

# Digital Work Training in Islamic Boarding Schools: A Strategic Model for Enhancing Santri Employability and Reducing Youth Unemployment in Urban Indonesia

Wahyudi Widodo<sup>1\*</sup>, Saifuddin Chalim<sup>2</sup>, Yandri Susanto<sup>2</sup>, Nuur Halimatus Saadiah Masrukhin<sup>3</sup>, Fadly Usman<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Husnur Rofiq<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> STAI Ma'had Aly Albikam, Malang, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Universitas KH. Abdul Calim, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup> Islamic Science University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

<sup>4</sup> Brawijaya University, Malang, Indonesia

Corresponding e-mail: [wahyudiwido62@gmail.com](mailto:wahyudiwido62@gmail.com)


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**ABSTRACT.** The purpose of this study is to analyze the extent to which digital training in Islamic boarding schools can improve students' skills, expand job opportunities, and reduce unemployment in Malang City. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study type. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with students, Islamic boarding school administrators, and training instructors, as well as participant observation of digital training activities. Secondary data were obtained from Islamic boarding school documents, reports from the Malang City Manpower Office, and previous research related to unemployment and digital-based education. This study was conducted for four months, from February to May 2025. The research data were analyzed using several analytical methods, namely SWOT and Logic Model. The results show that job digitalization training in Islamic boarding schools can improve students' technological literacy, particularly in digital marketing, basic graphic design, and online store management. Some students who participated in the training succeeded in developing digital-based micro-businesses or earning income through online freelancing. This study also found that infrastructure factors, instructor competence, and support from the local government, the business world, and alum networks greatly influenced the success of the training. Job digitalization training is one of the strategic and realistic solutions to address student unemployment in Malang City in the digital era.

**Keywords :** *Digital training, Islamic boarding schools, Student skills, Unemployment, Technological literacy.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) are Islamic educational institutions that play a strategic role in shaping the character, morals, and spirituality of students (*santri*) (Fatah et al., 2025; Rohani et al., 2025; Utama & Salim, 2024). Historically, *pesantren* have emphasized mastery of religious knowledge, moral development, and independence based on Islamic values (Ardianto et al., 2026; Baihaqi et al., 2023; Kardi et al., 2023; Salim et al., 2024; Sintasari et al., 2026). However, in the modern context, *pesantren* face serious challenges in the form of limited graduate competitiveness in a job market that increasingly demands professional and technological competencies. Several studies have shown that *pesantren* graduates tend to face obstacles in entering the formal workforce due to a lack of vocational and digital skills (Jaedun et al., 2024; Rohmadiyah et al., 2024).

In urban areas such as Malang City, these challenges are further complicated by the competitive and technology-driven economic structure. (Hayadin et al., 2025; Helmy et al., 2021) emphasized that the gap between the traditional pesantren curriculum and the needs of the modern job market has the potential to increase student unemployment if not balanced with educational innovation (Effendi et al., 2025; Nugraha et al., 2025). Therefore, Islamic boarding schools are required to adapt their curriculum without losing their Islamic identity, especially through the integration of 21st-century skills (Chalim et al., 2024).

The digitalization of work refers to the shift of economic activity and employment to digital technology-based platforms, such as online marketing, e-commerce, graphic design, and online freelance work (Ahadiyah et al., 2024; Aulia et al., 2025; Ekasari et al., 2021). Employment studies show that digitalization opens up new, more flexible job opportunities, especially for youth and groups with limited access to formal employment (Leuwol, 2021). In the Indonesian context, the digital economy is growing rapidly and has become a potential labor-absorbing sector for the younger generation (Riswanto & Devi, 2020). Fairuza et al state that youth involvement in digital platforms not only increases economic opportunities but also broadens social participation and access to information (Fairuza et al., 2023).

