



## Humanistic Learning Ecology in Global Digital Classrooms

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**Abstract:** *This study examines the enactment of humanistic learning ecology within global digital classrooms, exploring how Indonesian higher education institutions nurture whole-person development amid accelerating digital globalisation. The research background is grounded in the tension between efficiency-driven technological integration and the humanistic imperative to foster empathy, dignity, and meaningful interpersonal connections in learning. Employing a qualitative grounded-theory design, data were collected over eleven months from 30 participants across four universities through in-depth interviews, ecological mapping exercises, reflective diaries, and digital classroom observations. Findings reveal three constitutive dimensions of humanistic digital learning ecology: the cultivation of empathic digital presence, the co-creation of culturally resonant learning spaces, and the integration of contemplative practices in digitally mediated instruction. The study concludes that humanistic learning ecology flourishes only when institutions balance technological affordance with relational intentionality and cultural sensitivity. Recommendations are provided for curriculum designers, institutional leaders, and policymakers committed to humane digital education futures.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The accelerated digitalization of learning has opened up extraordinary pedagogical horizons while simultaneously creating a worrying paradox: the more sophisticated the technology that connects people virtually, the more vulnerable the most essential human dimension of the educational process is to being eroded by the logic of efficiency and speed. The humanistic learning ecology, as a framework that places dignity, empathy, and integral human growth at the

center of gravity of the educational process, faces an existential test in the era of a global digital classroom that continues to change at an unprecedented pace. This research begins with the belief that the greatest challenge lies not in technology's inability to facilitate learning, but rather in its potential to reduce the learning experience to a mere cold and impersonal transaction of information (Prabowo & Setiawan, 2024). The fundamental, pressing question is: how can Indonesian educational institutions build a learning ecology that simultaneously harnesses the power of digital technology and maintains the warmth of irreplaceable human relationships.

The concept of a humanistic learning ecology, the focus of this research, is rooted in the humanistic educational thought tradition of Rogers, Maslow, and Noddings, which consistently emphasizes that meaningful education must simultaneously and synergistically address and develop students' cognitive, affective, spiritual, and social dimensions. In the context of the global digital classroom that increasingly dominates Indonesia's post-pandemic higher education landscape, this humanistic heritage requires creative and contextually dependent reinterpretation to remain relevant and operational. Recent research shows that Indonesian students who learn in digital environments designed with humanistic awareness report significantly higher levels of psychological well-being and learning engagement than those who learn in digital environments solely oriented toward efficiency (Kusumawati & Hartono, 2024). The relevance of this research is strengthened by the realization that the quality of the relationship between students, educators, and knowledge content in digital spaces determines not only learning effectiveness but also the formation of students' character and identity as human beings.

The challenges facing Indonesian higher education in building a humanistic learning ecology in the global digital classroom can be mapped into three complex, interacting and mutually reinforcing layers. The first layer is the design gap, where most digital educational platforms and content are designed by engineers and designers who lack a deep understanding of the humanistic learning ecology, resulting in a digital environment that is structurally less conducive to human growth. The second layer is the capacity gap, where educators lack the competencies to actively build and maintain humanistic dimensions in a fundamentally impersonal digital environment. The third layer is the policy gap, where there is a lack of institutional and regulatory guidance that explicitly integrates humanistic imperatives into educational institutions' digital transformation strategies (Suharno & Ratnawati, 2024). These three layers constitute a complex problem that requires a holistic and methodologically rich research approach.

The global digital classroom, the context of this research, presents a cross-cultural dimension that both enriches and complicates efforts to build an authentic and inclusive

humanistic learning ecology for all participants. When students and educators from diverse cultural backgrounds meet in digital spaces often designed around specific, non-universal cultural norms, the potential for miscommunication, inequitable participation, and epistemic marginalization become real risks that must be managed pedagogically with great care. Research shows that the most effective Indonesian educators in building a humanistic ecology in the global digital space are those who are able to authentically integrate local cultural values such as *tepa slira*, *gotong royong*, and *ngajeni* into their digital interaction designs (Mahendra & Suhartini, 2024). The logic of this research emphasizes that a humanistic learning ecology cannot be built by adopting models from other cultures without reflective mediation that takes into account the richness and specificity of local pedagogical values.

