

## **Navigating the Digital Transformation of Islamic Education: Authority, Verification, and the Problem of Unsourced Religious Content**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Digital platforms have become a primary route through which Indonesian students encounter religious knowledge, and teachers of Islamic education increasingly meet classroom questions whose answers students have already obtained from sources carrying no chain of transmission. This study examines how the digital transformation of Islamic education reconfigures the relationship between teacher, text, and learner, and asks what verification practice becomes possible when the volume of accessible religious content exceeds any teacher's capacity to authenticate it. The study is a conceptual synthesis of peer-reviewed literature, policy documents, and institutional reports, selected purposively and analysed thematically across accessibility, content authenticity, pedagogical innovation, teacher role, ethics, and institutional readiness. The analysis finds that digitalisation expands access decisively but redistributes interpretive authority in ways existing teacher preparation does not address; that content generated by artificial intelligence intensifies rather than creates this problem, since fluency without sanad is already characteristic of much online religious material; and that blended learning models developed for school-age learners transfer poorly to the adult and para-professional audiences that dominate Islamic non-formal education without andragogical adjustment. The study argues that the practical task facing institutions is not the adoption of technology but the design of verification competence, and proposes three design principles: teaching provenance rather than conclusions, making the limits of teacher authority explicit, and building institutional review of digital content into curriculum governance rather than leaving it to individual discretion.*

**Keywords:** authority, digitalisation, Islamic education, teacher, verification

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## INTRODUCTION

A teacher of Islamic education in an Indonesian madrasah now regularly faces a situation that has no established pedagogical response. A student arrives with an answer to a fiqh question, obtained within seconds from a short video, a search result, or a conversational system, delivered fluently and with apparent confidence, and carrying no indication of who produced it, on what basis, or within which school of interpretation. The teacher can assert a different position, but assertion against fluent content is a weak instrument, and the teacher rarely has time to trace the provenance of what the student has brought. This is the practical problem from which the present study proceeds.

The position taken here is that this is not principally a problem of digital literacy, nor of technological infrastructure, but of authority. Islamic knowledge has historically been transmitted through chains that establish not only what is said but who is entitled to say it, and the pedagogical relationship in traditional Islamic education is inseparable from that structure.<sup>1</sup> Digital transmission preserves content while discarding the chain. What is lost is not accuracy in the first instance but the means of assessing accuracy, and it is this loss, rather than the volume of content, that unsettles the teacher's position.

This makes the case of Islamic education distinct from the general literature on educational digitalisation. Studies of digital transformation in secular schooling treat the teacher's changing role as a shift from knowledge provider to facilitator, a shift that is manageable because the knowledge in question is public<sup>2</sup> and its verification is a matter of method available to anyone. In Islamic education the verification of a religious claim is not merely methodological; it is tied to competence conferred by training and recognised by a scholarly community. A teacher who becomes a facilitator without also becoming a verifier occupies an untenable position, and the literature on educational digitalisation does not address this because it does not arise in the settings that literature examines.

The study is framed by the perspective that technology mediates rather than merely delivers, in the sense that the medium of transmission shapes what counts as knowledge and who holds standing to adjudicate it. This framing is preferred over technology acceptance models, which measure willingness to adopt but say nothing about what adoption does to epistemic authority, and over purely normative accounts of Islamic educational philosophy<sup>3</sup>, which establish what ought to hold but do not describe what is occurring in classrooms.

The argument advanced is that the practical task facing Islamic educational institutions is not the adoption of digital tools, which is already well advanced, but the deliberate design of verification competence in both teachers and students. The purpose of the study is accordingly to map how digitalisation reconfigures the relationship between teacher, text, and learner, and to derive design principles that follow from that mapping.

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<sup>1</sup> Nadeem A. Memon, Mohamad Abdalla and Dylan Chown, 'Laying Foundations for Islamic Teacher Education', *Education Sciences*, 14.10 (2024), 1046.

<sup>2</sup> Antonios Kafa, 'Exploring Integration Aspects of School Leadership in the Context of Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence', *International Journal of Educational Management*, 39.8 (2025), 98–115.