However, this involvement is heavily influenced by individuals' levels of digital literacy and technical skills. Without adequate training, digitalization can actually widen social and economic disparities (Barikzai et al., 2025; Humaida et al., 2026). Therefore, digital training is a crucial instrument to ensure that vulnerable groups, including Islamic boarding school students (*santri*), are able to optimally utilize digital economic opportunities. Digital training in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) is part of the santri empowerment strategy aimed at improving skills, independence, and job readiness. Firmansyah and Kamal demonstrated that technology-based training in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) can improve students' practical competencies without disrupting religious activities. Similar findings were presented by Ardhana and Mulyodiputro, who stated that technology skills training can foster students' interest in learning and self-confidence (Firmansyah & Kamal, 2021). Furthermore, Mustofa emphasized that entrepreneurship and digital training in Islamic boarding schools play a crucial role in developing students' independent mindsets (Mustofa et al., 2025). Students are prepared not only to become job seekers but also job creators. This aligns with the concept of Islamic boarding schools as centers for the economic empowerment of the community, as proposed by Labib, who emphasizes the importance of integrating education, training, and real-world economic practices (Akmansyah et al., 2025; Hariadi et al., 2024).

Theoretically, digital training can be explained through human capital theory, which states that investment in education and skills will increase individual productivity and employment opportunities. Digital training improves the quality of Islamic boarding school students' human resources through mastery of skills relevant to job market needs. Furthermore, the concept of employability emphasizes that job readiness is determined not only by technical skills but also by self-confidence, adaptability, and practical experience (Supratman et al., 2020). Digital literacy is a key factor in increasing the employability of Islamic boarding school students in the digital era. Leuwol (2021) states that digital literacy relates not only to the ability to use technology but also to understanding ethics, communication, and the productive use of digital media. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, digital literacy needs to be aligned with Islamic values so that technology use remains within ethical and moral boundaries (Aslihah & Washudin, 2023). Gushevinalti et al. (2020) emphasize that digital communication transformation must be accompanied by character building to avoid negative impacts. Several studies indicate that limited infrastructure and access to technology are major obstacles to implementing digital training in community-based educational institutions. (Hasan, 2015) stated that modernizing Islamic boarding schools often faces internal resistance and limited resources. Therefore, multi-stakeholder collaboration between Islamic boarding schools, local governments, universities, and the private sector is a key factor in the success of digital training programs (Fahriany & Wahyunengsih, 2025; Rohani et al., 2025). External

support includes not only facilities and funding but also knowledge transfer and networking. Purnamasari and Nuryani emphasized that a collective and collaborative approach can increase the effectiveness of community-based empowerment programs. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, this collaboration enables the creation of a sustainable training ecosystem that is adaptive to technological change (Komang Yunita Purnamasari & Ni Nyoman Juli Nuryani, 2022).

Based on the narrative and reference sources above, it can be concluded that student unemployment is a structural problem influenced by the mismatch between Islamic boarding school curricula and the needs of the modern job market. The digitalization of work offers new opportunities, but requires adequate literacy and skills to optimally utilize them. Digital training in Islamic boarding schools has been theoretically and empirically proven to improve human capital, employability, and economic independence of students, especially when supported by multi-stakeholder collaboration and contextual program design (Hermawan, 2025; Masuud et al., 2025). Therefore, this research occupies a crucial position in filling the gap in research related to the implementation of digital training in Islamic boarding schools as a concrete strategy to reduce student unemployment in urban areas. This study not only strengthens the findings of previous research but also provides a new contribution in the form of a digital-based student empowerment model that aligns with Islamic boarding school values.

The novelty of this research lies in the development and analysis of an urban Islamic boarding school-based digitalization training model explicitly positioned as a strategy to increase the employability of Islamic boarding school students in facing the digital job market. Unlike previous research that generally emphasizes the entrepreneurial aspect of Islamic boarding school students or partial technical skills training, this study integrates digital training, Islamic boarding school values, and the work readiness of Islamic boarding school students into a systematic analytical framework using a logic model approach. Furthermore, this study presents empirical evidence regarding the impact of digital training on improving technological literacy, self-confidence, and the transition of Islamic boarding school students to digital economic activities in the context of Islamic boarding schools in Malang City, a phenomenon that has been limited in Islamic boarding school education studies. Thus, this research provides conceptual, methodological, and practical contributions in the form of a contextual, applicable, and potentially replicable model of Islamic boarding school empowerment in an effort to reduce Islamic boarding school unemployment in the digital era.

