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Becoming Digital: Lecturers' Meaning-Making of Digital Transformation in Islamic Higher Education

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A B S T R A C T

Digital transformation in higher education changes academic work as well as institutional systems, raising questions about how lecturers interpret its benefits and demands. This study examines how lecturers at Universitas Islam Negeri Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, Indonesia, experience, interpret, and negotiate digital transformation in their academic work. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was employed, drawing primarily on semi-structured interviews with ten lecturers, supplemented by observation and document review. Analysis proceeded through repeated reading, initial noting, within-case theme development, and cross-case interpretation. Five interrelated themes concerned acceptance of digitalization alongside application fragmentation, adaptation through collective learning, negotiation of digital demands against academic workload, changing work culture, and the preservation of academic purpose. The fifth theme connected the others through lecturers' judgments about whether technology supported their professional responsibilities. The findings are synthesized as negotiated becoming digital: lecturers' ongoing incorporation of institutional digital requirements while evaluating and adjusting their implications for meaningful academic work. This situated interpretation connects participation in modernization with practical efforts to preserve professional priorities. The findings suggest that institutional managers should examine overlapping workflows, provide continuing technical and peer support, and evaluate digital initiatives through their contribution to academic responsibilities. The study offers an interpretive contribution from one Islamic university rather than a general model of digital transformation.

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1. Introduction

Digital transformation has become a strategic concern for higher education because it affects how universities organize academic work, deliver services, coordinate information, and exercise governance. Conceptual clarity is important when examining these changes. Digitization refers to converting analogue information into digital form, whereas digitalization concerns the use of digital technologies to reorganize existing activities and processes. Digital transformation involves broader changes in organizational arrangements and value creation enabled by digital technologies (Vial, 2019; Verhoef et al., 2021; Wessel et al., 2021). In universities, these developments intersect with teaching, research, community engagement, student supervision, and administrative reporting. Reviews consequently emphasize that transformation depends on relationships among technology, strategy, people, organizational culture, and governance, rather than on the acquisition of applications alone (Castro Benavides et al., 2020; Fernández et al., 2023; McCarthy et al., 2023). This distinction makes the organization and meaning of academic work central to understanding what institutional digital change entails.

The benefits of digitalization are accompanied by organizational tensions. Faster communication, remote access, and improved documentation may coexist with disconnected

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platforms, overlapping procedures, and repeated data entry. Fernández et al. (2023) identify limitations in the strategic integration of university digital initiatives, while reviews of transformation barriers highlight difficulties involving leadership, resources, competence, organizational culture, and stakeholder coordination (Gkrimpizi et al., 2023; Singun, 2025). Bygstad et al. (2022), examining digitalization at the University of Oslo, distinguish between the digitalization of education and that of disciplinary subjects and show the importance of aligning these developments in a shared digital learning space. Their analysis illustrates that digital transformation requires coordination across practices and infrastructures. For educational management, an important question is therefore how institutional arrangements enable lecturers to connect digital procedures with the academic activities those procedures are intended to support.

Lecturers occupy a consequential position within these arrangements because they must incorporate digital requirements into professional responsibilities that continue to demand time, attention, and judgment. Administrative burden provides one perspective on this relationship: procedural requirements can consume academic resources without necessarily advancing teaching or research (Woelert, 2023). Technostress offers a complementary perspective by examining mismatches among technological demands, individual capacities, and working conditions (Wang & Li, 2019). Digital demands may also be experienced as constructive challenges when they are manageable and adequately supported (Nascimento et al., 2024). These perspectives suggest that positive and negative experiences can coexist. A lecturer may appreciate institutional modernization while finding particular applications burdensome, or develop digital competence while questioning the allocation of administrative work. Understanding these responses requires attention to how lecturers interpret digital demands in relation to the purposes and conditions of their profession (Mahdiyyah & Tanjung, 2026).

Qualitative research has already demonstrated that technological and organizational changes affect academic identity. El-Soussi (2022), drawing on interviews with four faculty members in the United Arab Emirates, found that the emergency transition to online teaching generated tensions between teachers' professional beliefs and their pedagogical, managerial, and social roles. In Indonesia, Gaus and Hall (2015) examined thirty academics across three state universities and showed how academics sought to maintain their professional identities while responding to externally prescribed accountability requirements involving online performance assessment. These studies establish that academics actively interpret institutional change and seek to sustain meaningful professional commitments. They also provide different points of comparison for the present inquiry: El-Soussi emphasizes changes in teaching roles during an emergency transition, whereas Gaus and Hall locate identity tensions within accountability reforms. The present study builds on these insights by examining lecturers' encounters with multiple digital requirements across everyday academic work.

