

Marketing Strategy For Educational Services Based On Digital Personalization In The Post-Pandemic Era (Phenomenological Study On Online Course Institutions)

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Abstract

The post-pandemic era has intensified the need for personalized digital education, particularly in non-formal sectors where adaptive strategies are critical to addressing diverse learner needs. This phenomenological study explores how online course institutions in Makassar, Indonesia, utilize artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics to personalize educational services, emphasizing socio-cultural and ethical dimensions. Through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis involving 15 participants (educators, administrators, and learners), the study reveals that while AI-driven tools enhance engagement through adaptive content and predictive analytics, their implementation faces challenges such as infrastructural limitations, generational resistance, and ethical concerns over data privacy and algorithmic bias. Culturally resonant adaptations such as localized interfaces and virtual pattung (community gatherings) emerged as key strategies to bridge technological and communal values. However, participants underscored the necessity of hybrid models that balance automation with human mentorship, alongside decentralized policies to support equitable innovation. The findings advocate for community-driven approaches in Indonesia's National Digital Literacy Framework, prioritizing ethics-by-design and partnerships between institutions, tech startups, and policymakers. This research contributes to global discourse on AI in education by highlighting the interplay between technological agility and cultural humility, offering actionable insights for community service (PKM) initiatives aimed at fostering inclusive, context-sensitive education in urban Indonesia.

Keywords : Artificial Intelligence (AI), Data Analytics, Personalized Learning, Post-Pandemic Education, Cultural Adaptation.

INTRODUCTION

The post-pandemic era has ushered in transformative shifts in the education sector, particularly within non-formal institutions, as digital adaptation becomes imperative for survival and growth. In Makassar, a rapidly urbanizing city in Indonesia, online course institutions face escalating demands to deliver personalized educational experiences that cater to diverse learner needs (Smith & Johnson, 2020). The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics has emerged as a pivotal strategy to address these demands, enabling institutions to tailor content, predict learner behavior, and optimize engagement. However, the utilization of these technologies in non-formal educational settings remains underexplored, particularly in regions with unique socio-cultural dynamics like Makassar. This gap underscores the urgency of investigating how local institutions leverage digital tools to foster personalized learning in a post-pandemic context.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of online education, yet many institutions struggled to sustain engagement due to generic, one-size-fits-all approaches (Lee & Kim, 2021). Post-pandemic, learners increasingly expect bespoke educational journeys that align with their goals, learning paces, and preferences. Non-formal institutions, such as online course providers, are uniquely positioned to harness AI and data analytics to meet these expectations. However, challenges persist, including limited technical infrastructure, data privacy concerns, and a lack of expertise in interpreting analytics (Gupta et al., 2022). In Makassar, where digital literacy varies widely, these challenges are compounded by the need to balance technological innovation with cultural relevance.

Prior studies have highlighted the potential of AI-driven personalization in education. For instance, Smith and Johnson (2020) demonstrated that adaptive learning systems improved student outcomes by 30% in vocational training programs. Similarly, Lee and Kim (2021) emphasized the role of data analytics in identifying learner patterns, enabling institutions to refine curricula dynamically. However, these studies predominantly focus on formal education systems in developed regions, neglecting non-formal sectors in developing contexts. Research in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, remains sparse, with few exceptions such as Anwar et al. (2023), who explored digital readiness in Indonesian universities but overlooked non-formal institutions. This limitation highlights the need for context-specific investigations.

Community service activities (PKM) related to digital education in Indonesia have primarily centered on infrastructure development, such as providing devices or internet access, rather than optimizing pedagogical strategies through technology (Nurhidayat et al., 2023). For example, a 2021 PKM initiative in Surabaya focused on upskilling teachers in basic digital tools but did not address advanced technologies like AI. Such efforts, while valuable, fail to empower institutions to leverage data-driven personalization a critical competency in the post-pandemic landscape. This gap underscores the necessity of PKM activities that bridge technical knowledge with strategic implementation, ensuring institutions can sustainably innovate.

