Tanjak: Journal of Education and Teaching
Volume 7, Issue 2, August 2026
DOI: 10.35961/jg.v7i2.3063

p-ISSN: 2716-4098
e-ISSN: 2720-8966

A Preliminary Qualitative Study on Student Engagement and Pedagogical Policy Enactment in A Technology Free Higher Education Classroom

Muryanti[1]*, Fadhila Rahman[2], Isnaria Rizki Hayati[3]

[1] Community Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Riau, Pekanbaru, Riau, Indonesia.
Email: muryanti@lecturer.unri.ac.id, ORCID: 000-0003-3500-061X
[2] Guidance and Counselling Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Riau, Pekanbaru, Riau, Indonesia.
Email: fadhillarahman@lecturer.unri.ac.id, ORCID: 0009-0008-8106-305X
[3] Guidance and Counselling Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Riau, Pekanbaru, Riau, Indonesia.
Email: isnariarh@lecturer.unri.ac.id, ORCID: 0009-0006-3149-2185

***Corresponding Author**
Email: muryanti@lecturer.unri.ac.id

Article History
Received : 10 July 2026
Revised : 29 July 2026
Accepted : 06 August 2026
Published : 13 August 2026

Abstract
While digitalization has been reinforced in higher education, there are growing concerns regarding the drawbacks of technology and artificial intelligence towards students' engagement. This preliminary study explores student learning experiences in a technology-free classroom environment within an undergraduate course on educational policy and community development at a public university in Indonesia using a qualitative case study design. Data were collected from 28 students through written reflections produced during classroom sessions. From the thematic analysis, five preliminary themes emerged: better classroom engagement, improved material comprehension, experiential learning, meaningful activities, and enjoyable participation. Even though students were confused at the beginning of the lesson, they reported feeling more involved and challenged in the classroom. From the preliminary findings, this study tentatively suggests that technology-free classrooms may work as learning spaces that can complement and critically interrogate dominant digitalisation agendas. However, the findings of this study do not reject technology. These preliminary findings show the importance of balanced digital and non-digital approaches within Indonesian higher education policy contexts. The study also acknowledges its limited scope, so it recommends further research on this topic with stronger triangulation.

Keywords: technology free classroom; student engagement; experiential learning; higher education; policy enactment.

Introduction

The increasing integration of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) into higher education has changed how learning is regulated and implemented. It has become a policy agenda in many countries, including Indonesia. It tends to be seen as a pathway to innovation and improved learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2024; OECD, 2023). Even though it is not stated explicitly, avoiding technology integration would somehow mean walking in the opposite direction to the rest of the global community. That is why governments and universities have invested in digital infrastructure and made policies for supporting its use in the education system.

In Indonesia, this digitalisation is promoted through the *Merdeka Belajar* (Emancipated Learning) policy, which explicitly mentions technology as one of its keys for accelerating learning progress (Jakarta Post, 2023; Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024). Learning practices are also encouraged to use digital technology like a Learning Management System (LMS). Lecturers are encouraged to master technology to support technology-driven higher education policy (Fahadi & Khan, 2022; Tang et al., 2023). In this context, technology use in education seems to be hegemonic.

Even though technology use in higher education brings many benefits, some drawbacks need to be taken into account. To some extent, the presence of digital technology and AI tools in classrooms can make learning seem innovative. On the other hand, the tools do not necessarily bring engagement and meaningful results. In some studies, the use of AI tools is reported to cause overreliance among students (Daud et al., 2024, 2025; Slimi, 2023). The ease of access to information can reduce students' cognitive processes as they can receive assistance from free AI tools. Many educators have concerns regarding the unintended consequences of a technology-rich classroom, such as digital distraction and overreliance on AI tools (Risko & Gilbert, 2016; Fan et al., 2025). Digital tools can indeed provide access to information, but they may hinder students from deep thinking, social interaction, and learning engagement. That is why some studies suggest that excessive use of AI tools may cause what Fan et al. (2025) term "metacognitive laziness", a tendency to avoid cognitive processes due to AI accessibility.