More recent scholarship further narrows the basis for a defensible research gap. Proietti (2026), combining evidence from a European higher education project with an exploratory Italian follow-up study, connects digital transformation with work intensification, changing professional roles, self-directed and peer learning, and concerns about preserving the university's educational mission. This research demonstrates that the relationships among digital demands, professional meaning, and organizational conditions are already

recognized (Firmansyah et al., 2026). The present study therefore does not claim that lecturers' experiences of digital change have been overlooked altogether. Its focus is more specific: how acceptance of institutional modernization, frustration with fragmented applications, collective learning, and the protection of academic priorities are connected within lecturers' accounts of their own practice. The analytical task is to develop a detailed phenomenological account of how lecturers participate in digitalization while evaluating and adjusting its place in meaningful academic work.

UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi (UIN STS Jambi), Indonesia, provides the institutional setting for this inquiry. Lecturers encounter multiple institutional and national systems associated with academic administration, personnel management, and professional reporting. These requirements intersect with the Tridharma responsibilities of teaching, research, and community engagement, as well as student supervision. The setting enables an examination of how lecturers experience the relationship between digital governance and their professional responsibilities within an Indonesian Islamic university. Islamic higher education is treated as an important contextual boundary of the study (Indriyani et al., 2022). The analysis does not presume that commitments to accountability, service, or academic integrity are unique to Islamic institutions, or that institutional religious identity necessarily produces distinctive digital experiences. Its relevance is considered through what participants' accounts support, rather than used independently as evidence of theoretical novelty.

Accordingly, this study asks: How do lecturers at UIN STS Jambi experience, interpret, and negotiate digital transformation in their academic work? Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is employed to examine participants' meaning-making and the relationships among their experiences. The interpretive synthesis emerging from the analysis is termed negotiated becoming digital: an ongoing process through which lecturers incorporate institutional digital requirements into their work while evaluating and adjusting those requirements in relation to professional responsibilities and academic purpose. The concept draws together adaptation, meaning-making, and professional identity negotiation around the relationship between participation in digital modernization and the preservation of meaningful academic work. In this formulation, negotiation includes practical adjustments to time and routines, learning with others, and articulating judgments about the usefulness of digital arrangements; it does not require formal bargaining or imply successful influence over institutional decisions. The study offers this concept as a situated phenomenological synthesis rather than a universal model or a claim that negotiation itself is new. Its educational-management contribution lies in connecting lecturers' experiences with questions of workflow integration, institutional support, and the academic value enabled by digital systems.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to investigate how lecturers experienced, interpreted, and negotiated institutional digital transformation in relation to their academic responsibilities. IPA was selected because the research focused on the meanings lecturers attributed to digital requirements, professional adaptation, administrative demands, and academic priorities

rather than on measuring technological adoption or evaluating the technical performance of institutional digital applications. The approach is grounded in a double hermeneutic, whereby participants seek to make sense of their experiences while researchers interpret participants' meaning-making within particular social and institutional contexts (Smith et al., 2022).

The study adopted an idiographic orientation, emphasizing the interpretation of individual experiences before examining relationships across participants. This approach enabled the investigation to explore how lecturers understood the coexistence of institutional modernization, fragmented digital applications, collective learning, changing administrative demands, and the preservation of academic purpose. The research did not assume that lecturers' experiences represented the broader academic population or that the Islamic identity of the institution necessarily produced a distinctive pattern of digital meaning-making. Instead, it sought to develop a contextually situated interpretation of lecturers' experiences of becoming digital within an Indonesian Islamic higher education institution.

2.2 *Research Setting and Participants*

The research was conducted at Universitas Islam Negeri Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin (UIN STS) Jambi, Indonesia. The university provided an institutional setting in which lecturers encountered digital systems associated with academic administration, personnel management, professional reporting, teaching, research, community engagement, and student supervision. These intersecting requirements created an appropriate context for examining how digital transformation was interpreted in relation to lecturers' professional responsibilities and established academic practices.

Ten lecturers participated in the study. All had direct experience of institutional digitalization and could describe their encounters with digital applications, administrative procedures, and changing academic work practices. They were treated as individual experiential cases rather than as statistically representative members of the university's academic population. A verified breakdown of academic ranks, years of service, and faculty affiliations was unavailable. These characteristics are therefore not reported, limiting the analysis of differences associated with participants' professional backgrounds.

2.3 *Sampling Procedures*

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct experience of digitalization in academic and administrative activities. This strategy was appropriate for IPA because the study sought information-rich accounts of a shared phenomenon rather than a statistically representative sample (Patton, 2015). The researcher contacted ten lecturers directly and invited them to participate. The available records do not establish the total number initially approached or whether any lecturers declined. The ten cases formed a bounded group for individual interpretation and cross-case comparison. This sample size was consistent with the study's idiographic scope, although the relatively brief interviews limited analytical depth. No claim of statistical representativeness or demonstrated data saturation is made.