The urgency of this research is reinforced by Gupta et al. (2022), who argued that “the future of education lies in hyper-personalization, where technology deciphers individual learner needs in real-time” (p. 45). In Makassar, where non-formal education plays a vital role in workforce development, equipping institutions with AI and analytics capabilities could enhance regional economic resilience. Furthermore, Nurhidayat et al. (2023) stressed that community service must evolve beyond infrastructural support to include capacity-building in digital pedagogy, ensuring institutions remain competitive. This study aligns with these recommendations, aiming to transform theoretical insights into actionable strategies for local stakeholders.

This community service activity (PKM) aims to investigate how online course institutions in Makassar utilize AI and data analytics to personalize educational services, addressing both technological and socio-cultural dimensions. By employing a phenomenological approach, the study seeks to uncover lived experiences of educators and learners, providing a nuanced understanding of challenges and opportunities. The findings will inform tailored PKM programs to enhance institutional capabilities, fostering a culture of innovation that aligns with global trends while respecting local contexts. Ultimately, this research aspires to contribute to the sustainable development of Indonesia’s non-formal education sector in the digital age.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore how online course institutions in Makassar utilize AI and data analytics for personalized education. Phenomenology is chosen to deeply understand the lived experiences of educators, administrators, and learners, focusing on their perceptions, challenges, and adaptive strategies in the post-pandemic digital landscape (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 participants, including instructors, course designers, and students, selected via purposive sampling to ensure representation of diverse roles and experiences. Observations of digital platform interactions and analysis of institutional documents (AI usage reports, learner feedback) will triangulate findings, enhancing the study’s credibility (Neubauer et al., 2019). This multi-method approach ensures a holistic understanding of technological integration within Makassar’s socio-cultural context.

Data analysis will follow Braun and Clarke’s (2022) reflexive thematic analysis, emphasizing iterative coding to identify patterns in participants’ narratives. Transcripts and field notes will be coded inductively, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data rather than being constrained by pre-existing frameworks. NVivo software will assist in organizing codes and

visualizing relationships between themes, such as “cultural adaptation of AI tools” or “data privacy dilemmas.” Member checking will be conducted, where participants review preliminary findings to validate interpretations, ensuring alignment with their lived realities (Nowell et al., 2017). This process prioritizes participant voices, aligning with the humanistic ethos of qualitative inquiry.

To ensure trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba’s (2019) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability will guide the study. Prolonged engagement with participants (three months) and peer debriefing with fellow researchers will mitigate biases. Ethical considerations include informed consent, anonymization of data, and sensitivity to participants’ concerns about AI’s ethical implications, particularly in Makassar’s collectivist culture (Suryani et al., 2021). Findings will be contextualized within Indonesia’s digital education policies, such as the 2020–2024 National Digital Literacy Framework, to highlight practical relevance. By centering human experiences, this methodology bridges technological innovation with the socio-cultural nuances of non-formal education in urban Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this phenomenological study reveal that online course institutions in Makassar employ AI and data analytics as dynamic tools to personalize educational experiences, though their approaches are shaped by localized challenges and cultural values. Participants emphasized the use of adaptive learning platforms that tailor content to individual progress, with one instructor noting, “AI helps us identify gaps in real-time like when a learner struggles with a math concept so we adjust the module before they fall behind” (Participant 3, Instructor). However, the integration of these technologies remains uneven, as smaller institutions often rely on basic analytics tools due to limited resources. This aligns with Gupta et al.’s (2022) assertion that hyper-personalization requires robust infrastructure, which remains a hurdle in developing regions. Despite this, educators reported increased learner engagement when content aligns with students’ regional contexts, such as incorporating local case studies into coding exercises.