Despite this growing concern, the existing literature has three notable gaps that this study addresses. First, most research on the drawbacks of educational technology investigates educators' perceptions or measures learning outcomes under technology-rich conditions; very few studies examine what happens when technology is systematically removed from an entire course, and fewer still capture how students themselves experience that removal. Second, where low-tech pedagogical tools have been studied, like non-digital games (McCauley & Cardinot, 2025), these are typically framed as supplementary alternatives to technology rather than as a deliberate, course-wide policy choice with implications for engagement and policy enactment. Third, research on Indonesian higher education has focused almost exclusively on strategies for adopting and integrating technology in line with Merdeka Belajar (e.g., Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024; Tang et al., 2023), leaving the deliberate limitation of technology largely unexamined even as a comparative case. This matters empirically, because without evidence of what a technology-free classroom looks and feels like from students' own perspective, claims about the necessity of digitalisation for engagement remain assumed rather than tested; theoretically, because a deliberately technology-free classroom offers a natural comparison case for competing claims in the engagement literature (Fredricks et al., 2004); and practically, because it provides an empirical counterpoint that can inform, rather than comply with, ongoing digitalisation policy in Indonesian higher education.

This preliminary study addresses this gap by examining a technology-free classroom in an undergraduate course on Education Policy and Community Development at a public university in Riau,

Indonesia. This does not frame the absence of technology as a rejection of digitalisation. Instead, this study would like to conceptualise it as a pedagogical strategy and a form of micro-level policy enactment (Ball et al., 2012) which interprets, negotiates, and to some extent challenges macro-level policy at the level of classroom practice. In doing so, the study shifts the analytic lens from technology adoption to technology removal, treating the technology-free classroom as a legitimate site of pedagogical practice worth investigating in its own right. Therefore, the study aims to explore how students experience learning in a technology-free classroom and what these preliminary experiences reveal about engagement, cognition, and the assumptions that lie in contemporary digital education policies in Indonesia.

Theoretical Framework

There are three theories underpinning this study, namely student engagement, experiential learning, and policy enactment. Each is outlined below, and together they frame the technology-free classroom as a site where engagement can be observed and interpreted as a form of pedagogical and policy practice.

Student Engagement in Higher Education

Even though university students are encouraged to learn autonomously, their engagement in the classroom is still considered a central determinant of learning outcomes. According to Fredricks et al. (2004), student engagement can be conceptualised as a multidimensional construct encompassing three interrelated dimensions, namely behavioural, emotional, and cognitive. Behavioural engagement refers to participation in learning activities, which is observable during the learning process. Unlike behaviour, Emotional engagement is related to feeling. It can be seen as affective responses like interest and enjoyment, which can be witnessed through student interactions during the lesson. Meanwhile, cognitive engagement can be related to the thinking process when following lessons. The three elements are widely used in higher education research (Hiver et al., 2024).

Recent research has increasingly associated student engagement to the presence or absence of digital technologies. However, the research does not judge the presence or absence of technology as the only factor affecting engagement. Many agree that engagement can be influenced by many factors, such as the teaching, the media, pedagogy, context, and learner agency (Godsk & Møller, 2025; Rotar, 2025). Given that technology is now one of the most widely used learning media in higher education, its effect on engagement, including the effect of its absence, remains worth exploring directly.

Experiential Learning and Active Pedagogy

Experiential learning theory was originally elaborated by Kolb (1984). It defines learning as a cyclical process which involves real experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. This implies that meaningful learning arises through active engagement with experience. Many pedagogical approaches can be applied to support experiential learning. They may include role-play, debates, and collaborative activities that encourage students to participate. Some research shows that such approaches can support students' understanding and retention of the lesson (Tekeş, 2025; Zhang, 2024). It is also important to note that such approaches do not require digital technology so that lecturers can utilise them in technology-free classrooms.