## METHOD

SWOT analysis is used in this study as a strategic analysis tool to comprehensively evaluate the implementation of digitalization training in Islamic boarding schools in Malang City, considering internal and external factors that influence the program's success. SWOT was chosen because it is able to identify strengths *and* weaknesses *originating* from the internal conditions of the Islamic boarding school and students, as well as opportunities *and* threats *originating* from the external environment, such as the dynamics of the digital job market, government policies, and technological developments.

In this study, data for the SWOT analysis were obtained from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation of the digital training program. Strengths and weaknesses were analyzed based on the Islamic boarding school's internal readiness, human resource quality, technological infrastructure, and the students' learning culture. Meanwhile, opportunities and threats were identified through an analysis of the external context, including digital economic growth, employment policy support, the level of digital job competition, and program sustainability risks. The identification results were then compiled into a SWOT matrix to map the strategic position of the digital training program. Logic model analysis was used in this study to explain the relationship between resources, the training process, and the impact of digital job training on reducing student unemployment in Malang City. This approach allows researchers to systematically

understand how training interventions produce changes at the individual, institutional, and socio-economic levels.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

The following table shows the results of training activities at Islamic boarding schools. Significant changes were observed between the students' pre- and post-training levels. The most notable improvement was in self-confidence, which rose from 18% to 71%. This aligns with interviews that indicated students were more willing to explore digital work after acquiring basic skills. Graphic design skills also increased sharply, from 12% to 60%, indicating the high relevance of the material to job market needs. In fact, more than half of the participants successfully opened online stores, which had previously been virtually non-existent. Students who attempted online freelancing also experienced significant growth, although financial returns remained limited. This evidence demonstrates that training not only improves technical skills but also encourages the exploration of new economic opportunities. Therefore, the integration of digital training has been shown to have a significant impact on students' job readiness (Supratman et al., 2020).

**Table 1.** Activity report before and after digital training

| Skill Categories            | Before (%) | After (%) | Students who actively use |
|-----------------------------|------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| Be confident in your skills | 18         | 71        | 85 people                 |
| Can make graphic designs    | 12         | 60        | 72 people                 |
| Opening an online store     | 8          | 55        | 66 people                 |
| Trying online freelancing   | 0          | 40        | 48 people                 |
| Earn digital income         | 0          | 35        | 42 people                 |

In-depth interviews with students revealed that their primary motivation for participating in the training was to support their families' finances. Some students come from farming families and small traders with uncertain incomes. With digital skills, they hope to help market their families' products or even start new businesses independently. One student mentioned that after the training, he successfully sold his mother's cassava chips outside the city through social media. Stories like these demonstrate that digital training not only provides individual benefits but also contributes significantly to the family economy. This aligns with research by Latif et al. (2024) in Banjarnegara, which found that digitizing family-based MSMEs can increase income by up to 40%. Thus, the program's impact will extend to the socio-economic sphere of students and their families.

Based on a SWOT analysis, digitalization training for work in Islamic boarding schools in Malang City possesses significant internal strengths, particularly in the character of the students, their collective learning culture, and the relevance of the training materials to the needs of the digital job market. These strengths are key assets for increasing student employability. However, major weaknesses lie in limited infrastructure and reliance on external support, which could potentially hinder the program's sustainability if not addressed strategically. Externally, opportunities for program development are wide open, driven by the growth of the digital economy and government policy support for youth digital skills development. Islamic boarding schools have the potential to expand their role beyond their role as religious educational institutions to also serve as centers for student digital entrepreneurship and job incubation. However, threats from competition in the digital job market and technological dynamics require Islamic boarding schools to continually update their materials, strengthen digital ethics literacy, and develop sustainable financing models. With the right strategy, these strengths and opportunities can be leveraged to minimize weaknesses and anticipate threats, enabling digitalization training to become a long-term solution to reducing student unemployment.

