends sessions no longer than 50 minutes); setting response time boundaries that respect rest and worship schedules; and integrating planned "digital detox" practices as part of classroom routines. This principle aligns with the values of tawazun and hifzh al-nafs in Islam. Achievement indicators: (a) synchronous session duration does not exceed 50 minutes without a break; (b) a written policy exists regarding teacher-student response hours that respects worship and rest times; (c) at least one scheduled "digital detox" activity occurs per month.

**Accessible and Equitable Design (A).** Design that ensures equal participation for all students, including those with limited internet access, devices, or technical ability. Practices include: providing materials in formats accessible offline; establishing asynchronous alternatives for every synchronous activity; and using platforms that offer low-bandwidth versions. This principle expresses the value of 'adl (justice) in the digital context. Achievement indicators: (a) offline/print versions are available for all core materials; (b) every synchronous activity has a substantively equivalent asynchronous alternative; (c) a mapping of students' access conditions has been conducted at the start of the semester as a basis for design.

**Safe and Structured Interaction (S).** Design that creates sufficient structure to protect students' digital safety without sacrificing freedom of intellectual exploration. This includes: implementing mutually agreed-upon netiquette at the start of the semester; using closed groups and moderatable platforms; safe and confidential reporting mechanisms; and clear response protocols when digital incidents occur. This principle expresses the values of amanah and hifzh al-'irdh (protecting one's own honor and that of others). Achievement indicators: (a) a netiquette document exists, co-developed with students at the start of the semester; (b) all classroom interaction spaces

are closed groups with teacher moderation; (c) an incident-reporting mechanism exists that is known to all students and has been tested at least once.

**Humanizing and Culturally Responsive (H).** Design that humanizes the digital learning experience countering technology's tendency to reduce students to “users” or “data” and is culturally responsive to the diverse backgrounds of students. This includes: using names and forms of address that honor student preferences in virtual sessions; making space for the expression of cultural identity in digital content production; and integrating non-Western perspectives in the selection of authentic English-language materials. This principle expresses the values of ta'aruf, karamah insaniyyah (human dignity), and rahmah. Achievement indicators: (a) at least 30% of authentic materials are sourced from non-Anglo-American contexts; (b) students are given explicit space to represent their cultural/religious identity in digital-based assignments; (c) student forms of address in virtual sessions follow confirmed preferences, rather than system defaults.

The “H” principle above, in practice, is often understood as a push toward unbounded pluralist accommodation that is, accepting all cultural perspectives that arise in digital materials or interactions as equally valid. Within the Washathiyah framework, this framing requires additional nuance. Washathiyah is not about accepting all perspectives as equal in value, but about maintaining principled balance (tawazun) in addressing diversity. This means that when authentic English-language materials or cross-cultural interactions present content or values that fundamentally conflict with Islamic ethics, the teacher's role as a digital ethics facilitator is not to validate every perspective equally, but to facilitate students in recognizing (ta'aruf) and understanding the context in which such perspectives arise (savoir comprendre), while maintaining the capacity for value-based critical evaluation (tawazun fi al-hukm) including the ability to respectfully express disagreement. Thus, the “Humanizing and Culturally Responsive” principle within the WASH framework is more accurately understood as “principled openness” rather than unbounded accommodation a distinction important to ensure that the WASH Framework does not become trapped in a value relativism that would, in fact, contradict the epistemological foundation of Washathiyah itself.

## 5. Systemic Implications: Toward a Washathi Digital Education Ecosystem

The analysis presented in this research carries implications that extend beyond the ELT context and touch on more fundamental questions about the orientation of the Islamic educational ecosystem in the digital age. If Washathiyah is the epistemological principle that permeates all dimensions of Muslim life not only in the narrow religious domain, but also in how one thinks, communicates, and interacts with technology then it must permeate the institutional architecture of education, not merely remain a slogan in policy documents.