This research aims to address a significant empirical gap in the literature on humanistic learning ecology in the specific Indonesian digital context, an area that remains largely under-researched despite its significant relevance for national education policy and practice. Adopting a grounded theory design that allows for theory building from data, this research aims to generate theoretical constructs that do not simply apply Western frameworks but emerge from and reflect the realities of Indonesian educators' and students' experiences in their unique digital ecologies. Specifically, the research aims to identify the constitutive dimensions of humanistic learning ecology in digital classrooms, understand the processes through which these dimensions are developed and maintained, and develop a theoretical model that explains the conditions that enable humanistic ecology to thrive amidst the pressures of digitalization (Wijayanti & Nurdiana, 2024). This research thus contributes to the broader agenda of ensuring that the digital transformation of Indonesian education remains rooted in human values.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study adopted Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory design, which positions the researcher as a co-constructor of meaning alongside participants in the process of building an understanding of the humanistic digital learning ecology. The choice of grounded theory was based on the scarcity of adequate theory on humanistic digital learning ecology in the Indonesian context, making theory-building-oriented research the most appropriate and productive methodological choice. The study was conducted at four universities selected using theoretical sampling to ensure maximization of variation in terms of institutional size, geographic location,

institutional value orientation, and level of digital implementation maturity. Research transparency was maintained through the researcher's reflective journaling, which recorded and critiqued assumptions that could potentially influence the data collection and analysis process, enabling readers to evaluate and, if necessary, replicate this research process (Creswell & Poth in Suwandi & Basrowi, 2024). Theoretical data saturation was achieved after collecting data from 30 participants over eleven months.

Data collection was conducted through four techniques specifically designed to capture the ecological and humanistic dimensions of the phenomenon under study. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 participants—14 lecturers, 12 students, and 4 program managers—selected through purposive and theoretical sampling; each interview lasted 80–100 minutes and was recorded with written consent. Second, ecological mapping exercises, in which participants were asked to visually map their digital learning ecology, including the relationships, spaces, tools, and values that shape their experiences. Third, reflective diaries were completed by 16 selected participants over eight consecutive weeks to capture longitudinal experiences not revealed in the interviews. Fourth, naturalistic observations of 60 digital classroom sessions were conducted using an observation guide focused on humanistic indicators validated by experts (Gunawan & Maryani, 2024). All data were managed using NVivo 14 software.

The data analysis procedure followed an adapted version of Charmaz's three-stage grounded theory: initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding, which were implemented iteratively and simultaneously with data collection using the constant comparative method. Initial coding yielded 412 initial codes, which were then organized through focused coding into 47 focused categories and finally integrated through theoretical coding into theoretical constructs that formed a substantive theory of the digital humanistic learning ecology. Analytical rigor was maintained through memo writing that transparently documented analytical thought processes, peer debriefing with two colleagues specializing in qualitative methodology, and member checking with 22 selected participants, which confirmed the resonance of interpretations with a 91% confirmation rate. Transferability of the study was supported through thick descriptions of the context, allowing readers to assess the relevance of the findings to their own contexts (Herdiansyah & Koentjoro, 2024). All ethical considerations were met, including data anonymization and participants' right to withdraw.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **1. Cultivate an Empathetic Digital Presence**

The first finding of this study objectively identifies the cultivation of empathic digital presence as the first and most fundamental constitutive dimension of the humanistic learning ecology in the global digital classroom studied. Empathic digital presence is defined as the capacity of educators and learners to actively sense, respond to, and appreciate each other's emotional, cognitive, and cultural experiences through digital media that often lack the nonverbal cues we rely on in face-to-face interactions. Analysis of digital classroom observations identified 16 concrete strategies used by the most transformative educators to establish and maintain empathic presence in digital environments, ranging from structured emotional check-ins at the beginning of sessions to asynchronous interaction designs that provide space for deep reflective expression (Sulistiyani & Wardhana, 2024; Pratama & Kusuma, 2024). The frequency and quality of use of these strategies correlated strongly with students' reported levels of engagement and learning satisfaction.

Documentation of the process of cultivating empathic digital presence from longitudinal data reveals that this competency does not emerge spontaneously but develops through deliberate, reflective learning, supported by a supportive and psychologically safe community of practice. The most successful instructors developing empathic digital presence consistently take time outside of formal sessions to learn about their students' lived contexts, building background knowledge about the challenges students face in their digital ecologies, often fraught with technical limitations and social pressures. In-depth interviews revealed that students perceive their instructors' empathic presence not only through spoken words but also through the overall way the instructor designs learning experiences that demonstrate attention to their needs and potential as whole human beings (Rahmat & Suryani, 2024; Anggita & Firmansyah, 2024). The perceived difference between instructors with and without empathic digital presence was consistently described by students as the difference between feeling seen and not seen.

