

Strategic Role of Islamic Religious Education in Character Building in the Digital Era: A Theoretical and Practical Analysis

Wulan Septianingsih¹, Rizki Amalia², Diana Oktafiani³

¹SMK Negeri 4 Kota Bengkulu, Bengkulu, Indonesia, ²SMK Negeri 4 Rejang Lebong, Bengkulu, Indonesia, ³SMA Negeri 1 Kepahiang, Bengkulu, Indonesia

Corresponding author e-mail: wulanseptianingsih11@gmail.com

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Abstract: This study examines the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in shaping students' character, particularly in the rapidly advancing digital era. The aim of this study is to explore how PAI contributes to students' development of essential moral values and ethical responsibilities in their use of technology. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive methodology through a literature review approach, this research provides an in-depth analysis of existing literature on the integration of religious values in education, particularly in the context of digital media. The results reveal that PAI acts as a "moral filter," guiding students to critically assess information, distinguish reliable from misleading content, and interact wisely in digital environments. These values not only help students make ethical decisions but also equip them to be responsible and respectful digital citizens. However, a significant challenge identified is the limited technological proficiency among PAI educators, which can hinder the effectiveness of digital-based learning. This gap in digital competence impacts educators' ability to integrate technology meaningfully into lessons, thus reducing the potential impact of PAI education. Therefore, the study highlights the importance of digital training for educators to enhance their capacity to deliver PAI content in ways that are engaging, interactive, and relevant for tech-savvy students. This study contributes to the educational field by demonstrating that PAI not only fosters academic excellence but also plays a pivotal role in building resilient, ethically grounded individuals who are equipped to navigate the complexities of the digital age responsibly.

Keywords: Character Education, Digital Literacy, Islamic Religious Education.

A. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving digital era, character education has become increasingly crucial, particularly concerning the extensive use of technology and its impact on young generations. With the proliferation of digital devices and online platforms, students are exposed to vast amounts of information, which can shape their behavior and ethical perspectives. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a significant role in shaping students' character, equipping them with essential moral values for

interacting responsibly and ethically in digital spaces. Character education grounded in Islamic values aids students in developing integrity and wisdom when navigating the internet and accessing information (Eryandi, 2023). Through Islamic teachings, PAI serves as a moral filter, enabling students to critically evaluate information and maintain ethical principles in their digital interactions (Kholiq, 2023). By instilling values such as honesty, respect, and responsibility, PAI can prepare students to face moral dilemmas online, promoting a balanced approach between religious ethics and modern technological advancements.

What are unknown concerns how digital literacy can be more effectively integrated into Islamic religious curricula to prepare students for the complex moral challenges of the digital age. While digital competency is recognized as essential for modern education, the literature reveals a gap in understanding how Islamic values and digital literacy can be combined to foster ethical responsibility online (Arifuddin et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2023). Integrating digital literacy into PAI goes beyond teaching technical skills; it involves incorporating ethical considerations that guide students in making responsible decisions online. For example, addressing issues such as cyberbullying, misinformation, and online privacy from an Islamic ethical perspective could help students develop a strong moral compass. Additionally, the lack of digital skills among educators has been identified as a significant barrier to implementing technology-based PAI education. This challenge necessitates targeted strategies to enhance educators' digital competencies, ensuring they can effectively integrate technology into their teaching practices (Asikin, 2024; Amri, 2018). Developing comprehensive training programs and providing continuous professional development opportunities for educators are crucial steps in overcoming this barrier.

The state-of-the-art reveals that efforts to incorporate digital literacy in character education often focus on secular ethics without fully integrating religious values (Kulsum & Muhid, 2022). While secular digital literacy programs emphasize concepts such as digital citizenship, online safety, and critical thinking, they may lack the depth of moral guidance that religious values offer. Recent research supports using technology positively to enhance religious understanding and increase student engagement, presenting an opportunity for PAI to play a pivotal role in shaping digital citizenship rooted in Islamic ethics (Bunt, 2018). By embedding Islamic principles into digital literacy education, PAI can offer a holistic approach that nurtures both the cognitive and moral development of students. However, the integration of Islamic ethics into digital literacy is still developing, requiring a deeper understanding of the pedagogical approaches that best convey these values to students (Qowim, 2024; Inayha, 2023). Effective pedagogical strategies may include case studies, ethical dilemmas, and project-based learning that encourage students to apply Islamic teachings in real-world digital contexts.