Policy Enactment and Micro-Level Decision Making

According to Ball et al. (2012), policy enactment theory may refer to how educational policies are actively implemented through everyday practices. Unlike the policy documents, the enactment seems to be dynamic. How a policy is implemented can be influenced by many factors, such as institutional

conditions, professional beliefs, contextual constraints, and the material realities of teaching. That is why the ideal of a policy's macro-level intention can be interpreted and translated differently at the micro level.

Based on the policy enactment framework, the technology-free classroom can be seen as a micro-level policy enactment. In a national context that strongly promotes digitalisation, a choice to limit technology use in the classroom constitutes an act of pedagogical translation and, in some respects, a form of professional resistance. This is what Ball and colleagues (2012) may refer to as "professional cultures" and contextual judgements that influence how teachers interpret and negotiate policy mandates. In this case, this study draws on that framework to position the technology-free classroom as a site of meaningful policy enactment.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative case study to explore student learning experiences within a classroom context. The case study approach was chosen because it is considered well suited to in-depth examination of complex educational phenomena in real-life settings (Yin, 2018). As this study focuses on exploring student meaning-making, this approach was appropriate for generating context-sensitive understandings of the phenomenon being investigated.

Context and Participants

The study was conducted in an undergraduate course on Educational Policy and Community Development at a public university in Riau Province, Indonesia. This course was purposively selected for two reasons. First, its subject matter directly concerns policy analysis and implementation, which made it pedagogically coherent for students to examine policy enactment (Ball et al., 2012) through their own lived experience of a micro-level pedagogical policy choice: the deliberate removal of digital technology. Second, as the course convenor, the first author had direct instructional access to the class and could integrate the technology-free arrangement and data collection into the existing course design without disrupting other courses or requiring cross-institutional negotiation, an important practical consideration for a preliminary, single-semester study.

The class consisted of 28 students. It represented the entire enrolment for this course in the semester in which the study was conducted. Participants were therefore not selected through a sampling procedure. However, they comprised the full population of an intact class, a form of total-population/convenience sampling that is common in classroom-based case study research (cf. Yin, 2018). While this means the findings cannot be generalised beyond this specific course and cohort, engaging the entire class allowed the study to capture the full range of student responses to the technology-free arrangement, including dissenting or ambivalent voices, rather than a self-selected subset who might already hold particular attitudes towards technology. This is consistent with the case-study logic of prioritising depth of understanding within a bounded context over statistical representativeness. The study began at the start of the semester.

At the beginning of the semester, a class agreement was established that all sessions would be conducted without the use of digital devices, including smartphones and laptops. All students agreed to this. Students were informed of this arrangement in the course outline and were requested to keep their devices in their bags before each session started. Even though this arrangement was framed as a mutual agreement, the authors acknowledge the inherent power differential between lecturers and students and the possibility that this may have influenced compliance and, subsequently, the nature of student reflections.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher occupied a dual role as both the lecturer and the researcher. This positionality carries the potential for social bias, as students may have produced reflections they believed the lecturer wished to read. This limitation is explicitly acknowledged as a constraint on the interpretation of findings. To partially mitigate this, reflections were treated as anonymous and collected without direct observer presence during the writing process. Findings are presented as preliminary and exploratory, and future studies should employ independent data collectors and member-checking procedures to strengthen credibility.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted within the normal scope of teaching practice. Student participation was voluntary; students were informed that their reflections would be used for research purposes and that non-participation would have no bearing on their academic assessment. All data were anonymised prior to analysis, and no sensitive personal information was collected during the data collection stage. To keep with institutional norms for classroom-based research at the study site, ethical review was conducted at the faculty level.

Instructional Design

The course was designed using active and experiential learning strategies, including role-play simulations, group discussions, structured debates, and gallery walk activities. These approaches were intended to encourage participation, collaboration, and critical thinking in the absence of digital support, as outlined in the active pedagogy principles related to experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984).