2.4 *Data Sources and Collection*

Data collection was conducted between the first week of February and June 2026. Initial observation and supporting research activities began in February, while the semi-structured interviews were conducted during May and June 2026. The interviews constituted the

primary source of experiential data because they enabled participants to describe how they understood and responded to institutional digital transformation. All interviews were conducted face-to-face by Fridiyanto and Muhammad Rafii in Bahasa Indonesia. Each interview lasted approximately 15–20 minutes and was audio-recorded. The recordings were subsequently transcribed, and the transcripts were checked against the original audio recordings to improve their correspondence with participants' statements. No follow-up interview sessions were conducted.

The interviews addressed five experiential domains: engagement with institutional digital systems, perceived benefits and difficulties, professional adaptation, administrative workload, and the relationship between digital requirements and academic responsibilities. These domains aligned with the research question and provided a common focus for interpreting lecturers' experiences. The original interview guide was unavailable for this revision; a reconstructed guide is therefore not presented as the original instrument. Observation of digital-service use and review of institutional documents provided contextual information about organizational practices and requirements. However, the available records do not specify the scope of observation, how observations were recorded, or the documents examined. These sources are consequently treated as contextual support rather than independent validation of participants' subjective accounts.

The relatively short interview duration and absence of follow-up interviews restricted opportunities for sustained phenomenological exploration and further clarification of individual experiences. Consequently, the analysis was confined to the experiential meanings supported by the available interview material and did not claim to capture the full complexity of participants' professional experiences.

2.5 *Data Analysis*

The analysis was informed by the iterative procedures of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis described by Smith et al. (2022). As reported in the original study, the analytical process involved repeated engagement with participants' interview accounts, attention to descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual meanings, identification of emergent themes within individual cases, and interpretation of relationships across cases. The analysis considered how lecturers described institutional modernization, application fragmentation, adaptation through collective learning, changing administrative demands, and the relationship between digitalization and academic responsibilities. Interpretation proceeded from individual accounts toward comparisons of shared concerns and differences in the meanings attributed to digital requirements. The five themes reported in the findings represent the resulting interpretive structure rather than numerical categories or measures of thematic frequency.

The themes comprised: (1) Digitalization as Necessity, Fragmentation as Friction; (2) Becoming Digital through Adaptation and Collective Learning; (3) Negotiating Digital Demands against Academic Workload; (4) Digitalization as a Transformation of Work Culture; and (5) Technology as Tool, Lecturer as Subject. The fifth theme provided a higher-order interpretative connection among the other themes by emphasizing participants' judgments about the purposes of academic work and the appropriate role of digital technology. These relationships informed the synthesis termed negotiated becoming digital, which describes lecturers' incorporation of institutional digital requirements alongside their

efforts to interpret and adjust those requirements in relation to professional responsibilities. The synthesis does not represent a fixed developmental sequence, formal bargaining process, or universal model of institutional digital transformation.

Firmansyah conducted the qualitative analysis. Fridiyanto contributed to the research design, data collection, and manuscript preparation, and Muhammad Rafii contributed to the Results and Discussion sections. All authors reviewed and refined the manuscript. Individual case-analysis notes and the theme-development matrix were unavailable for examination. The analytical account can therefore be explained through the reported stages and participant excerpts, but the complete pathway from individual cases to themes cannot be independently reconstructed from the retained documentation.

2.6 Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

Methodological rigor was considered through the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), interpreted in accordance with the phenomenological orientation of the study. Credibility was supported by grounding the findings in participants' accounts and presenting illustrative quotations alongside their thematic interpretations. The interview recordings were transcribed and checked against the audio material, providing an additional safeguard for the accuracy of the documented accounts. Observational and documentary materials were used to contextualize participants' experiences rather than to establish independent confirmation of subjective meanings. Transferability was addressed by describing the institutional setting, research design, and experiential focus of the study. The findings were not intended to represent all lecturers at UIN STS Jambi or other Islamic higher education institutions.

Researcher positionality was especially relevant because the research team included researchers professionally affiliated with UIN STS Jambi. Fridiyanto, who participated in conducting the interviews, was part of the institutional environment under investigation. This insider position provided contextual familiarity with academic practices and institutional digital requirements, while also creating the possibility that professional familiarity and shared institutional assumptions influenced participants' responses and the interpretation of their experiences. The interpretive findings should therefore be understood in light of the researchers' professional relationship to the setting. Although the study reported an IPA-oriented analytical process, no retained individual case-analysis notes or theme-development matrix are available to substantiate a comprehensive analytical audit trail. The study does not claim that independent coding, member checking, external auditing, or formal peer debriefing procedures were conducted.

