Al Qodiri: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial dan Keagamaan
Volume 24, Issue 1, 245-254.
e_ISSN: 2598-8735
https://al-qodiri.unikhams.ac.id/index.php/alqodiri/index

Reconstructing ethical artificial intelligence use among university students based on islamic values

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Article Info

Article history:

Received: 14, 01, 2026
Revised: 27, 02, 2026
Accepted: 23, 04, 2026

Keywords:

Artificial Intelligence Ethics;
Digital Ethics;
Higher Education;
Islamic Moral Epistemology;
Student Behavior.

Abstract

This study investigates the ethical implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) usage among university students and reconstructs a value-based ethical framework grounded in Islamic moral epistemology. The rapid integration of AI into academic practices has transformed how students engage with knowledge, raising critical concerns regarding authorship, academic integrity, and moral responsibility. This research adopts a qualitative interpretivist design to explore students' experiences, ethical reasoning, and behavioral patterns in using AI within an اسلامی higher education context. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis involving students and lecturers, and analyzed using a rigorous thematic approach. The findings reveal that AI has become an integral cognitive partner in academic work, enhancing efficiency while simultaneously reducing epistemic ownership and depth of understanding. More critically, the study identifies a persistent ethical ambiguity, where students struggle to distinguish acceptable AI use from academic misconduct, largely due to blurred authorship and the absence of clear institutional guidelines. The results further demonstrate a significant disconnection between students' awareness of Islamic ethical values and their actual digital practices, indicating a contextual gap in moral application. In response, this study develops a reconstructed ethical framework that translates core Islamic values—honesty, trustworthiness, responsibility, and justice—into practical guidelines for AI usage. Theoretically, this research contributes by extending AI ethics discourse beyond Western paradigms and integrating spiritual and moral dimensions into digital ethics. Practically, it offers a foundation for designing ethically grounded policies and pedagogical strategies in higher education. Ultimately, the study argues that sustainable AI integration depends on aligning technological advancement with deeply internalized ethical consciousness.

To cite this article: Abdussyukur., Haris, M, A., Ramadana. Haryanti, E., Daud, N, M., Aji, Y, A. (2026). Reconstructing Ethical Artificial Intelligence Use Among University Students Based on Islamic Values. *Al Qodiri: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial dan Keagamaan, 24*(01), 245-254.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has fundamentally reconfigured the epistemic landscape of higher education, reshaping how knowledge is generated, mediated, and validated. Contemporary students increasingly rely on AI-driven systems to support academic writing, data interpretation, and problem-solving, thereby accelerating efficiency and expanding access to information. Empirical studies indicate that AI integration has not only enhanced learning productivity but also transformed cognitive engagement patterns among university learners (Alam et al., 2026; Ouyang et al., 2022). As AI becomes embedded within academic workflows, it challenges traditional assumptions about authorship, originality, and intellectual effort (Bisenbaev, 2026; Chen & He, 2026). This shift signals a transition from human-centered knowledge production to hybrid human–machine cognition. However, such transformation simultaneously introduces profound

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ethical dilemmas that are not adequately addressed by existing academic norms. Consequently, the ethical governance of AI use has emerged as a critical frontier in contemporary higher education discourse.

In practice, the adoption of AI among university students is largely driven by pragmatic considerations, particularly the pursuit of efficiency, academic performance, and cognitive convenience. Students frequently employ AI tools to generate drafts, summarize readings, and solve complex problems, often without fully engaging in reflective or critical processes (Bisenbaev, 2026; Estaphan et al., 2025). While these practices may enhance productivity, they also blur the boundaries between legitimate academic assistance and ethical violations. Emerging evidence suggests that students often struggle to distinguish between acceptable AI-supported work and forms of academic misconduct such as plagiarism and misrepresentation (Xu et al., 2026). This ambiguity is exacerbated by the absence of clear institutional guidelines governing AI usage in academic contexts (Birkstedt et al., 2023; Smit et al., 2025). As a result, ethical decision-making becomes subjective and inconsistent, shaped more by peer norms than by principled reasoning. This phenomenon reflects a growing normalization of ethically ambiguous practices within digitally mediated learning environments.