Data Collection

Data were collected through short written reflections by students at the end of selected classroom sessions in the semester. Reflections were written in Bahasa Indonesia and captured students' cognitive and emotional responses to the learning experience in a technology-free environment. While the brevity of individual reflections is acknowledged as a limitation, aggregating responses across 28 participants and multiple sessions may allow for identification of consistent patterns.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved an initial familiarisation phase, followed by systematic coding of recurring patterns in student reflections, grouping codes into preliminary categories, and developing broader themes representing shared experiences. The primary researcher conducted the analysis. The absence of inter-rater reliability checking is acknowledged as a limitation of this preliminary study. Therefore, future work should incorporate secondary coding to enhance reliability.

Results and Discussion

The data were collected from student reflections at the end of the semester. To obtain authentic data, the reflections were written in Bahasa Indonesia. This was done to anticipate language barriers when writing the reflections. Five preliminary themes emerged from the thematic analysis. These themes are presented with illustrative excerpts in the original Bahasa Indonesia, followed by English translation. The summary of the themes can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Summary of thematic findings with sample quotes

Theme	N	%	Representative Quote
T1 (Enhanced classroom engagement)	17	60.7%	"The classroom became more lively" (R07)
T2 (Increased cognitive engagement)	24	85.7%	"Thinking more critically on my own, without AI" (R22)
T3 (Novelty of experiential learning)	4	14.3%	"I had never experienced role-play before" (R08)
T4 (Meaningful learning)	25	89.3%	"The material felt more real and stayed with me" (R24)
T5 (Ambivalence / productive challenge)	11	39.3%	"Hard, but turns out I can learn without AI" (R02)

Note. *n* indicates the number of students whose reflections contained evidence of each theme. Percentages are calculated based on the total number of participants ($N = 28$). T5 (Ambivalence / Productive Challenge) refers to students' initial discomfort or difficulty with the technology-free learning environment, followed by gradual adaptation and productive engagement.

Table 1 illustrates the summary of thematic analysis findings from 28 students. From the table, it can be seen that five themes emerged from students' responses: enhanced classroom engagement, cognitive engagement, experiential learning, meaningful learning, and productive challenge. The majority of students felt that the learning became more meaningful when no digital technology was involved (89.3%). They also felt urged to think more independently in this condition (85.7%). However, theme 3 seemed to have the fewest responses compared to the other themes. Only 4 students (14.3%) mentioned that the learning they experienced was new. Even though it was a relatively small number, it offers valuable insight about how some students felt about the activities during their learning. The detailed co-occurrence of the themes can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Co-occurrence of themes across individual reflections (R01–R28)

Respondent	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5
R01	1	1	0	1	1
R02	0	1	0	1	1
R03	1	0	0	1	0
R04	0	1	0	1	1
R05	1	1	0	1	1
R06	1	1	0	1	1
R07	1	1	0	1	0
R08	1	0	1	1	0
R09	1	1	0	1	1
R10	0	1	0	1	0
R11	1	1	0	1	1
R12	1	1	1	1	0

Respondent	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5
R13	0	1	0	1	0
R14	0	1	0	1	0
R15	1	0	0	1	0
R16	0	1	0	1	0
R17	0	1	0	0	0
R18	0	1	0	0	0
R19	1	1	0	1	0
R20	1	1	0	0	1
R21	0	1	0	1	0
R22	1	1	0	1	0
R23	1	1	0	1	1
R24	1	1	0	1	0
R25	1	1	0	1	0
R26	0	1	1	1	1
R27	0	0	1	1	1
R28	1	1	0	1	0
Total (n)	**17**	**24**	**4**	**25**	**11**
% of 28	**60.7%**	**85.7%**	**14.3%**	**89.3%**	**39.3%**

Based on Table 2, it can be seen that the occurrence of each theme varied across respondents. Theme 3 occurred the least, with only 4 students mentioning their new experience with the activities given during the lesson; however, themes 2 and 4 seemed to be prevalent among students. This might imply that learning without digital technology made them feel present during the lesson. The orange coloured theme highlights the slightly different tone of the theme. While themes 1-4 showed positive feelings, theme 5 tended to be slightly negative. Despite that, the negative feeling in this regard affected students' productivity, as they claimed that the confusion they felt made them learn better in the classroom. Each of the recurring themes is explained as follows.