The novelty of this study lies in its exploration of combining Islamic ethical teachings with digital literacy specifically within the context of PAI. Previous studies have

largely addressed either digital literacy or religious education independently, resulting in fragmented approaches to character building in digital environments (Yasmin et al., 2024). This study seeks to address this gap by proposing a framework where digital literacy is not only about technical skills but also about ethical considerations rooted in Islamic values. For instance, students can learn how to discern credible sources of information, avoid unethical digital behaviors, and engage in positive online interactions while adhering to Islamic teachings. As Jauhari (2020) emphasizes, the development of Islamic education requires a comprehensive approach that integrates both religious teachings and contemporary educational strategies to ensure relevance in modern contexts. Similarly, Khafifatulfian & Misbah (2023) highlights the importance of adopting innovative learning models, such as multiple intelligences, to enhance the effectiveness of PAI in fostering critical thinking and ethical reasoning. By integrating these ethical components into PAI, the study aims to develop students' ability to critically analyze digital content and respond to online challenges in a manner consistent with their religious beliefs.

The contribution of the study is to provide a model for integrating Islamic ethical values with digital literacy in PAI curricula, which could enhance students' moral responsibility and digital citizenship skills. This integrated approach is significant for preparing a generation that is both academically capable and morally grounded, aligned with the ethical principles needed to navigate the digital world responsibly (Hasanah & Sukri, 2023). By addressing the challenges educators face and offering practical solutions, this study contributes valuable insights into the field of Islamic education in the digital era (Salsabila et al., 2024). The proposed model may include guidelines for designing PAI lessons that incorporate digital literacy components, such as using interactive digital platforms, integrating ethical discussions in online learning environments, and employing multimedia resources to enhance student engagement.

Based on these considerations, this study investigates the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education in character building within the context of the digital era. By examining both theoretical frameworks and practical applications, the study aims to answer the research question: How does Islamic Religious Education provide a foundation for character development, equipping students to navigate digital complexities while upholding Islamic values? The findings could inform policymakers and educators about effective strategies for integrating digital literacy into Islamic education, promoting a balanced approach that respects both religious traditions and modern technological demands. This research also seeks to explore how PAI can adapt its methodologies to remain effective in promoting character development in a rapidly evolving society, ultimately preparing students to become ethical digital citizens who contribute positively to their communities.

In summary, the digital era presents both challenges and opportunities for character education within the framework of Islamic Religious Education. By integrating digital

literacy with Islamic ethical teachings, educators can foster a generation of students who are not only digitally competent but also ethically aware. This study aims to fill the existing research gap by providing empirical evidence and practical insights into how PAI can effectively prepare students for the moral complexities of the digital world. The outcomes of this research may serve as a foundation for future curriculum development, teacher training, and policy-making initiatives that seek to enhance the role of Islamic education in shaping ethical digital citizens.

B. Methods

The methodology used in this study is a qualitative descriptive approach with a literature review method, chosen for its ability to facilitate an in-depth exploration of data through interpretation and analysis. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in character development in the digital era, allowing researchers to examine existing theories, concepts, and findings critically (Sugiyono, 2019).

Data collection was conducted through an extensive review of academic sources, including books, scholarly journals, articles, and research reports. The focus was on topics related to the integration of PAI with digital technology, character challenges in the digital age, and educational innovations supporting character development (Zed, 2014). This comprehensive review ensured the inclusion of diverse perspectives and up-to-date research, providing a solid foundation for understanding the evolving role of PAI in addressing digital era challenges.

For data analysis, the study employed content analysis techniques, which involved systematic reading, coding, and thematic grouping. This method allowed the identification of key themes and patterns, leading to insights into how PAI contributes to shaping moral character in a digital context. To enhance data validity, source triangulation was applied by comparing multiple sources from various disciplines and perspectives. This process ensured a balanced and thorough understanding of the issues, strengthening the study's reliability and providing a nuanced view of PAI's role in character education amid the digital era's complexities (Moleong, 2017).

C. Results and Discussion

This study identified four key points related to the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in character development in the digital era. The findings indicate that PAI not only teaches religious material but also plays a critical role in strengthening students' character, especially in addressing the challenges of the digital age. The main findings are as follows:

Character Building through Islamic Religious Education Values

One of the primary roles of PAI (Islamic Religious Education) is to instill moral and ethical values in students, which serve as crucial guidelines in the digital era. These values, such as integrity, responsibility, honesty, tolerance, and respect for others, are imparted through PAI materials and provide students with a solid foundation for wise behavior in their online interactions. In today's digital age, where the internet often blurs the lines between right and wrong, these moral principles are vital in helping students navigate the complexities of the online world with awareness and discernment. Through the teachings of PAI, students are encouraged to act in accordance with ethical and Islamic values, empowering them to make informed decisions regarding the content they encounter online and their conduct in virtual spaces (Hasanah & Sukri, 2023). This ethical framework plays a key role in shaping how students engage with the digital world, ensuring they remain grounded in moral integrity even when faced with the challenges of online environments.