These limitations do not negate the experiential accounts reported in the study, but they constrain the degree of analytical traceability and the depth of phenomenological interpretation that can be demonstrated. Accordingly, the findings are presented as a bounded, context-sensitive interpretation of the participating lecturers' experiences rather than an exhaustive or independently verified assessment of institutional digital transformation.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

The study addressed voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and protection of participants' identities. Institutional permission was obtained to conduct the research at UIN STS Jambi. This authorization does not constitute approval by a research

ethics committee; separate committee clearance was not documented. Before data collection, participants were informed about the study's objectives, interview procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw without adverse consequences. Informed consent was obtained before the interviews. Pseudonyms were used in reporting the findings, and personally identifying information was excluded. Interview materials were used for research purposes and were not made publicly available because professional experiences within a single institution could permit identification. Requests for anonymized information remain subject to ethical and confidentiality restrictions.

3. Results

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) identified five interrelated experiential themes concerning how lecturers at UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi experienced and interpreted institutional digital transformation. The analytical account was developed from the ten participating lecturers' interview material, with attention to shared experiences and differences in how participants described digital requirements, adaptation, administrative demands, and professional responsibilities. The themes represent interpretive relationships rather than numerical categories or measures of thematic frequency. The selected quotations illustrate particular dimensions of these relationships and should not be interpreted as evidence that all participants expressed identical experiences.

Taken together, the findings indicate that lecturers did not necessarily experience digital transformation as either straightforward institutional progress or resistance to technological change. Rather, their accounts described the coexistence of appreciation for digital modernization and concern about its practical consequences for academic work. This relationship was expressed through experiences of fragmented digital applications, collective learning, workload negotiation, changing work practices, and judgments concerning the preservation of academic purpose. Table 1 summarizes the five themes and their central experiential meanings.

Table 1. IPA Themes and Their Central Experiential Meanings

Theme	Experiential focus	Central meaning
1. Digitalization as necessity, fragmentation as friction	Acceptance of modernization alongside confusion and digital fatigue	The perceived difficulty concerns disconnected systems and repeated work rather than digitalization itself.
2. Becoming digital through adaptation and collective learning	Trial and error, peer support, technical assistance, and self-learning	Digital competence is experienced as a continuing individual and collective learning process.
3. Negotiating digital demands against academic workload	Scheduling, prioritizing, and protecting teaching and research time	Adaptation includes managing professional attention and boundaries rather than merely operating software.
4. Digitalization as a transformation of work culture	Speed, transparency, documentation, flexibility, and data-based accountability	Digital systems reshape expectations concerning how academic work is performed and documented.
5. Technology as tool, lecturer as subject	Protection of academic purpose and human values	Digital transformation is considered meaningful when technology strengthens rather than displaces academic work.

3.1. Digitalization as Necessity, Fragmentation as Friction

A prominent theme concerned lecturers' acceptance of digitalization as an institutional necessity alongside their frustration with fragmented digital applications. Participants expressed positive expectations regarding efficiency, transparency, and modernization, although they differed in the particular benefits and difficulties they emphasized. Hana stated that digitalization at the university deserved "high appreciation," while Yani described it as a good institutional intention to improve efficiency, transparency, and governance. Danang similarly emphasized that technology could facilitate lecturers' teaching activities. These accounts suggest that criticism of implementation did not necessarily reflect rejection of technological change. Instead, participants distinguished between the institutional objectives of digitalization and their experiences of the applications through which those objectives were pursued.

The difficulties became particularly visible in accounts concerning the use of multiple digital platforms with different procedures and repeated reporting requirements. Hana explained that "the many applications used are very confusing" and suggested the development of a centralized academic portal. Joni associated the number of platforms with "digital fatigue," describing the need to divide attention between teaching, research, and manual data entry across different portals. Toni articulated the desired alternative in practical terms, suggesting that lecturers should be able to "enter [the data] once and have everything filled in." Janah similarly described the non-integrated system as burdensome, while Boni characterized the experience as "confusing" and "too complicated."

These accounts illustrate a tension between the anticipated benefits of institutional digitalization and the practical demands lecturers associated with navigating multiple applications. While digital systems were expected to simplify academic and administrative procedures, participants experienced some arrangements as introducing additional complexity. The experiential significance of fragmentation therefore lay not simply in the existence of multiple platforms but in how lecturers interpreted their effects on professional attention, administrative responsibilities, and academic work. These findings describe perceived fragmentation and its meanings for participants; they do not independently establish technical deficiencies in system interoperability.