Theme 1: Enhanced Classroom Engagement and Liveliness

One of the recurring themes is the atmosphere of the classroom when digital technology was absent. Based on the data, students described the classroom as noticeably more dynamic and interactive than their usual learning experiences. Some students described it as "kelas jadi lebih hidup" (the classroom became more lively) due to direct interaction between peers, as seen in the following excerpts:

> *"What I feel, miss, the learning atmosphere feels more focused and lively. Direct interaction between lecturers and students is usually more intense, discussions become more active, and we also get more trained to listen, take notes, and think spontaneously without relying on our phones. Basically, there are pros and cons, miss..."* (R05)
>
> *"What I feel is that I can focus more on studying without being distracted by my phone, and I can have good discussions with my group friends because no one is focused on their own phone"* (R12).

The absence of digital devices appeared to make students more focused on the learning process, as they were encouraged to engage in face-to-face dialogue. The experience that the students described seems to support findings from previous studies which found that technology-free environments can reduce fragmented attention (Risko & Gilbert, 2016).

Theme 2: Increased Cognitive Engagement

Another recurring theme in student reflections was that they felt they were thinking more deeply. Students noted "lebih banyak berpikir" (thinking more) and described an improved mental effort in following discussions and constructing arguments without recourse to digital search or AI assistance. This can be seen from some responses:

"……so I feel like I'm thinking more critically when designing something." (R14)

"Thank God, it's making us start to get used to studying without using technology and it's making us think more critically" (R16).

Students claimed that they felt challenged to think about the materials, as they could not reach their phones to ask AI. This finding is in line with other studies that show that learners can be attracted to internal cognitive processes when they could not access digital technology (Risko & Gilbert, 2016; Fan et al., 2025).

Theme 3: Novelty of Experiential Learning Activities

In addition to cognitive processes, some students highlighted the activities that were impressive to them. Some students indicated that activities such as role-play simulations were experiences they had not encountered in previous or other classes, noting "belum pernah sebelumnya (role-play)" (never experienced role-play before), as mentioned by some students:

"……role play, because discussions are too ordinary and have been done a lot in other courses." (R22)

"I had never experienced role-play before" (R08).

This finding is notable in that it reflects that the absence of technology should be supported with active learning strategies that are relatively underutilised in the Indonesian higher education context. It implies that the classroom without technology can be a space for lecturers to explore learning methods that can invite student participation (McCauley & Cardinot, 2025). Even though the fewest number of students felt the novelty of the activities, most of them agreed that they enjoyed the activities, especially the role-play, as shown in Figure 1.

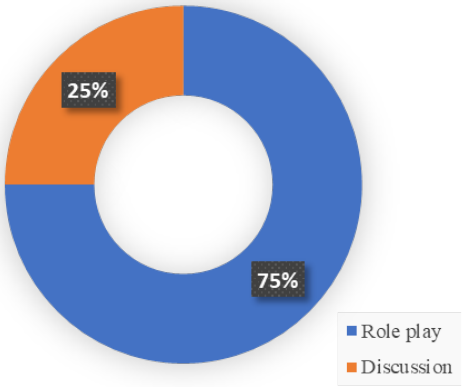

Figure 1. Preferred classroom activity

Based on Figure 1, it can be seen that two-thirds of the students preferred the role-play in learning about education policy. Only a quarter of them chose discussion. The education policy topic brought in role-play format was designed to invite students to act as different actors, such as policymakers, parents, students from remote areas, disability community activists, and principals from elite schools. The multi-perspective nature of role-playing might be why it was preferred more among the students.