In the context of the digital age, the values taught in PAI function as a "moral filter," acting as a protective mechanism against the many negative influences pervasive in the online world. With the vast amount of unfiltered content available such as fake news, hate speech, and pornography students are often exposed to harmful material that can distort their worldview. The ethical teachings of PAI provide students with the tools to differentiate between trustworthy and misleading information, helping them uphold a strong sense of moral integrity. By grounding students in Islamic values, PAI ensures they can navigate the digital landscape responsibly and respectfully, shielding them from harmful influences. Additionally, these teachings guide students in making positive contributions online, fostering a digital environment that reflects the ethical and moral values of Islam (Salsabila et al., 2024). Thus, PAI plays an essential role in equipping students with the necessary moral compass to thrive in the digital age.

Improvement of Digital Literacy through Islamic Religious Education

PAI (Islamic Religious Education) not only focuses on teaching moral values but also plays an essential role in enhancing students' digital literacy. As the digital world continues to grow and evolve, it is crucial for students to understand how to navigate online spaces ethically and responsibly. Digital literacy, as taught through PAI, emphasizes the importance of being cautious in online interactions, highlighting the ethics of social media use, maintaining privacy, and understanding the long-term consequences of one's "digital footprint." PAI educates students on the potential risks they may face in the digital world, such as online harassment, cyberbullying, or the spread of misinformation. By addressing these issues, PAI provides students with guidelines for responsible and ethical online behavior. Through this approach, PAI ensures that students are not only aware of the dangers posed by digital technology but are also equipped with the knowledge to use it responsibly. This includes

understanding the importance of respecting others' privacy and the need for ethical communication in both public and private digital spaces.

In PAI lessons, digital literacy can be effectively implemented by incorporating discussions about various digital challenges from an Islamic perspective. By engaging students in these discussions, educators can help students understand how to balance religious principles with modern technological realities. For instance, students can be taught to critically evaluate the information they encounter online, ensuring it aligns with their values while fostering respect for the diversity of opinions in the digital space. This approach encourages students to adopt behavior that aligns with Islamic values while using technology to benefit themselves and others. By providing religious guidance alongside digital literacy, PAI helps students become not just passive consumers of technology but active, responsible participants in the digital world. They learn to use technology wisely, promoting ethical online behavior, respect, and empathy, and contributing positively to the online community. This aligns with responsible citizenship, as students are taught to be mindful of their digital actions and how they affect others (Amri, 2018). This holistic approach to digital literacy prepares students to navigate the complexities of the digital age with a strong moral foundation, equipping them to face the challenges of the modern world.

Integration of Technology in Islamic Religious Education

Technology has provided an opportunity for PAI (Islamic Religious Education) to be delivered in more creative and effective ways, transforming traditional teaching methods. In recent years, many educators have embraced the potential of digital media to engage students and make learning more dynamic. For instance, Islamic education apps, instructional videos, and social media platforms have become popular tools in delivering lessons. These digital tools enable educators to present PAI content in interactive and visually appealing formats that capture students' attention. By using interactive videos, for example, students can engage with the material in a more immersive way, allowing them to learn Islamic values in a format that is both accessible and interesting. This approach helps students understand the relevance of religious teachings in their everyday lives, which are increasingly shaped by digital technology. With the incorporation of technology, PAI lessons are no longer confined to traditional classroom settings but are extended into students' digital environments, making learning more interactive and in tune with modern trends.

In the digital age, students are often more engaged with digital content than traditional textbooks, making it crucial to adapt teaching methods to fit their learning preferences. Through technology, PAI lessons can be made more relatable, aligning Islamic teachings with students' contemporary experiences. The use of digital media not only enhances engagement but also provides students with more flexibility in their learning. They can access resources at their own pace, revisiting materials as needed, which reinforces their understanding. Furthermore, these tools support deeper

learning by enabling students to explore the subject matter in a more personalized way. This approach not only enhances students' understanding of PAI content but also encourages them to incorporate Islamic values into their digital lives. As students are exposed to the increasing influence of technology in their daily routines, technology-based PAI education equips them with a moral compass to navigate the complexities and challenges of the digital era, fostering a sense of responsibility and ethical awareness in online interactions (Halawati, 2020). In this way, technology in PAI becomes a powerful tool to bridge the gap between traditional religious education and the digital world, creating a learning environment that resonates with students while fostering their moral development.