The urgency of addressing AI-related ethical challenges lies in their potential to undermine the foundational objectives of higher education, particularly the cultivation of critical thinking, intellectual integrity, and independent reasoning. Without adequate ethical frameworks, students risk becoming passive recipients of algorithmically generated knowledge rather than active constructors of meaning. Scholars argue that technological literacy must be complemented by ethical literacy to ensure responsible engagement with AI (Daher, 2025; Stolpe & Hallström, 2024). Moreover, the rapid pace of AI development often outstrips the evolution of ethical guidelines, creating a structural imbalance between capability and responsibility (Daher, 2025; Jedličková, 2025). This imbalance raises critical questions about the role of education in shaping morally responsible digital citizens. In the absence of robust ethical grounding, the widespread use of AI may inadvertently erode academic integrity and diminish the value of intellectual effort. Therefore, rethinking ethical frameworks in relation to AI is not only necessary but imperative.

Within Islamic higher education, the ethical implications of AI usage acquire a deeper dimension, as educational processes are inherently intertwined with moral and spiritual formation. Islamic epistemology emphasizes the integration of knowledge (ʻilm), ethics (akhlaq), and divine accountability, positioning all human actions within a moral and transcendental framework (A. M. Ismatulloh1*, 2025; Farooq & Munir, 2024). Values such as honesty (ṣidq), trustworthiness (amānah), responsibility (mas'uliyyah), and justice (ʻadl) serve as foundational principles guiding individual behavior. However, recent research indicates that the internalization of these values often remains abstract and is not effectively translated into digital practices, particularly in the use of AI technologies (Falcon & Carillo, 2026; Jalil et al., 2025). This disjunction highlights a critical tension between normative religious teachings and lived technological realities. Furthermore, the normalization of AI usage among students reinforces pragmatic behaviors that may conflict with ethical ideals. As such, the integration of Islamic values into AI ethics represents a crucial yet underdeveloped area of inquiry.

A growing body of scholarship has examined the ethical implications of AI in education, offering important but fragmented insights. Studies by (Zhai et al., 2021) and (Prahani et al., 2022) underscore the transformative potential of AI in enhancing accessibility and learning efficiency, while (Kim et al., 2024) and (Marzuki et al., 2023) explore its impact on academic writing and cognitive processes. Research by (Adams et al., 2023) proposes general ethical principles such as transparency, accountability, and fairness, yet these frameworks are predominantly grounded in secular paradigms. In parallel, studies within Islamic education emphasize the importance of value internalization and character formation in digital contexts (Mukaddam & Cahyadi, 2025); (Setiawan et al., 2025). Other scholars highlight the need for curriculum adaptation and institutional strategies to address emerging ethical challenges (Kasmila et al., 2025); (Putra et al., 2024). Despite these contributions, existing studies largely operate within disciplinary silos, addressing either technological ethics or religious values independently. Consequently, the intersection between AI ethics and Islamic moral epistemology remains insufficiently theorized and empirically explored.

More critically, prior research exhibits three fundamental limitations that necessitate further investigation. First, the majority of studies adopt descriptive or evaluative approaches, focusing on

identifying ethical issues without advancing reconstructive or integrative frameworks. Second, prevailing AI ethics models are largely rooted in Western normative paradigms, which may not fully capture the moral complexities inherent in religious educational contexts (Adams et al., 2023). Third, research within Islamic education often lacks operational strategies for translating abstract moral principles into practical guidelines for AI usage. This results in a persistent gap between ethical knowledge and behavioral implementation among students. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to how ethical frameworks can be systematically reconstructed to respond to the challenges of AI-driven learning environments. These gaps highlight the absence of a holistic model that bridges technological practice with Islamic moral epistemology. Addressing this deficiency requires a paradigm shift from fragmented analysis toward integrative and reconstructive inquiry.