Theme 4: Perceptions of Deeper and More Meaningful Learning

Regarding the meaningfulness of the learning process, some students expressed that learning in the technology-free environment felt more real. They described it as "jadi lebih berasa" (it felt more real/more meaningful). It can be seen from some excerpts:

> *"……forcing the brain to think critically again and having to be aware of the policy conditions around us directly."* (R28)
>
> *"I'm really happy, because not using technology in learning makes me be more critical in discussions and sharing opinions. Everyone seems to be enjoying it because their focus is only on learning, not on anything else."* (R24).

They felt present during the learning process because they were not distracted by electronic devices. These responses suggest a greater presence and personal investment in learning which could not be substituted by digital technology. This aligns with experiential learning theory, which emphasizes felt experience as the basis for deep understanding (Kolb, 1984).

Theme 5: Challenge and Enjoyment

Even though the majority of students felt positive about the low-tech classroom, not all responses were positive. Some students acknowledged the difficulty of the adjustment by saying "berat, tapi seru" (hard, but fun) and "ternyata bisa belajar tanpa AI" (turns out I can learn without AI), as shown in some responses:

> *"At first I felt a bit awkward, but the longer it went, the more fun it felt because you really have to think and discuss with your group mates."* (R22)
>
> *"During classes without using technology, honestly at first I was kind of surprised because I'm usually used to using my phone or laptop to look for extra materials. But over time, I got used to it."* (R25).

These responses signal a period of adaptation and highlight the extent to which digital dependency has become normalised in students' learning habits. During the earlier sessions, one or two students were observed trying to check their phones. However, by the third session onwards, no more students looked for their gadgets. The presence of ambivalence in this case, therefore, is a signal of genuine engagement with an unfamiliar pedagogical arrangement. Students who were uncomfortable with the situation gradually adapted to and enjoyed the learning process.

Discussion

The preliminary findings of this study offer initial insights into student engagement in a technology-free classroom in the Indonesian higher education context. Even though this study is limited due to its exploratory nature, the tentative observation can offer valuable information for discussion.

First, the better classroom engagement stated by students suggests that meaningful participation can be achieved without using digital technology. Unlike digitally supported classrooms, the technology-free setting seems to be able to draw students' attention to the lesson because they are not distracted by digital technology (Kabir & Mondal, 2025). It can also encourage them to interact with their peers during the lesson. Such engagement is in line with the notion suggested by Fredricks et al. (2004), which emphasises that behavioural and emotional engagement can be cultivated through the quality of pedagogical interaction, not through the mediation of any particular technology.

Second, the reported increase in cognitive engagement may point to an important effect of technology removal on internal processing demands. Students tended to claim that they started to rely more on their own reasoning when they could not access the AI tools. This seems to support concerns about cognitive offloading in AI-assisted learning (Adzima, 2025; Fan et al., 2025; Herman & Lara-Steidel, 2025; Risko & Gilbert, 2016), where AI assistance may reduce student engagement with course content

because they can rely on AI tools to find answers. Beyond noting this consistency with prior work, it is worth considering why removing technology might produce this effect. Digital devices, and AI tools in particular, function as external cognitive resources: when available, they invite students to offload effortful reasoning onto the tool rather than complete it internally (Risko & Gilbert, 2016). Removing this option does not by itself guarantee deeper thinking. However, it removes the path of least cognitive resistance, which may push students toward the more effortful, generative processing associated with durable learning. The absence of screens may also have reduced divided attention: without a device competing for attention, students' cognitive resources were directed more consistently toward the immediate social and material environment of the classroom, consistent with research on device presence and attentional capture (Risko & Gilbert, 2016). Finally, the collectively agreed removal of devices may have functioned as a shared social norm that made sustained attention a classroom-wide expectation rather than an individual effort, which could help explain why engagement was reported across such a wide range of students rather than only a subset. Together, these mechanisms suggest that a technology-free classroom enhances engagement less because technology is inherently disengaging, and more because its removal eliminates a low-effort cognitive alternative, reduces competition for attention, and establishes a shared behavioural norm. These mechanisms remain inferred from self-report data in this study. They would benefit from more direct testing in future research using process-level measures such as observation or eye-tracking.