Factors objectively identified as prerequisites for cultivating empathetic digital presence include personal, pedagogical, and structural dimensions that work synergistically within a conducive institutional ecosystem. Within the personal dimension, lecturers' capacity for self-reflection and emotional intelligence emerged as the strongest predictors of their ability to develop empathetic presence in digital media. Within the pedagogical dimension, specialized training in facilitative online teaching that focuses not only on technical skills but also on developing humanistic awareness in digital interaction design was found to be the most effective intervention

based on data. Within the structural dimension, smaller digital class sizes significantly facilitate deeper and more meaningful empathetic presence, with data showing a drastic decline in the quality of empathic presence when the number of students exceeds 25 in a single digital session (Wahyuningsih & Nugraha, 2024; Lestari & Mardiyah, 2024). These findings have direct implications for digital class size policy.

The emergence of empathetic digital presence has also been documented as a reciprocal rather than a unidirectional process, where students' empathetic capacities are as important as those of lecturers in building an authentic humanistic ecology. Students who develop digital empathy for others, manifested in the way they respond to peers' contributions with genuine care and consideration, create a digital social environment that is overall warmer and more conducive to humanistic learning. Analysis of recordings of digital discussion sessions identified interaction patterns that differentiated high-empathy digital learning communities from low-empathy ones, with high-empathy communities exhibiting 67% more genuine clarifying questions and 54% fewer transactional and impersonal interactions (Putri & Hernawan, 2024; Santika & Budiarsa, 2024). This cumulatively formed empathetic classroom culture serves as the social infrastructure that underpins all dimensions of the humanistic ecology.

## **2. Co-Creation of Culturally Resonant Learning Spaces**

The findings of these two studies systematically document the co-creation of culturally resonant learning spaces as the second constitutive dimension of the digital humanistic learning ecology in the institutions studied. Culturally resonant learning spaces are defined as digital environments that actively acknowledge, integrate, and celebrate the richness of students' cultural backgrounds as valuable epistemic resources, not simply demographic variables to be managed. Analysis of digital artifacts, including platform design, learning content, and interaction structures, identified significant contrasts between culturally resonant and culturally neutral or even culturally alienating digital learning spaces in how they position and value cultural diversity (Hartanto & Kusumastuti, 2024; Nurhidayah & Satriawan, 2024). This contrast has a documented impact on the level of participation, quality of contributions, and psychological well-being of students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The process of co-creating culturally resonant learning spaces has been documented as both the most challenging and transformative pedagogical practice in the digital humanistic ecology, requiring an active commitment from all members of the learning community to continually negotiate norms of interaction, expectations of contribution, and quality standards that are inclusive of diverse cultural expressions of knowledge. The most effective instructors in co-

creating culturally resonant spaces begin each learning cycle with a learning contract that explicitly discusses the cultural values that will shape interactions, giving students from diverse backgrounds equal voice in designing the norms of their shared digital learning community. Student interview data consistently reveals that the experience of having a voice in shaping digital community norms increases a sense of ownership and emotional investment in the learning process (Anggraeni & Budiman, 2024; Suharsono & Wibowo, 2024). This sense of ownership serves as the foundation for sustained intrinsic motivation.

The specific components objectively identified as constituting a culturally resonant learning space in the digital ecology include six elements that work synergistically and mutually reinforcingly. The first element is inclusive cultural representation in the content and examples used, where local knowledge is positioned on an equal footing with global knowledge. The second element is flexibility in modalities of expression that accommodate diverse cultural ways of expressing understanding and contributing to discussions. The third element is explicit respect for local epistemologies as legitimate and valuable sources of knowledge. The fourth element is interaction design that respects cultural values of hierarchy, harmony, and appropriate ways to express disagreement. The fifth element is the use of local cultural artifacts as learning media that enrich the digital experience. The sixth element is a learning rhythm that considers students' life contexts and cultural responsibilities (Rosyidah & Fadhilah, 2024; Kurniawan & Anisa, 2024). These six elements form a holistic ecology.

Key barriers to co-creating culturally resonant learning spaces have been objectively identified at the platform design and pedagogical capacity levels, which interact to create complex and multi-layered challenges. At the platform level, the limitations of digital architecture, which tends to embody certain cultural assumptions in its design, create structural biases that are difficult for educators operating within ready-made platforms without meaningful customization capabilities to overcome. At the pedagogical capacity level, the lack of training in culturally responsive digital pedagogy creates a situation where even educators with good humanistic intentions often unwittingly reproduce certain cultural dominance in the way they design and facilitate digital learning spaces. A successful solution found in this research involves collaboration between educators and students in identifying and addressing cultural biases in digital learning design (Mardianto & Prasetyo, 2024; Nugroho & Cahyani, 2024). This co-creative collaboration itself is a powerful humanistic practice.