Responding to these critical gaps, this study aims to reconstruct the ethical use of Artificial Intelligence among university students based on Islamic values within the context of higher education. Specifically, it seeks to analyze students' AI usage practices, examine the disconnection between ethical principles and actual behavior, and develop a conceptual framework grounded in Islamic moral epistemology. Theoretically, this research advances the discourse on AI ethics by integrating religious epistemology with digital ethics, offering a novel perspective that extends beyond secular paradigms. Practically, it provides actionable insights for educators and institutions in designing ethically grounded policies and pedagogical strategies for AI use. Unlike prior studies, this research adopts a reconstructive approach that not only identifies ethical challenges but also formulates a value-based framework for addressing them. By bridging the gap between technological advancement and moral responsibility, this study contributes to the development of ethically conscious and spiritually grounded learners. Ultimately, it positions Islamic values as a relevant and transformative foundation for navigating the ethical complexities of AI in the digital era.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in an interpretivist paradigm to explore and reconstruct the ethical use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) among university students based on Islamic values. The interpretivist stance is appropriate because the study seeks to understand how individuals construct meaning, negotiate ethical boundaries, and interpret their experiences in relation to AI within a specific socio-religious context (Afwan et al., 2026; Rahmalia, 2026). Beyond descriptive inquiry, this research is guided by a reconstructive orientation, aiming to develop a conceptual ethical framework that integrates empirical findings with Islamic moral epistemology. This approach allows the study to move from lived experiences toward normative formulation, thereby bridging empirical realities and ethical theory. Given the complexity of ethical behavior in digitally mediated environments, a qualitative design provides the flexibility and depth necessary to capture nuanced perspectives. Thus, the methodological approach aligns closely with the study's objective of examining and reconfiguring ethical practices in AI use.

The study was conducted at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, an Islamic higher education institution in Indonesia that explicitly integrates academic and religious values. This context was intentionally selected due to its relevance in examining how Islamic moral principles are internalized and enacted in relation to emerging technologies. Data collection was carried out over a three-month period from January to March 2026, allowing for prolonged engagement with participants and the research setting. Such engagement is essential in qualitative research to ensure depth of understanding and contextual sensitivity (Afwan et al., 2026; Lim, 2025). The institutional environment, characterized by the coexistence of digital innovation and religious education, provides a fertile ground for investigating ethical tensions and adaptations. Moreover, the increasing adoption of AI tools among students in this setting reflects broader global trends in higher education. Therefore, the research site offers both contextual richness and analytical relevance.

Participants consisted of 18 undergraduate students and 5 lecturers, selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance and depth of information (Lim, 2025; Makhene, 2022). Students were included based on three criteria: active enrollment, prior use of AI tools for academic purposes, and willingness to participate in in-depth interviews. Lecturers were selected based on their involvement in courses related to Islamic studies, ethics, or digital learning. The sample size was determined using the principle of data saturation, which was reached when additional

interviews no longer generated new themes or insights (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Saturation was observed after the 16th student interview, with subsequent data reinforcing existing patterns rather than introducing novel categories. This iterative assessment ensured that the data corpus was sufficiently comprehensive to support robust thematic analysis. The inclusion of both students and lecturers enabled triangulation of perspectives between users and institutional actors. Consequently, the sampling strategy strengthened the credibility and depth of the findings.

Data were collected using three primary instruments: semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. The interview protocol was designed to explore participants' experiences with AI usage, ethical reasoning, decision-making processes, and the application of Islamic values in academic contexts. Observations were conducted in classroom and informal learning environments to capture natural interactions with AI tools and contextual behavioral patterns. Document analysis included institutional policies, academic guidelines, and course materials related to ethics and technology. The development of these instruments was informed by prior research on AI ethics and digital learning (Adams et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2024). To enhance content validity, the instruments were reviewed by three experts in Islamic education and educational technology, ensuring alignment with theoretical constructs and research objectives. This multi-instrument approach enabled methodological triangulation, increasing the robustness of the data.