<sup>3</sup> Memon, Abdalla and Chown, p. 1046.

Recent research provides partial but incomplete support for this framing. Work on madrasah reform in Indonesia has shown that improvements in governance depend on the simultaneous strengthening of management and technology, and that success is conditional on evaluation and follow-up rather than on adoption alone.<sup>4</sup> Studies of technology-based learning in the Digital Madrasah Program indicate promising results while noting that outcomes remain contingent on teacher capacity.<sup>5</sup> Research on school leadership under digitalisation and artificial intelligence reports gains in administrative efficiency and communication quality that are nonetheless bounded by infrastructure and human readiness.<sup>6</sup> Work on the role of school principals in digital transformation similarly concludes that technology affects quality only when accompanied by changes in governance, not when merely acquired.<sup>7</sup> And a study of digital literacy as a framework for character education in madrasah ibtidaiyah demonstrates that digital competence can be aligned with formative aims when it is treated as curriculum content rather than as a technical prerequisite.<sup>8</sup>

What these studies share is a focus on institutional capacity and learning outcomes. None examines what happens to the teacher's epistemic standing when students obtain religious content from sources the teacher cannot authenticate, nor proposes a classroom procedure for the encounter described at the opening of this article. The gap is therefore not one of coverage but of question: the existing literature asks whether digitalisation improves Islamic education, whereas the question pursued here is what digitalisation does to the grounds on which religious knowledge claims are settled in a classroom. Its urgency is both theoretical, in that it identifies a limit to the transferability of general digitalisation research to religious education, and practical, in that teachers presently face the situation without institutional guidance.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is a conceptual synthesis based on secondary sources rather than an empirical investigation. The corpus consists of peer-reviewed journal articles on digitalisation in Islamic and general education, policy documents issued by Indonesian education authorities, and institutional reports and guidance on the educational use of artificial intelligence. Sources were selected purposively rather than through a protocol-driven search, on three grounds: that they report findings on digitalisation in an educational setting rather than advance opinion; that they address either the Indonesian Islamic educational context specifically or a mechanism transferable to it<sup>9</sup>; and that they include, deliberately, accounts that qualify or complicate the

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<sup>4</sup> Hasyim Haddade and others, 'Madrasah Management Strategies through Madrasah Reform Program: An Evidence from Indonesia', *International Journal of Educational Management*, 38.5 (2024), 1289–1304.

<sup>5</sup> Hasyim Haddade and others, 'Technology-Based Learning Strategies in Digital Madrasah Program', *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences*, 18.1 (2023), 55–70.

<sup>6</sup> Kafa, pp. 104–09.

<sup>7</sup> Hessa Al Nuaimi, Syed Zamberi Ahmad and Khalizani Khalid, 'The Importance of the School Principals' Role in the Digital Transformation of the Education Sector', *International Journal of Comparative Education and Development*, 26.1 (2024), 17–37.

<sup>8</sup> Purniadi Putra and others, 'Digital Literacy as a Transformative Framework for Character Education: A Case Study in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah', *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 9.1 (2026), 33–51.

<sup>9</sup> Haddade and others, 'Madrasah Management Strategies', pp. 1295–98.

argument advanced here rather than only those that support it. Works treating technology in non-educational sectors were excluded, as were sources without argumentative development. Foundational works on Islamic epistemology are retained irrespective of publication date because they constitute the conceptual framing under discussion. The corpus is therefore not exhaustive, and no claim is made that it represents the field; it is assembled to sustain an argument, and the argument is offered for assessment on its coherence and on the adequacy with which it meets the objections available to it.