3.2. Becoming Digital through Adaptation and Collective Learning

The second theme concerned lecturers' experiences of developing the competencies needed to function within an evolving institutional digital environment. Participants described adaptation as a continuing process involving repeated practice, experimentation, consultation, and informal learning rather than a single achievement of technical competence. Janah explained that she sometimes experienced difficulty remembering how to operate multiple applications but responded by repeatedly accessing the systems, consulting available guides, and discussing problems with colleagues or the university's technology unit. Toni described a comparable combination of experimentation, peer assistance, technical support, and online tutorials.

The participants' accounts also highlighted the importance of social relationships in navigating digital requirements. Lecturers with greater familiarity with particular applications were described as assisting colleagues who encountered difficulties. Some

senior lecturers sought support from younger colleagues through everyday practices of consultation and mutual problem-solving rather than through formally organized training arrangements. Participants also acknowledged the contribution of institutional orientation sessions and online training, although their evaluations of its adequacy differed. Boni regarded some orientation activities as insufficient, whereas Danang and Joni described supplementing formal instruction through self-directed learning using online resources.

These experiences indicate that becoming digital was interpreted not only as an individual effort to acquire technological skills but also as participation in collective learning practices. Although participants described different sources of assistance and varying assessments of institutional support, their accounts illustrated how adaptation depended on interactions among individual initiative, collegial relationships, and accessible technical resources. Digital competence consequently emerged in the findings as a continuing professional practice shaped by the organizational environment rather than as an isolated personal attribute.

3.3. Negotiating Digital Demands against Academic Workload

The third theme concerned the ways lecturers experienced and managed digital administrative demands alongside the time and attention required for their academic responsibilities. Participants described practical efforts to organize digital tasks without allowing administrative procedures to displace teaching, research, supervision, and community engagement. Boni expressed the perceived tension directly: "many applications do not make the work easier; they add work." In explaining this assessment, he contrasted multiple digital requirements with earlier manual procedures that, although slower, were not perceived as multiplying the number of tasks.

Other accounts emphasized practical adjustments rather than criticism alone. Hana acknowledged the potential benefits of digitalization while arguing that application features should be improved to prevent additional burdens on lecturers. Yani described allocating a particular period to digital administrative tasks so that these requirements would not interfere with preparing classes or supervising students. Similarly, Joni explained that he initially felt overwhelmed by the number of applications and their different operating procedures but subsequently developed a schedule for completing digital administrative responsibilities. Participants also described communicating difficulties and providing feedback to technology managers when particular systems were experienced as complicated or inefficient.

These accounts suggest that adaptation to digital transformation involved negotiating the relationship between institutional requirements and professional priorities. Participants responded through scheduling, prioritization, technical learning, and the articulation of concerns about usability. In this experiential context, negotiation did not necessarily involve formal bargaining or the capacity to change institutional policies. Rather, it referred to practical adjustments through which lecturers sought to maintain control over their time and attention while fulfilling digital reporting requirements. The findings reflect participants' experiences of administrative burden and their responses to it, rather than independent measurements of increases in workload.

3.4. Digitalization as a Transformation of Work Culture

The fourth theme concerned lecturers' interpretations of changes in academic work practices associated with institutional digitalization. Participants described a movement from physical documentation and location-dependent procedures toward digital records, faster communication, greater accessibility of information, and increased flexibility in completing certain responsibilities. One participant contrasted earlier correspondence procedures, which could take several days, with the ability to transmit PDF documents and obtain more immediate processing. Another participant described digitalization as supporting greater effectiveness and efficiency because some activities that previously required physical presence could be completed remotely.

Alongside these perceived benefits, lecturers described changes in expectations concerning professional competence and responsiveness. Joni emphasized that the substantive responsibilities of lecturers—education, research, and community engagement—had not fundamentally changed, although the procedures through which these responsibilities were performed had developed. His account highlighted an increasing expectation that lecturers combine academic competence with the ability to operate institutional digital systems. Yani similarly characterized adaptation as developing "a new work rhythm," indicating that digital transformation affected the organization and timing of everyday professional activities.

The participants' accounts therefore reflected both continuity and change in academic work. Digitalization was associated with greater flexibility, faster communication, and improved documentation, while also introducing expectations concerning responsiveness, procedural compliance, and digital competence. These experiences were not uniformly positive or negative. Instead, the meaning of changing work culture depended on how participants interpreted the relationship between new technological arrangements and established academic responsibilities. The findings suggest that digital transformation was experienced as a reconfiguration of professional practices and expectations rather than merely the replacement of manual procedures with electronic systems.