Third, the prominence of experiential learning activities in students' reflections reinforces the value of active pedagogy in higher education. The government seems to encourage student-centred learning in Indonesia's current education policy, which likely supports participative learning (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024). However, the findings in this study show that student-centred learning is yet to be optimised. This can be seen in the novelty expressed by students regarding role-play and similar activities, which is itself a finding that shows these learning activities tend to be underused in higher education classrooms. A critical reading of this finding suggests that technology adoption, rather than promoting active learning as intended, may sometimes displace it.

Fourth, the technology-free classroom represents a concrete instance of micro-level policy enactment. Drawing on Ball et al.'s (2012) framework, the instructor's decision to implement a technology-free environment can be understood as a professional translation of national policy mandates that selectively prioritises learning quality over digital compliance. Rather than passively implementing the digitalisation agenda embedded in Merdeka Belajar, this pedagogical choice involves active interpretation and local adaptation, a "professional culture" response (Ball et al., 2012) that reflects the instructor's contextual judgements about what constitutes effective teaching. This finding suggests that productive tensions between macro-level policy and micro-level practice deserve greater scholarly and policy attention in the Indonesian higher education context.

Finally, the ambivalent responses from students highlight the complexity of this pedagogical transition. Initially, students felt discomfort with giving up AI tools when learning in the classroom. This might reflect the digital dependency in contemporary learning cultures (Herman & Lara-Steidel, 2025). However, this discomfort also seems to be a productive challenge for the students. Their surprised statement "ternyata bisa belajar tanpa AI" (turns out I can learn without AI) can be a preliminary indicator of how students changed their perception regarding their agency and capability.

Several limitations of this preliminary study must be explicitly acknowledged. The single-method design, the absence of a comparison condition, and the researcher's dual role as instructor-researcher all

constrain the interpretive claims that can responsibly be made. Future research should employ triangulated methods, independent data collection, and comparative designs that explore the effects of technology-free classrooms and how they work compared to technology-driven classrooms.

Conclusion

This preliminary study suggests that technology-free classrooms can provide meaningful and engaging learning experiences in Indonesian higher education. From a policy perspective, the findings tentatively suggest the need for a more balanced and context-sensitive approach to digitalisation in the higher education context. Even though digital technology might give many benefits, its use is not one-size-fits-all. The use of digital technology should consider its suitability with learning objectives and student needs. It also requires lecturers' professional capacity to decide whether or not to use digital tools in their classes.

These findings carry practical implications. For lecturers, the results suggest that occasionally structuring technology-free sessions, particularly for content well suited to sustained discussion, debate, or role-play, may be a low-cost way to strengthen engagement without additional resources or institutional approval. This could be introduced gradually, for example as a single technology-free session per unit, accompanied by a clear rationale communicated to students in advance to reduce the discomfort of an unfamiliar practice. For higher education institutions, the findings imply that policies promoting digitalisation should leave room for context-sensitive pedagogical judgement rather than treating technology adoption as a uniform proxy for teaching quality. Institutions could explicitly recognise technology-free or low-tech pedagogical experimentation as a legitimate form of teaching innovation within evaluation and professional development frameworks, and faculty development programmes might incorporate guidance on when and how to design technology-free activities, drawing on active-learning strategies such as role-play and structured debate that this study found to be well received by students.

These findings are preliminary and context-specific. They should not be read as advocacy for the wholesale removal of technology from higher education classrooms. Rather, they constitute an exploratory contribution to an underexamined area of Indonesian educational practice, and they call for more systematic investigation through future research with stronger methodological designs.