Analysis was thematic. Each source was read and coded for claims about access, content authenticity, pedagogical method, teacher role, ethics, and institutional readiness; codes were grouped into the six themes that organise the following section; and each theme was then examined for convergence and disagreement across sources. Thematic analysis was chosen over systematic review procedure because the aim is to construct an argument about a relationship rather than to estimate an effect, and over discourse analysis because the object of interest is the substance of the claims rather than their rhetorical construction. The limitation this imposes is that the synthesis reflects the literature available in Indonesian and English and cannot claim exhaustiveness; the reasoning is offered for assessment on its coherence rather than on the representativeness of its sample.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Access Expands, Authority Disperses

The literature is consistent that digitalisation expands access to Islamic learning materials decisively, reaching learners previously constrained by geography, cost, or scheduling. The disagreement concerns what follows. Studies focused on institutional outcomes treat expanded access as an unambiguous gain, while work attending to the teacher's position notes that the same expansion disperses the authority that formerly accompanied access.<sup>10</sup> Both readings are correct and they are not in tension: access and authority were historically bundled because materials were scarce and mediated, and digitalisation unbundles them. The consequence for Islamic education specifically is that a student may now possess content without possessing any means of situating it, and the teacher's traditional function of supplying both simultaneously no longer holds. It is worth resisting the nostalgic reading of this. The bundling of access and authority was never a pedagogical achievement; it was an artefact of scarcity. A student in a village pesantren three decades ago deferred to the kyai partly because the kyai possessed texts and training the student could not otherwise reach, and that deference was therefore supported by a material condition that has now dissolved. Recovering the authority relation by restricting access is neither possible nor, on the tradition's own terms, obviously desirable, since the obligation to seek knowledge has never been understood as an obligation to seek it from one

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<sup>10</sup> Cornelia Connolly, Eamon O'Brien and T. J. O'Ceallaigh, 'Ensuring Knowledge Sustainability in a Digital Era', *Technology, Knowledge and Learning*, 31.1 (2026), 175–91.

source.<sup>11</sup> The question is accordingly not how to restore the former arrangement but what the authority relation should rest on once scarcity no longer supplies it.

### **Content Authenticity and Artificial Intelligence**

The circulation of religious content without attribution predates generative systems. What such systems alter is scale and fluency: they produce coherent, confident, and grammatically fluent religious text on demand, unmarked by the hesitations that once signalled non-expert authorship. International guidance on generative artificial intelligence in education emphasises human oversight and institutional review<sup>12</sup>, but that guidance is framed for content whose accuracy can be checked against public evidence. Religious content is not of that kind. A ruling may be internally coherent, textually plausible, and nonetheless unrecognised within any madhhab, and detecting this requires precisely the scholarly competence that the system's output makes appear unnecessary. The difficulty compounds in a specific way that distinguishes religious content from other domains. In most fields an authoritative source can be consulted to settle a disputed claim, and the consultation is a matter of locating the right document. In fiqh, a claim may be correct within one madhhab and incorrect within another, so that the question of whether generated content is accurate cannot be separated from the question of which interpretive community the learner belongs to. A generative system trained on a corpus spanning several schools will produce positions drawn from across them without marking the boundary<sup>13</sup>, and a learner without training will experience this as a single undifferentiated body of religious knowledge. The resulting error is not factual but jurisdictional, and it is invisible to precisely the verification methods<sup>14</sup> — checking against a reputable source — that general digital literacy instruction teaches.

The position taken here is that institutions should not attempt to prohibit the use of such systems, which is unenforceable, but should treat their output as they would treat an unattributed manuscript: usable as a prompt for inquiry, inadmissible as a basis for a ruling. This implies a specific classroom procedure. When a student brings generated content, the pedagogical move is not to correct the conclusion but to ask what it rests on, and to make the absence of an answer the object of the lesson. The procedure has an advantage the corrective approach lacks: it does not require the teacher to be certain that the content is wrong. A teacher who asserts a contrary position stakes their authority on a judgement they may not be equipped to make, and a student who later finds the generated answer corroborated by a recognised scholar will draw the obvious conclusion about the teacher's reliability. A teacher who asks for provenance stakes nothing, and teaches the operation that matters.

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<sup>11</sup> Ainul Wafa, 'Total Quality Management (TQM) in Islamic Educational Institutions', *Tadibia Islamika*, 2.2 (2022), 87–94; Busahdiar, Ummu Karimah and Sopa Tamin, 'Total Quality Management (TQM) and Basic Education', *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 20.2 (2023).