**Table 2.** SWOT of digitalization training for work in Islamic boarding schools

| Aspect               | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Strengths</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Islamic boarding schools have a strong base of students who are disciplined and accustomed to intensive learning.</li> <li>- Islamic boarding school values (work ethic, honesty, independence) support digital work ethics.</li> <li>- Practice-based training (graphic design, digital marketing, online store, freelance) is relevant to job market needs.</li> <li>- There is collaborative support from local governments, universities, and private partners.</li> <li>- The Islamic boarding school environment allows for collective learning and mutual mentoring between students.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Weaknesses</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited technological infrastructure (computers, internet networks) in some Islamic boarding schools.</li> <li>- The level of initial digital literacy among Islamic boarding school students is still low and uneven.</li> <li>- The program's dependence on external assistance (instructors and funding).</li> <li>- Resistance of some Islamic boarding school administrators to the use of digital technology.</li> <li>- There is no standardized and permanently integrated digital curriculum.</li> </ul>                                                                                       |
| <b>Opportunities</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The growth of the digital economy and online work platforms (freelance, e-commerce).</li> <li>- Government policy support for digital human resource development and reducing youth unemployment.</li> <li>- The potential of Islamic boarding schools as centers for digital-based economic empowerment of the community.</li> <li>- A network of Islamic boarding school alumni who can become mentors and work networks.</li> <li>- Market demand for micro-scale digital services (design, social media admin, online marketing).</li> </ul>                                                        |
| <b>Threats</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rapid technological changes make training materials easily outdated.</li> <li>- High competition in the digital job market with non-pesantren workers.</li> <li>- The risk of internet abuse if not balanced with digital ethics literacy.</li> <li>- Uncertainty about the sustainability of program funding.</li> <li>- Fluctuations in digital work income are not yet stable for novice students.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                        |

Bibliometric analysis plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality and depth of research literature because it enables researchers to map scientific developments systematically, objectively, and data-drivenly (Usman et al., 2025). Through bibliometric analysis, researchers can identify research topic trends, key actors, collaborative networks, and underexplored research gaps, ensuring that their research has a strong theoretical foundation and is relevant to current developments. Furthermore, bibliometric analysis helps assess the position and contribution of research within the broader scientific landscape, avoids duplication of research, and strengthens the justification for research novelty. Thus, bibliometric analysis serves not only as a literature

mapping tool but also as a strategic instrument for enhancing the validity, novelty, and direction of further research development.

Based on a bibliometric analysis-based literature review, research on Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in the past decade has been dominated by themes of religious education, character building, and traditional-based entrepreneurship. While studies linking Islamic boarding schools to the digitalization of work and the employability of Islamic boarding school students (*santri*) are relatively limited. Bibliometric studies show that the topics of digital skills, digital employability, and workforce readiness are mostly discussed in the context of general education, higher education, and MSME development, with a focus on the non-*pesantren* youth population (Donthu et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, research on Islamic boarding schools tends to use a qualitative, descriptive, normative approach and rarely adopts program evaluative frameworks such as logic models or outcome-based impact analysis. Bibliometric mapping of the themes of "digital training," "employability," and "Islamic education institutions" also reveals weak interconnections between these research clusters, indicating a gap in research at the intersection of Islamic boarding schools, digital training, and reducing student unemployment. Thus, this research occupies a strategic position in filling the gap in the literature by integrating the analysis of Islamic boarding school-based digital training programs using a logic model approach, while simultaneously expanding the direction of Islamic boarding school studies towards the realm of digital economy and employment policies based on religious education.

