

Digital Ethics in Anime: A Critical Analysis of Light Yagami in *Death Note* for English Learning

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed how individuals interact, make decisions, and engage with ethical issues, particularly within technology-driven environments. In educational settings, digital media has been widely utilized to support English language learning; however, its implementation has largely emphasized linguistic competence, often overlooking the development of students' ethical awareness. Despite the growing integration of digital tools in English language teaching, their potential role in fostering ethical reasoning remains insufficiently explored, especially among students in computer-related disciplines. This gap underscores the need for a more integrative pedagogical approach that connects language acquisition with critical ethical reflection. This study aims to investigate how digital ethics is represented through the character Light Yagami in the anime *Death Note* and to examine its potential as a pedagogical resource in English language teaching. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the study applies literary analysis, digital ethics frameworks, and principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The findings indicate that the character embodies central ethical issues such as power, justice, and responsibility, while illustrating how the misuse of authority can result in significant moral consequences. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that anime narratives can serve as an effective medium for engaging students with complex ethical dilemmas in technology-oriented contexts. The use of anime also provides meaningful and relatable contexts that enhance language comprehension and stimulate critical thinking. This study contributes to the intersection of digital ethics and ESP by positioning anime as an innovative pedagogical tool for promoting ethical engagement in English language learning.

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1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has changed the way people interact, access information, and make decisions in everyday life. In the field of computer science, this development also brings new challenges, especially related to ethical issues such as data privacy, decision-making systems, and the use of technology without proper control. Because of this, students in computer-related fields are expected not only to understand technical aspects but also to be aware of ethical responsibilities in using technology (Floridi, 2013; Moor, 1985).

At the same time, the use of digital media in English language teaching continues to grow. Many teachers use videos, animations, and other digital tools to make learning more interesting and effective. Previous studies show that digital media can increase students'

motivation and help them understand language in context (Fathali, 2020; Djekidel & Rogti, 2025). One type of media that has gained attention is anime, which provides authentic language, engaging stories, and cultural context that support language learning (Uy et al., 2023).

In addition to supporting language learning, anime also presents meaningful stories that often contain moral and ethical issues. One example is the anime *Death Note*, which tells the story of Light Yagami, a character who has the power to control life and death. From a literary perspective, this character can be related to the concept of a tragic hero introduced by Aristotle. From a broader perspective, the story also reflects ethical problems that are relevant to modern technology, especially in terms of power and responsibility.

However, most previous studies focus mainly on how digital media improves language skills and pay less attention to how it can be used to develop students' ethical awareness. This shows that there is still a gap in integrating language learning, digital media, and ethical discussion, especially for students in technology-related fields. Despite the increasing use of digital media in English language teaching, its role in fostering student's ethical reasoning remains underexplored. This indicates the need for a more integrative approach that connects language learning with ethical reflection.

This study argues that anime narratives, particularly *Death Note*, can function as a meaningful pedagogical tool to foster both language skills and ethical awareness in English learning contexts.

This study is important because it offers a different approach by combining digital ethics, literary analysis, and English language teaching. It contributes to the integration of ethical awareness into English learning by positioning anime as a medium for critical engagement with ethical issues.

Based on this background, this study aims to critically analyze how digital ethics is represented through the character Light Yagami in the anime *Death Note* and to examine its potential as a pedagogical resource in English language teaching.

2. Literature Review

Literature review is an important part of research because it explains the theories and concepts that support the study and shows how the research is positioned within existing knowledge. In this study, the literature review focuses on digital ethics, tragic hero in literary studies, the use of anime in language learning, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

Digital ethics is closely related to how technology is used responsibly. While Floridi (2013) conceptualizes digital ethics in terms of information responsibility, privacy, and the broader impact of technology on human life, Moor (1985) emphasizes the role of ethical decision-making in situations of technological ambiguity. These perspectives highlight that ethical awareness is essential, particularly for students who will engage with technology in their future careers. However, both frameworks are often discussed separately and remain underutilized in educational contexts, especially in language learning.

In literary studies, the concept of tragic hero helps explain how characters develop through moral conflict. Aristotle (1996) describes a tragic hero as a character with admirable qualities but also a flaw that leads to downfall. This concept becomes relevant when connected to ethical analysis, as it provides a framework for understanding moral dilemmas in narratives. In modern contexts, this can be seen in the character of Light Yagami in *Death Note*, whose transformation reflects a shift from justice-driven intentions to ethical ambiguity.