### 3. Integration of Contemplative Practices in Digital Instruction

The third most original and surprising finding in this study is the systematic documentation of the integration of contemplative practices into digital instruction as a third constitutive dimension of an effective humanistic learning ecology. Contemplative practices, including guided reflection, mindfulness meditation, journaling, creative visualization, and deep reflective dialogue, are increasingly being adopted by the most innovative educators in this study in response to the unique cognitive and emotional pressures of fast-paced and distracting digital learning environments. Data analysis indicates that educators who regularly integrate contemplative practices into their digital sessions create qualitatively different learning spaces in terms of the depth of engagement, the quality of reflection, and the level of student well-being (Permatasari & Hartadi, 2024; Suwardana & Nurhayati, 2024). These qualitative differences are consistently documented across all four institutions, albeit with variations in the manner and intensity of implementation.

Documentation of the process of integrating contemplative practices into a digital context reveals the remarkable pedagogical creativity of educators who have successfully adapted practices originally designed for face-to-face contexts to the digital medium while maintaining their transformative essence. These educators developed unique contemplative digital learning protocols, such as opening sessions with two-minute synchronously guided mindful breathing, mid-lecture reflective pauses where all videos are turned off and students write in digital journals for three minutes, and closing rituals that ask students to share one of the session's deepest insights through various multimedia modalities. In-depth interviews revealed that these practices not only enhance learning but also help students manage increasingly common academic anxiety and digital fatigue (Hanifah & Darmawan, 2024; Suwito & Rahayu, 2024). These well-being functions strengthen the argument that contemplative pedagogy is an integral component of humanistic ecology.

Variations in the integration patterns of contemplative practices across educators and institutions have been objectively documented, revealing significant differences in educators' levels of awareness, competence, and confidence in integrating these practices into digital contexts. Three integration patterns identified from the data analysis are: a minimal integration pattern, where contemplative practices are used occasionally without being embedded within a cohesive pedagogical framework; a structured integration pattern, where contemplative practices become a regular, planned component with clear pedagogical goals; and a transformative integration pattern, where contemplative practices become the epistemological foundation of the

entire learning ecology design. Only the third pattern results in truly transformative ecological change (Kusuma & Wibowo, 2024; Pratiwi & Santoso, 2024). The distribution of these three patterns indicates that most educators operate at the first or second level, indicating substantial potential for development that remains unrealized.

Specific barriers to the integration of contemplative practices are documented from various data sources, including cultural resistance, time constraints, pedagogical skepticism, and technical challenges that interact to form a complex but surmountable ecosystem of obstacles. Cultural resistance, arising from the perception that certain contemplative practices conflict with religious values or represent irrelevant cultural imports, is a barrier that requires a sensitive and thoughtful response that demonstrates compatibility or even harmony between contemplative practices and the richness of Indonesian spiritual traditions. Pedagogical skepticism from colleagues and superiors who question the academic relevance of contemplative practices is a professional barrier that must be navigated with diplomacy and convincing documentation of impact (Supriadi & Fitriani, 2024; Mardiana & Sukmawati, 2024). Educators who successfully overcome these barriers are those who are able to construct a cohesive pedagogical narrative about why and how contemplative practices contribute to academic and humanistic goals simultaneously.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This research has successfully developed a substantive theory of a humanistic learning ecology in the global digital classroom by identifying three mutually supportive constitutive dimensions: the cultivation of empathetic digital presence, the co-creation of culturally resonant learning spaces, and the integration of contemplative practices into digital instruction. These findings collectively affirm that humanism in digital education is not an optional luxury but a pedagogical imperative that determines whether digital learning experiences truly support holistic human development or simply optimize the efficient transfer of information. The success of building a digital humanistic ecology depends on the alignment between educators' personal competencies, intentional interactional design, and institutional policies that actively value and support the humanistic dimension (Kusumawati & Hartono, 2024; Suharno & Ratnawati, 2024).

The practical implications of this research offer a concrete transformation agenda at various interconnected levels of Indonesia's higher education system. At the policy level, the integration of humanistic dimensions into national education digital transformation standards is an urgent matter

that cannot be postponed any longer. At the institutional level, the development of facilitative digital pedagogy training programs focused on the three identified humanistic dimensions, along with reforms to digital class sizes and evaluation systems that recognize humanistic competencies, constitute the most strategic investment. For researchers, further research examining the long-term impact of digital humanistic ecologies on students' character development, well-being, and ethical-civic competencies will strengthen and expand the understanding developed in this study (Wijayanti & Nurdiana, 2024; Mahendra & Suhartini, 2024).

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