3.5. Technology as Tool, Lecturer as Subject

The fifth theme represented a higher-order interpretative concern connecting the other experiential themes: the relationship between digital technology and the substantive purposes of academic work. Participants' accounts suggested that technological arrangements were evaluated not only through their operational convenience but also through their contribution to teaching, research, student development, and professional responsibilities. Yanto expressed this orientation by emphasizing that the central purpose of the lecturer's profession remained educating students, nurturing critical thinking, and transmitting scholarly and human values. In his account, technology and applications were "tools, not substitutes for the lecturer's main role."

The fifth theme represented a higher-order interpretive concern connecting the other experiential themes: the relationship between digital technology and the substantive purposes of academic work. Participants' accounts suggested that technological arrangements were evaluated not only through their operational convenience but also through their contribution to teaching, research, student development, and professional

responsibilities. Yanto expressed this orientation by emphasizing that the central purpose of the lecturer's profession remained educating students, nurturing critical thinking, and transmitting scholarly and human values. In his account, technology and applications were "tools, not substitutes for the lecturer's main role."

This perspective helps illuminate the meanings associated with the preceding themes. Participants' requests for integrated applications reflected expectations that technological systems should simplify administrative work. Their accounts of collective learning demonstrated efforts to maintain professional capability amid changing requirements. Similarly, their strategies for scheduling administrative responsibilities reflected attempts to protect time for substantive academic activities. Although these concerns were expressed through different experiences, they converged in the interpretation around the question of whether institutional digitalization supported the professional purposes for which academic technologies were introduced.

4. Discussion

The findings indicate that lecturers at UIN STS Jambi experienced institutional digitalization through the simultaneous acceptance of modernization and negotiation of its consequences for academic work. Participants appreciated faster services, flexibility, documentation, and transparency, while questioning fragmented applications and repeated administrative tasks. This coexistence is central to interpreting their experience. Endorsement of institutional digitalization did not entail approval of every digital procedure, and criticism of particular applications did not necessarily indicate rejection of technological change. Organizational perspectives distinguish digital transformation from the implementation of information technology by emphasizing changes in organizational arrangements and value creation (Vial, 2019; Verhoef et al., 2021; Wessel et al., 2021). The present case complements these perspectives by examining how lecturers judged such changes through their effects on everyday professional responsibilities.

The relationship among the five themes provides the empirical basis for this interpretation. Fragmentation describes the difficulties participants encountered when navigating disconnected requirements. Collective learning captures how they developed practical ways of working within that environment. Workload negotiation concerns their allocation of time and attention, while work-culture transformation describes changing expectations of speed, responsiveness, documentation, and accountability. Technology as Tool, Lecturer as Subject connects these experiences through a shared concern with the purposes of academic work. Yanto's emphasis on educating students and nurturing critical thinking makes this orientation explicit; accounts of repeated entry, peer assistance, and scheduling show how related concerns were expressed in practical terms. The fifth theme therefore functions as a higher-order interpretation of the relationship among the other themes. It is not a final stage reached by every participant, and the themes do not constitute a fixed developmental sequence. (Fadhli et al., 2023; Faisal, 2026).

Application fragmentation was a particularly visible site of tension between institutional intentions and lecturers' experiences. Participants' requests for a centralized portal and single data entry expressed an expectation that digitalization should simplify the relationship among tasks. Their frustration concerned the additional effort required to

navigate applications and reproduce information. Fernández et al. (2023) identify shortcomings in the strategic integration of university digital initiatives. Bygstad et al. (2022), addressing the alignment of digital education and disciplinary subjects, likewise demonstrate the importance of connecting developments across institutional practices. Although their focus differs from the administrative fragmentation reported here, both perspectives draw attention to coordination. The present findings add an experiential interpretation: participants assessed integration through whether systems reduced repeated work and supported continuity across their responsibilities. These accounts establish perceived fragmentation; they do not independently verify the technical interoperability of the applications (Firmansyah, 2021; Mustakim et al., 2021).

This distinction also matters for interpreting digital fatigue and technostress. Wang and Li (2019) explain technostress through mismatches among technological demands, individual characteristics, and working conditions. In the present case, lecturers described willingness to learn alongside frustration with repeated procedures and competing obligations. Their accounts suggest that difficulties cannot be attributed to individual competence alone. System arrangements and the distribution of work also shaped the demands participants experienced. This interpretation is compatible with reviews locating transformation barriers across leadership, resources, technology, organizational culture, and coordination (Gkrimpizi et al., 2023; Singun, 2025). It remains an interpretation of participants' accounts rather than a causal test of system design. Nevertheless, it directs managerial attention toward the working environment as well as individual training needs.