In the field of English language teaching, digital media has been widely used to improve student engagement and language comprehension (Fathali, 2020; Djekidel & Rogti, 2025). However, most studies tend to focus on linguistic outcomes rather than examining how

digital media can facilitate ethical reflection. This suggests that the pedagogical potential of digital media has not been fully explored beyond language acquisition.

Anime, as part of digital media, offers unique advantages as a learning resource. It provides authentic language, cultural context, and engaging narratives that support learning (Uy et al., 2023). More importantly, anime often presents complex ethical issues, creating opportunities for critical discussion in the classroom. This positions anime not only as a linguistic resource but also as a medium for ethical engagement.

ESP (English for Specific Purposes) focuses on aligning language learning with students' academic or professional needs. Richards (2006) emphasizes that learning should be relevant to real-world contexts, while Chapelle (2003) highlights the role of technology in providing authentic learning materials. However, the integration of ethical dimensions within ESP, particularly for technology-related fields, remains limited.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that although digital ethics, literary analysis, digital media, and ESP have been widely studied, their integration remains underexplored. This study positions itself at the intersection of these fields by proposing anime as a pedagogical tool to bridge language learning and ethical awareness, particularly for students in computer-related disciplines.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how digital ethics is represented through the character Light Yagami in the anime *Death Note*. This approach is appropriate as the study focuses on interpreting meanings, values, and ethical perspectives embedded in narrative and visual data rather than numerical data.

The primary data source is the anime *Death Note*, particularly selected scenes and dialogues involving the main character. The data were purposively selected based on their relevance to ethical issues such as power, justice, and responsibility.

Data collection was conducted through observation and documentation. The researcher repeatedly watched the anime to gain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative and to identify significant scenes reflecting ethical dilemmas. Relevant dialogues and actions were transcribed and organized for further analysis.

The data analysis followed a thematic coding process adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006). The procedure consisted of several stages: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated viewing, (2) initial coding of significant dialogues and scenes, (3) grouping codes into broader themes such as power, justice, and responsibility, and (4) interpreting the themes in relation to digital ethics and literary perspectives.

To ensure the credibility of the analysis, data interpretation was cross-checked by re-examining the selected scenes and comparing them with relevant theoretical frameworks. In addition, the analysis applied theoretical triangulation by integrating perspectives from digital ethics (Floridi, 2013; Moor, 1985) and literary theory (Aristotle, 1996) to strengthen the validity of the findings.

The analytical framework of this study is based on the integration of digital ethics theory and the concept of tragic hero, which allows for a deeper examination of moral conflict and ethical reasoning in the narrative.

This method is considered appropriate because it provides a systematic and in-depth analysis of both narrative structure and ethical dimensions, supporting the objectives of this study.

4. Discussion

This section moves beyond descriptive explanation to critically interrogate how Light Yagami's character reflects deeper ethical structures relevant to contemporary digital systems. Rather than treating the narrative as a simple illustration, this discussion positions *Death Note* as a conceptual framework for analyzing power, authority, and ethical failure in technologically mediated environments.

Table 1

Summary of Key Findings

Aspect	Description
Power	Centralized and unregulated authority
Justice	Subjective moral absolutism
Responsibility	Systemic absence of accountability
Tragic Hero	Ethical collapse driven by epistemic arrogance
Learning Potential	Enables critical-ethical engagement in language learning

4.1 Digital ethics representation

The findings reveal that Light Yagami embodies a form of centralized authority that operates without transparency or external regulation, rather than merely reflecting individual misuse of power. Throughout the story, the character is shown as someone who has full control in making decisions without any external supervision

"I will become the god of a new world."

This statement does not simply reflect personal ambition, but rather mirrors algorithmic authoritarianism, where decision-making systems operate without transparency, ethical oversight, or accountability. In this sense, Light can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of how power becomes embedded within systems that claim objectivity while enforcing subjective control.

More critically, Light's decision-making reflects patterns of algorithmic bias, where judgments appear neutral but are shaped by underlying assumptions and selective criteria. His definition of justice is not universal, but constructed through his own perspective, similar to how biased datasets influence automated systems in real-world technological environments.