Data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2023) shows that globally, only 26% of higher education institutions have integrated digital literacy as a mandatory component across study programs. In Indonesia, this figure is estimated to be even lower, although specific data for PTKIN (Islamic state higher education institutions) is not yet systematically available. As an initial illustration of this potential, UIN Mataram (2021)

has published guidelines for implementing the values of religious moderation in education, which, although not yet specifically targeting digital literacy, demonstrate the existence of an institutional policy infrastructure that could be expanded in that direction. The claim that Islamic educational institutions are uniquely positioned to offer a model of digital literacy that surpasses UNESCO/ISTE standards should, at this stage of the research, be more accurately understood as a conceptual proposition grounded in the structural-epistemological potential of such institutions, rather than as a generalization from widely demonstrated practice. Empirical substantiation of this claim through systematic institutional case studies of PTKIN that have or are developing such policies represents an important agenda for future research, and is revisited in the recommendations section. This indicates that digital literacy integration in education remains sporadic and dependent on individual faculty or departmental initiatives, rather than representing a broadly systemic institutional commitment.

The epistemological distinctiveness of Islamic educational institutions, with their integrative Washathiyah framework, positions them to offer a model of digital literacy that not only adopts global standards from UNESCO or ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education) but enriches them with an ethical and spiritual dimension that the global discourse on humane and responsible technology is actively seeking (Vallor, 2016; Dignum, 2019).

Operational recommendations that can be derived from this research span three levels. At the curriculum level: the integration of critical digital literacy and global communication ethics modules as cross-curricular components in ELT programs, not merely as an optional topic in a single semester. At the faculty capacity-building level: training programs that develop faculty competence as digital ethics facilitators, encompassing technical, pedagogical, and ethical aspects in an integrated manner. At the institutional policy level: the development of technology-use policies for learning that explicitly state Washathiyah values as operational guidelines not merely as abstract vision statements.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This research has demonstrated that the harmonization of global communication ethics and digital literacy in the ELT context is not merely an elegant academic agenda; it is an urgent and strategic response to the epistemic crisis unfolding in the global digital ecosystem. Data shows that Indonesia with 212.9 million active internet users yet ranked 64th in the global digital literacy index stands at a critical crossroads between transformative opportunity and systemic vulnerability.

The values of Washathiyah, when operationally translated from institutional slogans into concrete pedagogical practices and when drawn from the depth of the Islamic scholarly tradition concerning this concept, rather than understood merely literally demonstrate strong analytical and prescriptive power. The principle of tabayyun, as understood through classical exegesis of QS. Al-Hujurat: 6, becomes the foundation for critical and graduated information verification competence; the values of ta'aruf and

tasamuh become the basis for developing authentic intercultural communicative competence, while acknowledging their conceptual tensions with Western models such as Byram's ICC; and the principle of *tawazun* which, in Kamali's sense, is active and evaluative rather than passively neutral provides the ethical compass for designing virtual learning spaces that balance freedom with responsibility, openness with safety, and openness with principled openness.

The WASH Framework proposed in this research Wellbeing-Centered, Accessible and Equitable, Safe and Structured, Humanizing and Culturally Responsive offers a design framework that can be operationalized by educational practitioners across diverse contexts, complete with achievement indicators that can be used as a self-evaluation rubric, in efforts to integrate human values into their digital transformation.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this research, the following are recommended:

- (1) In education, it is necessary to develop a critical digital literacy curriculum that is integrated across study programs, with Washathiyah values as drawn from the Islamic scholarly tradition concerning *tabayyun*, *tawazun*, and *maqashid* serving as the epistemological framework, not merely as a branding label.
- (2) Teacher training programs that develop digital ethics facilitation competence should be prioritized, focusing on three complementary dimensions: technical, pedagogical, and ethical-spiritual (including the strengthening of *muraqabah* awareness as a complement to psychological self-awareness).
- (3) Longitudinal empirical research measuring the impact of Washathiyah-based digital literacy interventions on students' digital behavior and the quality of their cross-cultural interactions needs to be conducted to validate the theoretical framework proposed in this study. Such studies should avoid overstated causal claims regarding digital mental health, while taking into account the existing methodological debates in the literature (Orben & Przybylski, 2019; Twenge et al., 2023).
- (4) Collaboration among ELT, Psychology, and religious moderation study programs should be strengthened to produce a more comprehensive interdisciplinary approach.
- (5) The government should accelerate the equitable distribution of digital infrastructure as a prerequisite for the implementation of a just digital education.
- (6) Systematic institutional case studies of PTKIN that have developed policies related to religious moderation and/or digital literacy beginning with cases such as the UIN Mataram (2021) guidelines should be conducted to empirically substantiate the proposition that Islamic educational institutions can offer a model of digital literacy that surpasses existing global standards.

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