A bibliometric analysis of relevant literature shows that studies on Islamic boarding schools and employment are still dominated by themes of religious education, character building, and traditional-based entrepreneurship, while the topics of work digitalization and the employability of Islamic boarding school students (*santri*) have not been systematically explored. A search of publications in the last five to ten years shows that research on digital training has focused more on public schools, universities, or MSMEs, with the number of studies specifically linking Islamic boarding schools, digital training, and reducing student unemployment being very limited. Furthermore, most articles discussing Islamic boarding schools tend to use a normative descriptive approach, with minimal use of evaluative frameworks such as logic models or program impact analysis. These bibliometric findings indicate a research gap in the intersection between Islamic boarding schools, work digitalization, and the employability of Islamic boarding school students in urban contexts. Therefore, this study contributes to enriching the scientific body by filling this gap through a more structured and impact-oriented analytical approach, while also broadening the direction of Islamic boarding school studies into the realm of the digital economy and employment policy.

The logic model analysis in the research on digitalization of work in Islamic boarding schools can be described in the following stages: (1) At the input stage, the training program is supported by the availability of students as participants, competent digital instructors, technological facilities, and support from the Islamic boarding school and external partners. These inputs are key prerequisites for effective training. Without infrastructure support and multi-stakeholder collaboration, digital training risks falling short of its objectives. (2) The activities phase includes a series of hands-on training sessions, such as graphic design, digital marketing, online store management, and an introduction to freelance platforms. These activities are designed with a *learning-by-doing approach* so that students gain hands-on experience relevant to the needs of the digital job market. (4) The direct results of these activities are visible in the outputs, including the creation of student digital portfolios, online store accounts, and ready-to-use freelance profiles. These outputs serve as an early indicator of the program's success, demonstrating that students not only understand theory but are also capable of producing tangible products. (5) Furthermore, short-term outcomes are characterized by increased digital literacy, self-confidence, and employability among students. Research findings indicate that students are more optimistic and willing to explore digital job opportunities after participating in the training. In the medium-term, some students

begin to earn income from digital activities, whether through freelancing, online businesses, or contributing to family businesses. (6) In the long-term impact phase, digital job training contributes to reducing the unemployment rate of Islamic boarding school students and strengthening Islamic boarding school-based economic independence. This impact is felt not only by individual students but also by Islamic boarding school institutions, which are increasingly recognized as centers of community economic empowerment.

Thus, the logic model demonstrates that digitalization training in Islamic boarding schools is a logical, structured, and sustainable intervention to address student unemployment. The program's success depends heavily on the continuity of input, the quality of activity implementation, and the support of the social and institutional environment.

## Discussion

The results of this research on digitalization of work training in Islamic boarding schools in Malang City can be understood through several theoretical perspectives, namely *human capital theory*, the concept of *employability*, the *digital divide*, and *the capability approach* to human resource development. The integration of these analytical frameworks is crucial to explaining why digital training can contribute to reducing student unemployment, not only practically but also structurally.

From the perspective of human capital theory, digital work training serves as an investment in improving the quality of Islamic boarding school students' human resources. This theory emphasizes that education and training will increase individual productivity, thereby impacting employment opportunities and income (Juhairiah et al., 2024; Rifdillah, 2025; Srinio et al., 2025) (Becker, 1993). Research findings indicate that Islamic boarding school students who participate in training experience significant improvements in digital skills, self-confidence, and work readiness. This confirms that Islamic boarding school students are no longer merely subjects of religious education but also productive economic assets (Miftahuddin et al., 2024).