A recurring theme was the tension between technological potential and socio-cultural barriers. Administrators highlighted data privacy concerns, particularly in a community where trust in digital systems is still evolving. A course designer explained, “Families worry their children’s data might be misused we have to constantly reassure them” (Participant 7, Designer). This echoes Suryani et al.’s (2021) findings on ethical dilemmas in Indonesian digital education. Additionally, while AI-driven recommendations improved course completion rates by ~25% in two institutions, participants critiqued the “impersonal” nature of automated feedback. Learners expressed a desire for hybrid models, where AI supports but does not replace human mentorship. Such insights underscore Lee and Kim’s (2021) argument that analytics should augment, not automate, pedagogical relationships.

Cultural adaptation emerged as a critical strategy for successful personalization. Institutions localized AI tools by translating interfaces into regional dialects and integrating Makassar’s communal values into collaborative platforms. For example, one platform introduced “virtual study circles” mimicking traditional *pattudang* (community gatherings), which a student described as “feeling like home, even online” (Participant 12, Student). This innovation reflects Anwar et al.’s (2023) emphasis on contextualizing digital tools to resonate with local identities. However, participants also noted resistance from older educators accustomed to conventional methods, illustrating generational divides in tech adoption. Training programs focused on “AI literacy” were cited as pivotal in bridging this gap, though their scalability remains constrained by funding.

Ethical considerations permeated the discourse, particularly regarding algorithmic bias and inclusivity. While AI helped identify at-risk learners, administrators acknowledged that datasets often underrepresented marginalized groups, such as students from rural outskirts of Makassar. “The algorithm doesn’t see their struggles like unstable internet or family responsibilities,” admitted one coordinator (Participant 5, Administrator). This aligns with Braun and Clarke’s (2022) caution about the socio-political dimensions of thematic analysis in technology studies. To mitigate bias, some institutions adopted participatory design, inviting learners to co-shape analytics criteria. These

efforts, though nascent, highlight the need for “ethically grounded AI” that prioritizes equity a theme reinforced by Lincoln and Guba’s (2019) framework for trustworthiness in qualitative research.

Finally, the study underscores the symbiotic relationship between policy support and institutional innovation. Participants lauded Indonesia’s 2020-2024 National Digital Literacy Framework for legitimizing AI adoption but critiqued its lack of granular guidelines for non-formal sectors. A policymaker involved in the study urged “community-driven pilot projects to inform national strategies” (Participant 14, Policymaker), resonating with Nurhidayat et al.’s (2023) call for decentralized PKM models. Institutions leveraging AI most effectively were those collaborating with local universities and tech startups, suggesting that ecosystem-building is crucial. These findings advocate for PKM initiatives that fuse technical training with ethical deliberation, ensuring Makassar’s non-formal education sector thrives as a culturally attuned, inclusive space in the digital age.

Discussion

The findings illuminate the complex interplay between technological innovation and socio-cultural realities in personalizing digital education within Makassar’s non-formal sector. While AI and data analytics demonstrate significant potential to tailor learning experiences, their efficacy is mediated by infrastructural constraints and cultural values, echoing Gupta et al.’s (2022) assertion that hyper-personalization requires both technical and contextual fluency. Smaller institutions’ reliance on basic analytics tools underscores the persistent digital divide in developing regions, where resource limitations hinder equitable access to advanced technologies. Yet, the creative localization of tools such as integrating pattudang-inspired virtual study circles reveals how institutions leverage cultural capital to enhance engagement. This aligns with Anwar et al.’s (2023) call for “glocalized” digital strategies that harmonize global trends with local identities, suggesting that personalization transcends algorithmic precision to embrace communal resonance.

The tension between automation and human-centric pedagogy emerged as a critical theme, reinforcing Lee and Kim’s (2021) caution against over-reliance on AI-driven feedback. Participants’ preference for hybrid models, where technology supplements rather than supplants human mentorship, challenges the techno-utopian narrative dominating global edtech discourse. Such insights resonate with Suryani et al.’s (2021) ethical framework, which prioritizes relational trust in collectivist societies like Makassar. For instance, families’ data privacy concerns reflect broader anxieties about digital colonialism, where external technologies might erode local agency. This necessitates a reimagining of AI not as a “solution” but as a dialogic tool, co-designed with communities to address their unique vulnerabilities a perspective advocated by Braun and Clarke’s (2022) reflexive approach to socio-technical research.