Challenges in Islamic Religious Education in the Digital Era

The study also identified several challenges in delivering PAI (Islamic Religious Education) in the digital era. One of the key challenges is ensuring that the core values of PAI remain relevant and are not diluted or distorted by the rapid pace of technological advancements. As technology evolves, the ways in which students engage with content and information also change, which can pose difficulties in keeping PAI lessons consistent with traditional moral teachings while making them applicable in modern contexts. With the shift to digital platforms, there is a risk that Islamic teachings could be oversimplified or misinterpreted. Moreover, the growing dependence on technology might lead to a detachment from the core values that PAI aims to instill. To address this, educators must carefully balance the use of technology with the preservation of the ethical and moral principles of Islamic education. This requires ongoing reflection and adaptation to ensure that technological tools enhance the learning experience without compromising the integrity of the educational goals. The challenge is to ensure that technological advancements complement and reinforce Islamic teachings rather than overshadowing them, allowing students to develop both their digital and moral literacy in harmony (Sabaruddin, 2023).

Another significant challenge is the lack of digital competence among many PAI educators, which hampers the effective integration of technology into their teaching practices. Despite the increasing availability of digital resources, many educators still struggle to use technology in a way that enhances student engagement and deepens understanding. This gap in digital skills among teachers is a barrier to delivering PAI content in ways that resonate with digital-native students. The use of technology requires a new set of pedagogical skills, and many PAI educators are not yet equipped with the necessary tools to implement these changes effectively. To overcome this challenge, there is a pressing need for comprehensive training and professional development programs to equip educators with the necessary digital skills and strategies for incorporating technology into PAI lessons. Such training should not only focus on technical skills but also on how to effectively integrate Islamic values into digital formats. By enhancing educators' digital literacy, PAI can be taught in more engaging and impactful ways, ensuring that it remains relevant and effective in the

digital age. Empowering teachers with the right tools will ultimately ensure that students receive a holistic education that addresses both their religious and digital needs (Sabaruddin, 2023).

The findings in this study underscore the significant role that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays in character development, especially in the context of the digital age. As technological advancements continue at an unprecedented rate, students are exposed to an overwhelming amount of information online. This digital environment can profoundly influence their behavior and mindset, often presenting both opportunities and challenges. The primary role of PAI in this context is to serve as a “moral filter,” helping students navigate the vast digital landscape with ethical awareness. The teachings of PAI, which emphasize core religious values such as honesty, simplicity, respect, and responsibility, provide a solid ethical foundation that students can rely on when making decisions in both the physical and digital spaces. These values serve as guiding principles, enabling students to discern the information they encounter online and behave in accordance with Islamic ethics. As Hasanah & Sukri (2023), Salsabila et al. (2024), Sulistyو & Ismarti (2022), and Muflihin (2020) suggest, by internalizing these religious values, students can avoid engaging in negative behaviors that are prevalent in the digital world, such as spreading fake news, participating in hate speech, or engaging in cyberbullying. Through the teachings of PAI, students learn the importance of using technology responsibly, which includes knowing how to interact respectfully in the digital world, maintaining ethical communication, and safeguarding others’ privacy.

PAI also plays a crucial role in enhancing digital literacy, ensuring that students not only master technical skills related to technology but also understand the ethical considerations that should accompany their digital interactions. In today’s era, where information spreads rapidly and the lines between truth and falsehood are often blurred, digital literacy is an essential skill. It equips students to be discerning consumers and creators of information, guiding them to verify the truthfulness of content before sharing it. This understanding helps students avoid contributing to the spread of harmful or misleading information. As Amri (2018), Nurjannah (2022), and Predy et al. (2019) highlight, technology, when used wisely, can be a powerful tool for learning. Through interactive media, educational videos, and other digital resources, PAI can become more engaging and accessible to students, especially the youth generation that is highly familiar with technology. This approach not only makes Islamic education more relevant to students but also aligns it with their everyday experiences in a digital world. By incorporating technology into PAI lessons, educators can create an engaging and dynamic learning environment that appeals to students, making religious teachings more applicable to their daily lives. Additionally, the use of digital media in PAI lessons provides an opportunity to present Islamic values in a manner that resonates with the needs and interests of the modern generation. The digital era demands that education evolve in response to the changing technological landscape, and PAI, by integrating technology, can meet these

challenges while remaining true to its core mission.