This situation can be linked to modern technological systems, especially those involving artificial intelligence. However, beyond analogy, this demonstrates a conceptual transfer in which fictional narrative is used to understand real-world ethical risks in AI systems.

According to Floridi (2013), technology must be used with ethical awareness, especially when it affects human life. Moor (1985) also emphasizes that technology influences human decisions, which makes ethical control very important.

Furthermore, Light's surveillance practices—monitoring individuals, collecting information, and making unilateral decisions—can be interpreted through the lens of surveillance capitalism, where data is used to predict and control human behavior.

From this discussion, it can be understood that the concentration of power without transparency or accountability reflects systemic ethical risks present in both fictional narratives and contemporary digital systems.

4.2 Tragic hero interpretation

From a literary perspective, Light Yagami can be categorized as a tragic hero; however, this classification requires deeper interrogation rather than surface-level description.

This transformation reflects not only character development but also a shift toward moral absolutism, where personal judgment replaces collective ethical reasoning.

Another dialogue that reflects this transformation is:

"I am justice."

This statement represents a collapse between subjective belief and universal truth, where Light positions himself as the sole authority of morality. Such a stance reveals an epistemological problem, in which the character fails to recognize the limits of his own reasoning. This shift from idealism to self-centered thinking highlights the internal conflict that defines a tragic hero.

From a broader perspective, this mirrors challenges in AI ethics, where decision-making systems often operate on incomplete or biased data while presenting outcomes as objective and definitive. Thus, Light's tragic flaw is not merely arrogance, but a systemic failure to accommodate alternative perspectives and ethical accountability.

This finding confirms that classical literary theory can still be applied to modern narratives, including anime, while also demonstrating its relevance in analyzing ethical issues within technological systems.

4.3 Implications for English language learning

The findings also show that the anime *Death Note* can be used as an effective learning resource in English language teaching. However, beyond its role as a language learning tool, this study positions anime as a medium for critical ethical engagement. The dialogues provide authentic language that can help students improve their vocabulary and comprehension.

In addition, the story presents situations that can be discussed in the classroom. Students are not only learning the language but also encouraged to think about ethical issues. Importantly, this approach enables conceptual transfer, where students connect fictional narratives with real-world issues such as algorithmic bias, surveillance systems, and ethical decision-making in technology. This supports previous studies showing that digital media can improve engagement and learning outcomes (Fathali, 2020; Djekidel & Rogti, 2025).

Furthermore, the use of anime can make learning more interesting and relatable. As shown by Uy et al. (2023), engaging content can motivate students to participate more actively. At the same time, discussions about ethical issues can help students develop critical thinking skills, which is also supported by Healy and Ijiri (2025).

Overall, this study demonstrates that anime functions not only as a pedagogical tool for language acquisition but also as a framework for integrating ethical reasoning into English language learning, particularly in technology-related fields.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that the character Light Yagami in the anime *Death Note* represents important aspects of digital ethics, especially related to power, justice, and responsibility. The findings indicate that the character's actions reflect how authority, when not balanced with ethical awareness, can lead to serious consequences.

More importantly, this study demonstrates that Light Yagami's character can be interpreted as a representation of ethical risks in contemporary digital systems, particularly those related to centralized decision-making, lack of accountability, and the potential for algorithmic bias.

In addition, the character can be understood as a tragic hero, whose downfall is mainly caused by internal factors such as ambition and a strong desire for control. This extends the

concept of tragic hero beyond literary analysis by linking it to ethical challenges in technology-mediated environments.

The results also show that anime can be used as an effective and engaging learning resource in English language teaching. Through meaningful stories and authentic language, students can improve their language skills while also developing critical thinking and ethical awareness.

From a pedagogical perspective, this study highlights the potential of anime as a medium for integrating language learning with ethical reasoning, particularly in ESP contexts for students in technology-related fields.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the integration of digital ethics and literary analysis by demonstrating how narrative texts can function as analytical frameworks for understanding ethical issues in modern technological systems.

From a practical perspective, this study offers an approach for educators to incorporate ethically rich digital media into English language teaching, enabling students to engage critically with real-world technological dilemmas while developing linguistic competence.

Based on these findings, the use of anime in language learning has strong potential to be developed further, especially as a medium to integrate language skills with ethical discussion.

Future research should explore classroom-based implementations and examine how this approach influences students' ethical reasoning, critical thinking, and language proficiency in diverse educational contexts.

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