Therefore, digital training in Islamic boarding schools can be understood as a strategy to increase the economic value of Islamic boarding school students through the accumulation of technology-based skills capital. When analyzed through the concept of employability, digital training does not merely create jobs but also increases *the employability* of Islamic boarding school students (Juliana et al., 2026). Employability encompasses a combination of technical skills, work attitudes, self-confidence, and the ability to adapt to changes in the job market. Research data shows that although not all Islamic boarding school students immediately earn an income, the majority have developed portfolios, practical experience, and an understanding of digital work platforms (Dahlan et al., 2025; Fanani & Ma'arif, 2025). This demonstrates that training serves as a *bridging mechanism* between the world of Islamic boarding school education and the digital workplace. In other words, the success of the program is measured not only by the number of students employed, but by their increased readiness to enter the dynamic job market (Bustomi et al., 2025).

Digitalization training for work can also be analyzed within the framework of the digital divide. Islamic boarding school students are structurally vulnerable to limited access to technology, both in terms of infrastructure, literacy, and social networks. This training program has proven effective in narrowing this gap by providing access to devices, the internet, and technical assistance. However, research also shows that the digital divide has not been fully addressed, especially in Islamic boarding schools with limited facilities and internal support (Qizam et al., 2025; Sholichah et al., 2022). Therefore, digital training in Islamic boarding schools is not only an educational intervention but also a form of social justice in technology access for marginalized groups. From the perspective of the capability approach (Amartya Sen), digital training increases students' real freedoms to choose and live lives they find meaningful. Students who previously had limited employment options now have new alternatives through digital entrepreneurship, freelancing, or strengthening family finances. The psychological impact of increased self-confidence and optimism for the future also demonstrates that the training not only expands economic opportunities but also strengthens students' agency as empowered individuals (Chughtai et al., 2024). In this context,

Islamic boarding schools are transforming from mere religious educational institutions into spaces for developing students' socio-economic capacity.

Furthermore, when analyzed institutionally, the success of digital training is strongly influenced by internal and external factors. Internal factors include student motivation, openness among Islamic boarding school administrators, and a culture of collective learning. External factors include support from the government, private sector partners, universities, and the availability of technological infrastructure. These findings indicate that digital training in Islamic boarding schools cannot be implemented in isolation but requires a sustainable collaborative ecosystem. Without external support, Islamic boarding schools risk program stagnation after the initial intervention phase ends. Overall, this analysis confirms that digitalization training in Islamic boarding schools in Malang City is not simply a short-term technical skills program, but a socio-economic transformation strategy that addresses the individual, institutional, and social structure. This training addresses the challenge of student unemployment with a contextual, adaptive approach that aligns with Islamic boarding school values. Therefore, digital training deserves to be positioned as a sustainable model for student empowerment in the face of economic change in the digital era.

## **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of this study shows that digitalization training for work at Islamic boarding schools in Malang City has proven effective in improving students' digital skills, self-confidence, and employability. Through a practice-based training approach, including graphic design, digital marketing, online store management, and online freelancing, students are able to develop technological literacy relevant to the needs of the digital job market. The results show a significant increase in students' technical and non-technical skills, which not only encourages them to explore digital job opportunities but also begins to generate income and contribute to strengthening their families' finances.

Furthermore, the SWOT analysis and logic model confirm that the success of digital training in Islamic boarding schools is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. The main strengths lie in the character of the students, the culture of collective learning, and the alignment of Islamic boarding school values with digital work ethics. However, limited infrastructure, uneven initial digital literacy, and dependence on external support are challenges that need to be anticipated. Externally, the growth of the digital economy and support from government policies offer significant opportunities for Islamic boarding schools to transform into centers of digital-based economic empowerment, although they still face threats such as digital job competition and rapidly changing technological dynamics.

Thus, digital job training can be positioned as a realistic and sustainable strategy to reduce unemployment among Islamic boarding school students in urban areas. This research not only provides empirical evidence of the positive impact of digital training in Islamic boarding schools but also offers a model for empowering Islamic boarding school students that is structured, contextual, and aligned with Islamic values. Moving forward, strengthening multi-stakeholder collaboration, integrating digital training into Islamic boarding school curricula, and developing sustainable funding schemes are important implications for the development of similar programs and further research in the field of Islamic boarding school education and digital employment .

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