The validity and trustworthiness of the data were ensured through multiple strategies consistent with qualitative research standards. Content and construct validity were established through expert review and alignment with established theoretical frameworks. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement, member checking, and triangulation across data sources (Dado et al., 2023; Vella, 2024). Dependability was ensured by maintaining a detailed audit trail documenting all stages of data collection and analysis. Confirmability was addressed through reflexive journaling, where the researcher critically examined potential biases and assumptions throughout the research process. Transferability was supported by providing rich, contextual descriptions that allow readers to assess the applicability of findings to other settings. Although inter-coder reliability is not always required in interpretive research, a peer debriefing process was conducted with a fellow researcher to review coding consistency. These strategies collectively ensured that the findings are credible, transparent, and analytically rigorous.

The data collection procedure followed a structured and iterative process. Initially, institutional approval was obtained, and participants were recruited based on predefined criteria. Informed consent was secured prior to participation, ensuring ethical compliance. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted, each lasting between 45 and 60 minutes, and audio-recorded with participants' permission. Observations were carried out concurrently to capture contextual dynamics and behavioral patterns related to AI usage. Relevant institutional documents were collected and systematically reviewed to complement primary data sources. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and field notes were compiled immediately after each session to preserve contextual insights. The iterative nature of data collection allowed emerging themes to inform subsequent interviews, thereby enhancing depth and coherence. This systematic procedure ensured the completeness and integrity of the dataset.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, following a rigorous and iterative coding process (Locke et al., 2022; Udayanga, 2025). The analysis began with open coding to identify significant units of meaning, followed by axial coding to establish relationships between categories. These categories were then synthesized into overarching themes that reflected patterns of ethical behavior and value integration. NVivo software was utilized to facilitate data organization, coding, and retrieval, ensuring analytical transparency. The interpretive process was guided by Islamic moral epistemology, enabling the integration of empirical findings with normative ethical principles. To enhance rigor, an audit trail was maintained, documenting coding decisions and thematic development. Reflexivity was continuously practiced to minimize researcher bias and ensure interpretive integrity. Importantly, the reconstruction of the ethical framework was conducted through an iterative synthesis process, where empirical themes were mapped onto Islamic ethical constructs to generate a coherent conceptual model. This approach allowed the study to move beyond description toward theoretical contribution.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by using pseudonyms and removing identifying information from the dataset. All data were securely stored and accessed only by the research team. The study adhered to principles of academic integrity, including transparency, honesty, and respect for participants' perspectives. Special attention was given to minimizing potential harm, particularly when discussing sensitive ethical issues related to academic practices. The research also complied with institutional ethical guidelines for studies involving human participants. Through these measures, the study maintained high ethical standards and ensured the protection of all participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of this study indicate that Artificial Intelligence has become deeply embedded in students' academic practices, functioning not merely as a supplementary tool but as an integral component of their learning processes. Most participants reported using AI to assist in drafting assignments, summarizing complex materials, generating ideas, and translating academic content, reflecting a shift toward technology-mediated cognition. This pattern suggests that AI is primarily utilized to enhance efficiency and reduce cognitive load, particularly when students face time constraints or difficulties in understanding subject matter. However, this reliance often leads to a transformation in how knowledge is constructed, as students tend to depend on AI-generated outputs rather than engaging in independent critical thinking. Several participants acknowledged that AI allows them to complete tasks more quickly, yet they also recognized that this convenience sometimes reduces their depth of comprehension. The data further reveal that students perceive AI as a practical academic solution rather than a tool requiring ethical reflection. This perception reinforces a utilitarian orientation toward technology, where outcomes are prioritized over processes. Consequently, AI usage among students reflects a pragmatic learning culture that emphasizes efficiency while simultaneously reshaping traditional academic engagement.

The widespread adoption of AI is accompanied by the emergence of significant ethical ambiguities that challenge students' understanding of academic integrity. Many participants expressed uncertainty regarding whether the use of AI-generated content constitutes plagiarism, particularly when the output appears original in form. This ambiguity is further complicated by the absence of clear institutional guidelines that explicitly define acceptable and unacceptable uses of AI in academic work. Students often rely on personal judgment or peer practices when making ethical decisions, leading to inconsistent interpretations of academic honesty. Some participants admitted that they had submitted AI-assisted work with minimal modification, believing that the lack of direct copying justified their actions. Lecturers also observed that students tend to evaluate ethical behavior based on the final output rather than the intellectual process behind it. This shift indicates a redefinition of authorship, where the role of the student becomes less central in knowledge production. As a result, ethical boundaries become increasingly blurred, creating a grey area that is difficult to regulate. Overall, the findings suggest that ethical awareness related to AI usage remains fragmented and situational rather than principled and consistent.