Participants' positive experiences qualify this interpretation further. Faster correspondence, remote completion of tasks, and improved documentation were valued because they facilitated recognizable professional activities. Nascimento et al. (2024) show that technological demands can have constructive as well as distressing dimensions. The accounts in this study similarly suggest that the meaning of a digital requirement depends partly on the relationship between its demands and perceived benefits. A procedure experienced as useful in one activity may coexist with another experienced as repetitive or intrusive. Consequently, describing a lecturer as either accepting or resisting digitalization can obscure the distinctions that lecturer makes among applications, tasks, and institutional expectations.

Administrative burden provides a complementary explanation of these distinctions. Woelert (2023) emphasizes how procedural work can consume academic resources without necessarily advancing core professional purposes. Boni's statement that multiple applications added work, together with accounts of repeated reporting, illustrates participants' concern with the cumulative demands of digital administration. The relevant unit of evaluation is therefore the workflow experienced by the lecturer, including preparation, entry, checking, and repetition across systems. Digital completion of an individual transaction does not by itself establish a reduction in total administrative effort. Because this study did not measure transaction times or compare administrative staffing arrangements, it cannot determine the magnitude of additional work or establish whether tasks were formally transferred from support staff. Its contribution is to identify how participants understood that burden and responded to it (Firmansyah et al., 2025; Fridiyanto et al., 2020).

Collective learning explains how participants continued to function within this demanding environment. Repeated practice, online tutorials, assistance from colleagues, and consultation with technical staff provided ways to resolve difficulties. These practices align with Trenerry et al. (2021), who emphasize relationships among individual adaptability, collaboration, leadership, and organizational support in workplace digital transformation. Proietti (2026) also identifies self-directed learning and peer support as important features of changing academic work. The present case does not introduce collective learning as a new mechanism. It shows how that mechanism operated alongside frustration and workload adjustment: lecturers could become more capable users while continuing to question the organization of digital tasks. Peer assistance consequently supported participation without necessarily resolving fragmentation or eliminating its demands.

Workload negotiation further demonstrates that becoming digitally capable involved more than learning application functions. Yani and Joni described scheduling administrative tasks around other responsibilities, while participants' feedback to technology managers articulated expectations about usability and burden. These responses connect digital practice with decisions about professional priorities. Gaus and Hall (2015) found that Indonesian academics sought to sustain their professional identities while responding to externally prescribed accountability requirements. El-Soussi (2022) similarly identified tensions between professional beliefs and changing roles during the transition to online teaching. The present findings extend this comparison across participants' encounters with multiple digital requirements. Lecturers incorporated digital competence into their professional practice while seeking to preserve teaching, research, supervision, and community engagement as its substantive purposes. The reported adjustments indicate practical agency, although they do not establish that participants could change institutional requirements.

The work-culture theme situates these adjustments within changing organizational expectations. Participants described faster processing, digital records, remote access, and a new rhythm of work. Such changes could facilitate tasks while increasing expectations of responsiveness and documentation. Proietti (2026) likewise connects digitalization with flexibility, work intensification, and changing academic roles. The present findings support that account of ambivalence while showing how it was evaluated in relation to everyday responsibilities at UIN STS Jambi. Participants did not describe their core academic duties as disappearing. Instead, they encountered changes in how those duties were performed and evidenced. Their experience therefore involved continuity of professional purpose alongside changes in the procedures and expectations surrounding its fulfillment.

Together, these relationships support the interpretive synthesis termed negotiated becoming digital. The concept describes lecturers' ongoing incorporation of institutional digital requirements alongside their evaluation and adjustment of those requirements in relation to meaningful academic work. Adaptation captures changes in practice; sensemaking concerns interpretation; professional identity negotiation addresses the maintenance or revision of professional self-understanding; and sociotechnical adjustment situates change within relationships among people, technologies, and organizational arrangements. Negotiated becoming digital brings these perspectives together around the coexistence of participation and evaluative boundaries. In this case, lecturers learned applications, sought assistance, organized their time, and expressed judgments about when technology supported or displaced academic priorities. Negotiation refers to these everyday

practices and interpretations, rather than necessarily to formal bargaining or successful institutional influence. The concept is offered as a situated synthesis of the five themes, not as a universal model or evidence that negotiation in digital transformation is previously unknown.

The Islamic higher education setting should be interpreted within these evidentiary boundaries. The study documents experiences at an Indonesian Islamic university, but the reported accounts do not establish that religious identity produced a distinctive pattern of digital meaning-making. Commitments to service, accountability, educational relationships, and scholarly responsibility should therefore not be attributed exclusively to Islamic institutions. The case contributes evidence about how lecturers in this institutional setting connected digital requirements with *Tridharma* responsibilities and student guidance. Establishing how explicitly Islamic commitments influence digital governance would require accounts that directly connect those commitments with participants' judgments and practices, together with relevant institutional evidence. In the present analysis, Islamic higher education defines the context and scope of the inquiry rather than independently substantiating its theoretical contribution.