<sup>12</sup> Fengchun Miao and Wayne Holmes, *Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research* (UNESCO Publishing, 2023), pp. 18–26.

<sup>13</sup> Ahmad Atabik, Muhammad Yahya and Mustajab Mustajab, 'Arabic Language Learning Models in Schools', *International Journal of Religion*, 5.3 (2024), 287–301.

<sup>14</sup> Miao and Holmes, pp. 18–26.

## What is Lost When the Chain is Discarded

The argument advanced here turns on the claim that digital transmission preserves content while discarding the chain, and the claim requires more precision than it has so far received. A chain of transmission performs at least three functions that are analytically separable. It establishes provenance, allowing a claim to be traced to a source. It establishes competence, since each link is a person whose qualification to transmit was assessed by the preceding link. And it establishes accountability, because a transmitter who is later found to have erred can be identified and their other transmissions reconsidered. Digital circulation discards all three simultaneously, but the losses are not equally consequential.

Provenance is the most recoverable. A student can be taught to ask where a claim originates, and platforms increasingly supply at least nominal attribution. Competence is harder, because assessing whether a named source is qualified requires knowing how qualification is conferred in the relevant tradition, which is itself specialist knowledge. Accountability is the least recoverable and the least discussed. Where religious content circulates anonymously or under a pseudonym, an error cannot be traced back through the transmitter's other material, so the ordinary corrective mechanism of the tradition — that an unreliable transmitter's corpus becomes suspect — simply does not operate. Content that would have been quarantined in a manuscript tradition circulates indefinitely.<sup>15</sup>

This analysis has a practical consequence for teaching. If the three functions are separable, then verification instruction can be sequenced rather than attempted wholesale. Asking for provenance is teachable to a secondary student; assessing competence belongs to teacher preparation<sup>16</sup>; and recognising that accountability has been lost, and that this is a reason for caution rather than a reason for rejection, is a disposition that can be cultivated without specialist training. Existing digital literacy curricula tend to collapse these into a general instruction to evaluate sources critically, which is not actionable for a learner who lacks the means to perform the evaluation.<sup>17</sup>

## Pedagogical Innovation and the Andragogical Question

Blended learning is widely reported as effective in Islamic educational settings, and the evidence supports this for school-age learners within formal institutions.<sup>18</sup> A distinction that the literature rarely draws, however, is between those learners and the adult and para-professional audiences that constitute much of Indonesian Islamic non-formal education: majelis taklim participants, adult converts, and working teachers undertaking continuing study. Adult learning proceeds on different premises, namely self-direction, the use of prior experience as a learning

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<sup>15</sup> Feriyanto Ismail and others, 'Enhancing Excellence: Analyzing Quality Management in Islamic Boarding Schools', *Al-Tanzim*, 7.3 (2023), 848–62; Muhammad Khoirul Fatihin, Nur Asnawi and Muhammad Fahim Tharaba, 'Transforming Islamic Education', *Al-Tanzim*, 7.4 (2023), 1145–60.

<sup>16</sup> Rusdi Ramli, Bahrani Bahrani and Ahmad Ramli, 'Building a Quality Culture in Islamic Educational Institutions', *Jurnal Inovatif Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 4.1 (2025), 50–61.

<sup>17</sup> Jamaluddin Nur Fahmi and Siti Rochmiyati, 'Pengaruh Jurnal Membaca Digital Terhadap Kemampuan Literasi Siswa Kelas V Sekolah Dasar', *Ideguru*, 9.1 (2023), 71–77.

<sup>18</sup> Haddade and others, 'Technology-Based Learning Strategies', pp. 60–64.

resource, and orientation toward immediate problems rather than deferred curricula.<sup>19</sup> Digital flexibility serves these premises well, since it permits learners to study at their own pace and to bring their own questions.