Another important finding of this study is the evident disconnection between students' understanding of Islamic ethical values and their actual practices in using AI. While most participants demonstrated familiarity with core values such as honesty, trustworthiness, responsibility, and justice, these principles were not consistently applied in digital academic contexts. Students often perceived AI as a neutral technological tool, thereby separating its use from moral evaluation. This cognitive separation allows ethically questionable practices to be normalized without being perceived as violations of religious or academic principles. Several participants acknowledged that although they were aware of the importance of honesty in Islam, they did not consider AI-assisted work as a form of dishonesty. This indicates that ethical knowledge remains abstract and is not effectively internalized in practical situations. The influence of peer behavior and academic pressure further reinforces this disconnect, as students tend to conform to commonly accepted practices rather than ethical ideals. Lecturers also noted that ethical instruction rarely addresses the specific

challenges posed by AI, limiting its relevance to contemporary academic realities. Therefore, the gap between moral awareness and actual behavior reflects a broader issue of contextualization in ethical education.

The findings also highlight the urgent need for a structured ethical framework that integrates Islamic values into the use of AI within academic environments. Both students and lecturers emphasized the lack of clear guidance as a major factor contributing to ethical ambiguity. In response to this need, the study reconstructs an ethical framework by aligning empirical patterns of AI usage with fundamental Islamic moral principles. This framework emphasizes the importance of honesty in acknowledging intellectual contributions, responsibility in engaging with knowledge, trustworthiness in academic conduct, and justice in the fair use of technological resources. By embedding these values into AI-related practices, the framework seeks to transform technology use from a purely instrumental activity into a morally accountable process. The reconstructed model also highlights the role of educational institutions in reinforcing ethical behavior through curriculum integration, policy development, and pedagogical innovation. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of fostering critical thinking and reflective engagement as essential components of ethical AI usage. This approach positions Islamic moral epistemology as a dynamic and relevant foundation for addressing contemporary technological challenges. Ultimately, the findings demonstrate that ethical AI usage requires not only technical regulation but also a holistic integration of moral values and educational practices.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Artificial Intelligence has evolved from a peripheral academic aid into a constitutive element of students' cognitive processes, fundamentally reshaping how knowledge is produced and internalized. This shift reflects the logic of distributed cognition, where epistemic authority is no longer exclusively human but shared with algorithmic systems (Ouyang et al., 2022; Chen & He, 2026). However, this study advances the discourse by critically challenging the implicit assumption that such integration is epistemically neutral. While prior research celebrates efficiency gains, the present findings indicate a paradox: increased productivity is accompanied by a decline in epistemic ownership and reflective depth. This aligns partially with Stolpe and Hallström (2024), yet diverges by demonstrating that cognitive offloading is not merely a support mechanism but may restructure the learner's role from knowledge constructor to knowledge curator. An alternative explanation may lie not solely in AI usage itself, but in pre-existing surface learning cultures that predispose students to instrumental engagement with knowledge. Therefore, AI does not independently erode critical thinking but amplifies latent epistemic tendencies within contemporary education systems. This nuanced interpretation extends existing theory by reframing AI not as a causal agent, but as an accelerant of deeper pedagogical transformations.