Despite the immense potential of technology in enhancing PAI education, the study also identifies significant challenges that hinder the effective implementation of technology-based learning. One of the primary obstacles is the limited digital competence among PAI educators. While technology offers numerous advantages, many PAI teachers still lack the necessary skills to effectively incorporate digital tools into their teaching practices. This gap in digital competence can lead to ineffective technology integration, which limits the potential benefits of using digital media in the classroom. As Sabaruddin (2023) points out, to overcome this challenge, educators need specialized training that goes beyond merely mastering the technical aspects of digital tools. The training must also focus on how to integrate religious values within the digital context. PAI educators must understand how to seamlessly blend technology with the teachings of Islamic ethics, ensuring that the use of digital tools does not detract from the core moral and religious teachings. Training in this area will not only enhance educators' technical skills but also equip them to create lessons that are both digitally effective and ethically sound. Furthermore, educational institutions must play a supportive role by providing resources and infrastructure that enable PAI teachers to develop their digital skills. By investing in the professional development of educators, schools can help them deliver PAI lessons that are more interactive, engaging, and aligned with the needs of students living in the digital age.

The development of digital competence among PAI (Islamic Religious Education) educators is indeed essential in the modern educational landscape. As technology continues to evolve, teachers must not only be adept at using digital tools but also understand how to integrate them meaningfully into their teaching practices. This is particularly crucial in enhancing the learning experience for students, ensuring that lessons are not only engaging but also aligned with ethical and moral teachings that PAI imparts. By incorporating multimedia tools, digital platforms, and online resources into PAI, educators can make religious teachings more accessible and relevant, bridging the gap between traditional values and the digital world. Furthermore, PAI teachers can utilize these technologies to cultivate responsible digital behavior and ethical reasoning among students. This includes teaching students how to critically engage with the content they encounter online, encouraging ethical communication, and ensuring that they understand the implications of their actions in a digital context. Educators, as highlighted by various studies, play a pivotal role in fostering digital literacy and guiding students toward becoming responsible digital citizens (Kamal et al., 2024). Integrating AI tools to improve teachers' digital competence, as discussed in recent studies, can also play a key role in equipping educators with the necessary skills to keep pace with technological advancements in education (Kamal et al., 2024). This approach not only enhances teachers' professional development but also ensures that students are prepared for an increasingly complex digital landscape.

Overall, the findings of this study highlight the importance of PAI in shaping students' character in the digital age. By applying Islamic values to everyday life, students are encouraged to use technology wisely, maintain ethical communication, and take responsibility for their digital actions. Despite challenges such as the limited digital competence among educators, PAI can continue to play a crucial role in character development by addressing these issues through targeted training and support. As educational institutions provide the necessary resources and professional development opportunities for PAI teachers, they can ensure that PAI education remains relevant and effective in preparing students for the digital age. By combining religious education with digital literacy, PAI can help shape young generations who are not only academically proficient but also ethically grounded, responsible, and capable of navigating the digital world with wisdom and integrity. This dual focus on digital skills and moral values provides a strong foundation for students to thrive in a rapidly changing, technology-driven world while staying true to their religious and ethical principles. With continued investment in digital education for both students and teachers, PAI can remain an essential tool for fostering character development and responsible digital citizenship in the 21st century.

D. Conclusions

This study concludes that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in character development, equipping students to face the challenges of the digital era. PAI goes beyond delivering religious content by instilling core moral values such as honesty, responsibility, integrity, and respect. These values serve as a "moral filter" that helps students navigate the digital space ethically, discern information critically, and avoid negative behaviors like spreading fake news, hate speech, and cyberbullying. Additionally, PAI enhances students' digital literacy by not only developing their technical skills but also fostering an ethical mindset, enabling them to use technology responsibly, maintain ethical communication, and protect their digital privacy. Through the integration of interactive media and educational technologies, PAI remains relevant and engaging for today's tech-savvy generation.

Despite its potential, the primary challenge lies in the limited digital competence of PAI educators, which affects the effective integration of technology into religious education. Addressing this issue requires targeted training that focuses on both technical skills and the incorporation of Islamic values into digital contexts. With adequate support in training and resources, PAI can continue to shape students who are not only academically proficient but also possess strong ethical character in navigating the digital world. This study demonstrates that the integration of Islamic values with digital literacy in PAI provides a solid foundation for students to responsibly handle the complexities of the digital era, effectively answering the research question on how PAI contributes to character development in this rapidly evolving landscape.

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