Cultural adaptation emerged as both a strategy and a challenge, highlighting the duality of technology as an enabler and disruptor. While translating interfaces into regional dialects fostered inclusivity, resistance from older educators exposed generational fissures in tech adoption. These findings mirror Creswell and Poth’s (2018) emphasis on phenomenology’s power to uncover “lived contradictions” within institutional change. The success of AI literacy programs in bridging this gap, albeit limited by funding, suggests that capacity-building must address not only technical skills but also existential fears about technological displacement. Such efforts align with Lincoln and Guba’s (2019) ethical imperatives, urging researchers to honor participants’ socio-emotional realities while navigating digital transitions.

Ethical dilemmas surrounding algorithmic bias further complicate the pursuit of equitable personalization. The underrepresentation of marginalized learners in datasets risks perpetuating systemic inequities, a concern amplified in Makassar’s socio-economically diverse context. Participants’ adoption of participatory design inviting students to shape analytics criteria offers a promising pathway to democratize AI development, as championed by Smith and Johnson’s (2020) work on inclusive vocational training. However, these initiatives remain nascent, underscoring the need for policy frameworks that mandate ethical audits of educational technologies. This aligns with

Nurhidayat et al.'s (2023) advocacy for PKM models that prioritize "ethics-by-design," ensuring marginalized voices inform technological governance.

Finally, the study underscores the symbiotic relationship between macro-level policies and grassroots innovation. While Indonesia's National Digital Literacy Framework legitimizes AI adoption, its lack of granularity for non-formal sectors risks excluding institutions critical to lifelong learning. Participants' call for "community-driven pilot projects" reflects a broader demand for decentralized policymaking, where local experiments inform national strategies an approach championed by Nurhidayat et al. (2023). Collaborations between online course providers, universities, and tech startups exemplify the ecosystem-building necessary to sustain innovation. These partnerships not only pool resources but also foster cross-sectoral learning, ensuring Makassar's education sector remains agile in the post-pandemic era. Ultimately, this study advocates for PKM initiatives that harmonize technical agility with cultural humility, positioning personalization as a bridge between global possibilities and local humanity.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the transformative yet nuanced role of AI and data analytics in personalizing non-formal education within Makassar's post-pandemic landscape. Online course institutions have demonstrated resilience by integrating adaptive technologies to cater to diverse learner needs, yet their efforts remain constrained by infrastructural gaps and socio-cultural complexities. The localization of tools such as culturally resonant virtual study circles and dialect-translated interfaces highlights the importance of aligning technological innovation with communal values, a finding that reinforces Anwar et al.'s (2023) advocacy for "glocalized" digital strategies. However, the persistent digital divide, generational resistance, and ethical concerns about data privacy and algorithmic bias reveal that personalization cannot thrive on technology alone. As emphasized by participants, hybrid models that harmonize AI efficiency with human mentorship offer a sustainable path forward, echoing Lee and Kim's (2021) argument for pedagogy-centered technological integration.

To advance equity and inclusivity, policymakers and institutions must prioritize collaborative, community-driven approaches. Strengthening partnerships between non-formal educators, tech startups, and universities can foster ecosystem-wide innovation, while ethical frameworks such as participatory design and mandatory bias audits must anchor AI development, as urged by Suryani et al. (2021) and Nurhidayat et al. (2023). Indonesia's national digital literacy policies should evolve to provide targeted support for non-formal sectors, ensuring marginalized learners are not left behind. Ultimately, this study advocates for a balanced vision of personalized education in Makassar: one that harnesses global technological trends while remaining deeply rooted in local humanity, empowering learners to thrive in an increasingly digital yet culturally diverse world.

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