The andragogical reading also clarifies a difficulty. Where adult learners direct their own study, the teacher's role shifts further toward verification and away from delivery, which returns the analysis to the authority problem identified above. The design implication is that materials for adult Islamic learning should foreground provenance, showing where a position comes from and which scholars hold it, rather than presenting conclusions to be accepted.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Teacher's Changing Role**

Research on digital leadership and on the principal's role in transformation converges on the finding that technology affects educational quality only where governance changes alongside it. Applied to the teacher, this suggests that reassigning the teacher from provider to facilitator without also equipping them as verifier produces a role that cannot be performed. There is a further consideration that the facilitation literature does not address. In secular subjects a teacher may acknowledge uncertainty without institutional cost; saying that a question exceeds one's expertise is ordinary professional conduct. In religious education the same admission carries different weight, because the teacher's standing rests partly on a claim to reliable transmission. A teacher who frequently defers may be read as unqualified rather than as careful. This creates an incentive toward false confidence that is specific to the setting, and it is a reason for institutions to make deferral procedurally normal — by establishing a route through which a teacher refers a question to a recognised scholar and returns with an answer — rather than leaving each teacher to manage the reputational cost individually.<sup>21</sup> Studies of teacher readiness in Indonesian Islamic institutions report that digital competence gains from short training interventions are fragile without sustained institutional support<sup>22</sup>, which is consistent with the interpretation offered here: training in tool use does not address the competence the changed role actually requires. The distinction can be put sharply. Training in digital tools prepares a teacher to deliver content through a new medium; what the changed situation demands is the capacity to adjudicate content the teacher did not produce and cannot always authenticate. These are different competences, and the second is not acquired by practising the first. A teacher fully proficient in learning management systems, digital assessment, and multimedia production may be no better placed to respond to a student citing an unsourced ruling than a teacher with no digital training at all. Professional development programmes that measure their success by tool proficiency will therefore report progress while leaving the problem untouched.

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<sup>19</sup> Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton and Richard A. Swanson, *The Adult Learner*, 9th edn (Routledge, 2020), pp. 43–56.

<sup>20</sup> Knowles, Holton and Swanson, pp. 43–56.

<sup>21</sup> Mohammed Alzoraiki and others, 'The Role of Transformational Leadership in Enhancing School Culture and Teaching Performance', *Frontiers in Education*, 9 (2024), 1413607.

<sup>22</sup> Afif Akhmad, 'Digital Leadership Practices in Educational Management', *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 24.8 (2025), 112–35.

### **Ethics, Privacy, and Institutional Position**

Data privacy concerns are amplified in religious education because learning platforms may capture information about students' religious observance, doubt, or practice. International ethical guidance addresses the general case but does not treat religious observance as a category warranting particular protection.<sup>23</sup> The position taken here is that it should be so treated, and that Islamic educational institutions should adopt data policies that classify records of religious practice as sensitive by default<sup>24</sup> rather than awaiting external regulation. This is a stronger position than the surveyed literature takes, and it is advanced as a recommendation rather than as a finding. Two considerations support it. The first is that the information at stake is not merely personal but potentially consequential in ways that ordinary educational data is not: a record indicating that a student searched repeatedly for rulings on apostasy, on marital difficulty, or on practices their family would disapprove of carries risks unrelated to education. The second is that the ordinary safeguard of anonymisation is weaker here than elsewhere, because religious practice patterns within a small institution are frequently identifying even when names are removed. A madrasah with one student who consistently accesses material outside the school's madhhab has not anonymised that student by deleting their name.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Indonesian Case in Comparative Perspective**

The analysis so far has proceeded as though the problem were uniform across Muslim-majority settings, and it is worth asking whether the Indonesian case has features that qualify the argument. Three appear relevant. Indonesian Islamic education is institutionally plural to an unusual degree, encompassing state madrasah, independent pesantren of varying orientation, Islamic schools operated by mass organisations, and a substantial non-formal sector. This plurality means that no single authority can issue a ruling on digital content that would bind the field, and any institutional response must therefore be adopted institution by institution rather than mandated centrally.<sup>26</sup>

Second, the madhhab situation in Indonesia is comparatively settled, with Shafi'i jurisprudence predominant in traditional institutions. This might appear to simplify the jurisdictional problem described above, since a learner has a default frame against which to assess a generated position. In practice it may complicate it, because content produced by systems trained predominantly on Arabic-language material from other jurisdictions will present Hanbali or Maliki positions without marking them as such, and a learner who assumes a Shafi'i frame will read them as simply what Islam holds.