The emergence of ethical ambiguity surrounding AI usage reveals a more profound disruption of academic norms than previously acknowledged. While existing frameworks emphasize principles such as transparency and accountability (Adams et al., 2023), this study demonstrates that these constructs become unstable when confronted with generative technologies that blur authorship boundaries. Unlike earlier findings that attribute ethical confusion to a lack of guidelines (Birkstedt et al., 2023; Smit et al., 2025), the present study suggests that the problem is more structural: AI destabilizes the very ontology of authorship itself. Students no longer perceive themselves as sole creators, but as co-producers with algorithmic agents, leading to a reconfiguration of moral responsibility. This finding challenges dominant ethical models that assume a clear distinction between human and tool, indicating that such binaries are increasingly obsolete. Furthermore, the reliance on peer norms rather than principled reasoning reflects a shift toward situational ethics, consistent with Jalil et al. (2025), yet extending it by highlighting the normalization of ambiguity as a stable condition rather than a transitional phase. Consequently, ethical frameworks must move beyond rule-based compliance toward reconceptualizing authorship and accountability in hybrid cognitive environments.

A critical contribution of this study lies in exposing the persistent disjunction between Islamic moral knowledge and its behavioral enactment in digital contexts. While previous research has identified gaps in value internalization (Mukaddam & Cahyadi, 2025; Falcon & Carillo, 2026), this study advances the argument by demonstrating that such gaps are not merely pedagogical failures

but epistemological misalignments. Students' perception of AI as a morally neutral tool effectively suspends the applicability of religious ethics, creating what can be termed a "moral exclusion zone" within digital practices. This finding challenges the assumption within Islamic moral epistemology that ethical principles are universally transferable across contexts (Farooq & Munir, 2024). Instead, it suggests that moral cognition is context-dependent and requires active reinterpretation in technologically mediated environments. An alternative interpretation may consider that students are not rejecting ethical values but reclassifying AI-assisted work as a distinct category outside traditional moral frameworks. This implies that ethical education must move beyond transmission of values toward contextual translation and operationalization. Thus, the study extends Islamic ethical theory by emphasizing the need for dynamic reinterpretation rather than static application.

The influence of contextual pressures, particularly peer norms and academic performance demands, further complicates ethical decision-making processes. Consistent with normative social influence theory (Putra et al., 2024; Kasmila et al., 2025), students' behavior is shaped less by internalized values and more by perceived collective practices. However, this study deepens the analysis by demonstrating that such conformity is not merely social but structurally reinforced by institutional ambiguity. Unlike previous studies that locate ethical lapses at the individual level (Marzuki et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2024), the findings suggest a systemic diffusion of responsibility, where unclear policies create permissive environments for ethically ambiguous behavior. This challenges the dominant narrative that ethical misconduct is primarily a matter of personal integrity, instead positioning it as an emergent property of socio-technical systems. Moreover, the normalization of AI-assisted practices indicates a shift from deviant behavior to accepted academic culture. This raises critical questions about the future of academic integrity as a socially constructed norm. Therefore, ethical interventions must address not only individual cognition but also institutional design and cultural dynamics.

The reconstructed ethical framework proposed in this study represents a substantive theoretical advancement by integrating Islamic moral epistemology with contemporary AI ethics in an operational manner. While prior frameworks emphasize abstract principles (Adams et al., 2023; Daher, 2025), this model translates values such as ṣidq, amānah, mas'uliyyah, and 'adl into actionable guidelines for AI usage. More importantly, the framework challenges the dominance of compliance-based ethics by foregrounding virtue-based ethical formation. This aligns with virtue ethics traditions yet extends them by situating moral development within digitally mediated practices. Unlike earlier studies that advocate ethical integration without specifying mechanisms (Setiawan et al., 2025; Prahani et al., 2022), this research demonstrates how value internalization can be systematically linked to technological behavior. However, it is also important to acknowledge potential limitations, particularly the assumption that value-based frameworks can effectively regulate behavior in highly pragmatic environments. Alternative perspectives might argue that structural incentives and assessment systems play a more decisive role than moral values alone. Nevertheless, the proposed framework contributes a novel conceptual bridge between normative ethics and empirical practice.