The findings also give practical content to a human-centered orientation. Multi-level approaches emphasize that technological change depends on organizational and social support (Trenerry et al., 2021), while higher education scholarship highlights the alignment of digital initiatives with stakeholder needs and institutional purposes (Khajoueinejad et al., 2025). Participants' accounts specify concerns that such an orientation should address: repeated entry, difficulty navigating applications, access to assistance, and competition for academic time. Theme 5 supplies the evaluative connection among these concerns. Systems were valued insofar as they helped lecturers fulfill professional responsibilities. The study thus provides an experiential basis for considering workflow fit and academic purpose in digital governance, without claiming to establish a comprehensive human-centered framework.

Three managerial implications follow. First, institutions should examine overlapping reporting requirements and data flows before expanding their application portfolios. A workflow review can identify opportunities to reduce repeated entry and clarify the purpose of each requirement. Second, continuing technical assistance and supported peer learning should accompany system implementation. These arrangements should address recurring difficulties while avoiding excessive dependence on the unpaid assistance of individual colleagues. Third, evaluation should include lecturers' experiences of administrative effort and the usefulness of systems for teaching, research, supervision, and community engagement. Measures such as repeated-entry frequency, time spent completing reporting workflows, and user accounts of interruptions could inform subsequent evaluation. These are recommendations derived from the findings; their effectiveness requires further investigation.

The study's contribution is therefore an integrated interpretation of how lecturers participate in digital modernization while seeking to sustain academic purpose. The higher-order synthesis connects fragmentation, collective learning, workload adjustment, and changing work culture through participants' judgments about the place of technology in their profession. Its limitations remain important. The analysis concerns ten lecturers at one

institution and relies primarily on their accounts, with observation and documents providing contextual support. It does not independently assess application performance, quantify administrative workload, or establish changes over time. Transferability depends on the relevance of the institutional conditions and experiences described, rather than statistical representativeness. Future multisite and longitudinal research could examine how these relationships vary across institutions and whether changes in integration and support alter lecturers' experiences. Research involving administrative staff, technology managers, and students would also help clarify how different participants understand the purposes and consequences of institutional digitalization.

5. Conclusion

The findings indicate that lecturers at UIN STS Jambi experienced digital transformation through the coexistence of support for institutional modernization and concern about its practical demands. They valued faster services, flexibility, documentation, and transparency while describing fragmented applications and repeated administrative tasks as competing with academic time and attention. Their responses involved learning with others, reorganizing routines, and evaluating digital requirements against teaching, research, community engagement, and student supervision. Technology as Tool, Lecturer as Subject provided the higher-order meaning connecting these experiences: participants judged digital arrangements through their contribution to substantive academic responsibilities.

The study synthesizes this relationship as negotiated becoming digital, an ongoing process through which lecturers incorporate institutional digital requirements while evaluating and adjusting their implications for meaningful academic work. The contribution lies in connecting fragmentation, collective learning, workload negotiation, and changing work culture within a situated phenomenological interpretation. Negotiation encompasses everyday adjustments and professional judgments; it does not necessarily involve formal bargaining or successful influence over institutional decisions. Within this case, meaningful digital change was associated with technology supporting academic purposes and with lecturers retaining a role in interpreting its value.

The managerial implications are to reduce overlapping reporting requirements, provide continuing technical assistance and supported peer learning, and evaluate digital workflows in relation to academic responsibilities. These recommendations arise from participants' experiences and require further evaluation. The study is limited to ten lecturers at one Islamic university, relies primarily on their accounts, and does not independently measure technical performance, administrative workload, or change over time. Islamic higher education defines the institutional context; the findings do not establish a uniquely religious pattern of digital experience. Future multisite and longitudinal research involving lecturers, administrative staff, technology managers, and students could examine how integration and support arrangements affect the relationship between digital demands and meaningful academic work.

Declarations

Author Contribution Statement

Fridiyanto contributed to the conceptualization and design of the study, data collection, and preparation of the original draft of the manuscript. Firmansyah conducted the qualitative data analysis and contributed to the refinement of the research methodology. Muhammad Rafii

contributed to the writing and development of the Results and Discussion sections. All authors collaboratively reviewed, revised, and finalized the manuscript for submission. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement

The qualitative data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available because they contain information derived from participant interviews and are subject to confidentiality and research ethics considerations. Relevant anonymized data may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical and confidentiality requirements.

Declaration of Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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