Third, Indonesian Islamic education has a documented history of institutional adaptation, from the incorporation of general subjects into madrasah curricula to the more recent integration

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<sup>23</sup> UNESCO, Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (UNESCO Publishing, 2021), pp. 21–28.

<sup>24</sup> Mansur Mansur and Muhammad Sholeh, 'Implementation of Character Education Based on Local Wisdom in Schools', *Journal of Integrated Elementary Education*, 4.1 (2024), 54–70.

<sup>25</sup> Abdul Gafur and others, 'Enhancing the Quality of Life for Santri', *Al-Tanzim*, 8.3 (2024), 747–59.

<sup>26</sup> Nizar Alam Hamdani, 'Scrutinizing Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia', *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 9.1 (2023), 79–92.

of technology under reform programmes.<sup>27</sup> This history suggests that the design principles proposed below are not being advanced into an inhospitable environment; the relevant institutions have adapted before. What the reform literature also indicates, however, is that such adaptations succeed where evaluation is followed by action and fail where they stop at adoption, which locates the risk precisely.<sup>28</sup> An institution that adopts a digital content review policy without a mechanism for acting on what the review finds will have produced a document rather than a practice.

### **Institutional Readiness and Design Principles**

Work on quality culture and governance in Indonesian Islamic institutions indicates that the fragile stage of institutional improvement is the passage from evaluation to action, and that leadership commitment, while necessary, concentrates capacity in a single figure.<sup>29</sup> Applied to digitalisation, this suggests that institutional responses which rest on the initiative of a principal or a single capable teacher will not persist. Three design principles follow from the analysis as a whole: teach provenance rather than conclusions, so that students acquire the habit of asking what a claim rests on; make the limits of teacher authority explicit, so that a teacher may say that a question requires a scholar without forfeiting standing; and locate review of digital content within curriculum governance rather than leaving it to individual discretion. The first two are supported by the reviewed literature on teacher role and adult learning<sup>30</sup>; the third is an extension beyond what the literature establishes and is offered as a proposal for testing.

### **CONCLUSION**

Digitalisation has expanded access to Islamic learning decisively while dispersing the interpretive authority that access formerly carried, and the resulting difficulty is felt most sharply by the classroom teacher who encounters content they cannot authenticate and for which no institutional procedure exists. Content generated by artificial intelligence intensifies this difficulty rather than creating it, since fluency without chain of transmission already characterises much online religious material; blended learning models transfer to adult Islamic learning only with andragogical adjustment; and reassigning the teacher as facilitator without equipping them as verifier produces an untenable role.

The implication is that the task facing Islamic educational institutions is the design of verification competence rather than the adoption of technology. Three principles are proposed: teaching provenance rather than conclusions, making the limits of teacher authority explicit, and locating review of digital content in curriculum governance rather than in individual discretion. The study is a conceptual synthesis of secondary sources and does not establish that these principles work; empirical examination of classrooms in which students routinely bring

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<sup>27</sup> Haddade and others, 'Madrasah Management Strategies', pp. 1295–98.

<sup>28</sup> Erwin Norman and others, 'Implementing Sharia-Based Total Quality Management in Islamic Educational Institutions', *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journal*, 6.2 (2025), 116–34.

<sup>29</sup> Ismail and others, pp. 855–58; Ramli, Bahrani and Ramli, pp. 55–58.

<sup>30</sup> Muhammad Saipul Hasan and others, 'Developing Administrative Excellence for Enhanced Educational Service Quality in Islamic Secondary Schools', *Kharisma*, 4.2 (2025), 109–24.

generated religious content, and of institutions that have attempted formal review procedures, would test them directly and is the research this article invites.

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