References

Adzima, K. (2025). Comparing Student Attitudes of Cheating Behaviors in the Physical and Online Environments with an Emphasis on AI Usage. *Electronic Journal of E-Learning*, *23*(3), 120–137. https://doi.org/10.34190/ejel.23.3.4256

Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Braun, A. (2012). How schools do policy: Policy enactments in secondary schools. Routledge.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Daud, A., Aulia, A. F., Muryanti, Harfal, Z., Nabila, O., & Salsabila, H. (2024). *Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris di Era Artificial Intelligence*. Taman Karya.

Daud, A., Aulia, A. F., Muryanti, Harfal, Z., Nabilla, O., & Ali, H. S. (2025). Integrating Artificial Intelligence Into English Language Teaching: A Systematic Review. In *European Journal of Educational Research* (Vol. 14, Number 2, pp. 677–691). Eurasian Society of Educational Research. https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.14.2.677

Fahadi, M., & Khan, Md. S. H. (2022). Technology-enhanced Teaching in Engineering Education: Teachers' Knowledge Construction Using TPACK Framework. *International Journal of Instruction*, *15*(2), 519–542. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2022.15229a

Fan, Y., Tang, L., Le, H., et al. (2025). Beware of metacognitive laziness: Effects of generative artificial intelligence on learning motivation, processes, and performance. British Journal of Educational Technology, 56(2), 489–530. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13544

Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. Review of Educational Research, 74(1), 59–109. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543074001059

Godsk, M., & Møller, K. L. (2025). Engaging students in higher education with educational technology: A systematic review. Computers & Education, 208, 105123.

Herman, J., & Lara-Steidel, H. (2025). Artificial Intelligence on Campus: Revisiting Understanding as an Aim of Higher Education. *Educational Theory*, *75*(4), 603–625. https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.70026

Hiver, P., Al-Hoorie, A. H., & Mercer, S. (2024). Student engagement in the language classroom (2nd ed.). Multilingual Matters.

Hunaepi, & Suharta, I. G. P. (2024). Transforming education in Indonesia: The impact and challenges of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum. Path of Science, 10(6), e07323. https://doi.org/10.22178/pos.107-1

Kabir, R., & Mondal, M. S. H. (2025). Perceived Benefits or Barriers? The Online Learning Experience of Bangladeshi Undergraduate Students. *Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Sciences*, *13*(2), 53–63. http://mojes.um.edu.my/EISSN:2289-3024

Kolb, D. A. (1984). Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development. Prentice Hall.

McCauley, V., & Cardinot, A. (2025). Game-Based Learning in Astronomy: Teacher and Student Perspectives on Non-Digital Games. *International Journal of Game-Based Learning*, *15*(1). https://doi.org/10.4018/IJGBL.391305

OECD. (2023). Digital education outlook 2023: Towards an effective digital education ecosystem. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/c74f03de-en

Risko, E. F., & Gilbert, S. J. (2016). Cognitive offloading. Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 20(9), 676–688. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2016.07.002

Rotar, O. (2025). Beyond technology tools: Supporting student engagement in online higher education. Research in Learning Technology, 33. https://doi.org/10.25304/rlt.v33.3234

Slimi, Z. (2023). The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Higher Education: An Empirical Study. *European Journal of Educational Sciences*, *10*(1). https://doi.org/10.19044/ejes.v10no1a17

Tang, Y. M., Yang, D., Fong, R. W. T., & Lim, C. P. (2023). Engaging Pre-service Teachers in Technology-Enabled Case-Based Learning in an Undergraduate Course. *Designing Technology-Mediated Case Learning in Higher Education: A Global Perspective*, 157–180. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-5135-0_10

Tekeş, E. (2025). Role-play as an active learning strategy in higher education: A review of recent evidence. Journal of Further and Higher Education, 49(1), 44–58. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2024.2385101

UNESCO. (2024). AI in education policy framework: Guidance for member states. UNESCO Publishing.

Yin, R. K. (2018). Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th ed.). SAGE.
Zhang, X. (2024). Experiential learning in higher education: Evidence from a systematic review. Educational Research Review, 42, 100587. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2024.100587