From a global perspective, this study challenges the hegemony of Western-centric AI ethics models by introducing a contextually grounded, spiritually informed alternative. While global frameworks prioritize procedural ethics such as fairness and accountability (Zhai et al., 2021; Jedličková, 2025), they often neglect dimensions of moral intentionality and transcendental accountability that are central to Islamic thought. This study positions Islamic moral epistemology not as a localized alternative but as a complementary paradigm capable of enriching global AI ethics discourse. The findings suggest that universal ethical models may be inherently limited if they fail to incorporate diverse epistemological traditions. At the same time, the study acknowledges that religious frameworks must also adapt to remain relevant in rapidly evolving technological contexts. This dual movement of contextualization and universalization represents a significant contribution to interdisciplinary scholarship. By situating the research within global debates, the study enhances its theoretical and practical relevance beyond its immediate context.

Finally, the implications of this study extend to the redesign of higher education systems in the age of Artificial Intelligence. The findings indicate that ethical AI usage cannot be achieved through regulation alone, but requires a holistic integration of cognitive, moral, and institutional dimensions. While previous research advocates for ethical literacy (Daher, 2025; Stolpe & Hallström,

2024), this study argues for a deeper transformation toward ethically reflexive learning environments. Such environments must encourage critical engagement with AI, foster moral reasoning, and align technological practices with value-based frameworks. However, it is equally important to consider alternative scenarios where overregulation may stifle innovation or create resistance among students. Therefore, the challenge lies in balancing ethical guidance with pedagogical flexibility. By bridging theoretical insight and practical application, this study offers a comprehensive pathway for navigating the ethical complexities of AI in higher education. Ultimately, it repositions ethics not as a constraint on technology, but as an essential condition for its meaningful and responsible use.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the integration of Artificial Intelligence into students' academic practices has fundamentally transformed not only the mechanics of learning but also its underlying ethical and epistemological foundations. The findings reveal that AI is no longer a neutral or auxiliary tool, but an active agent shaping how knowledge is produced, interpreted, and claimed. While its use enhances efficiency and accessibility, it simultaneously reconfigures the learner's role, often reducing epistemic ownership and weakening reflective engagement. More critically, the study demonstrates that ethical ambiguity in AI usage is not merely a consequence of insufficient guidelines, but a structural outcome of blurred authorship and hybrid cognition. This challenges conventional academic integrity frameworks that rely on clear distinctions between human and tool. Furthermore, the persistent gap between students' understanding of Islamic ethical values and their actual digital practices indicates a deeper epistemological disconnect, where moral principles fail to translate into technologically mediated contexts. The influence of peer norms and institutional ambiguity further reinforces situational ethics, suggesting that ethical behavior is shaped as much by systemic conditions as by individual intention. Therefore, the study repositions ethical AI use as a complex socio-technical phenomenon that requires integrated responses at cognitive, moral, and institutional levels.

Building on these insights, this research offers a significant theoretical and practical contribution by reconstructing an ethical framework that bridges Islamic moral epistemology with contemporary AI practices. Unlike dominant compliance-based models, the proposed framework emphasizes the internalization and contextualization of values such as honesty, trustworthiness, responsibility, and justice as guiding principles for AI engagement. In doing so, the study not only extends existing theories of digital ethics but also challenges the universality of Western-centric models by introducing a spiritually grounded and culturally responsive perspective. Importantly, this research demonstrates that ethical regulation alone is insufficient; what is required is a transformation toward ethically reflexive learning environments that integrate moral reasoning with technological literacy. While acknowledging its contextual scope and the potential influence of broader educational structures, this study provides a conceptual foundation for future research and policy development in AI ethics within higher education. Ultimately, it advances the argument that the sustainability of AI integration in education depends not on technological sophistication alone, but on the capacity to align innovation with deeply internalized ethical consciousness.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Abdussyukur conceptualized the study, developed the research framework, supervised the overall research process, and led the writing of the manuscript. Mohammad Akmal Haris contributed to the research design, data collection, and initial data analysis, as well as drafting sections of the manuscript. Ramadana was responsible for data collection, transcription, and supporting the thematic analysis process. Enny Haryanti contributed to the theoretical development, particularly in integrating Islamic moral epistemology, and critically reviewed the manuscript. Nuraini Muhammad Daud assisted in data interpretation, validation of findings, and refinement of the analytical framework. Yunita Abdullah Aji contributed to literature review development, manuscript editing, and final proofreading. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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