

Islamic Character Education in the Digital Era: A Case Study of Junior High Schools

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

*Islamic Character Education,
Digital Era,
Junior High School, Islamic
Digital Literacy,
Educational Strategy*

Article history:

Received 2025-05-01

Revised 2025-05-26

Accepted 2025-06-20

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the strategy and implementation of Islamic character education at the Junior High School (SMP) level in facing the challenges of the digital era. Using a qualitative approach through a case study method, this study analyzes the school's efforts to synergize Islamic character values with digital culture that is now part of students' daily lives. The results of the study indicate that the transformation of Islamic character education has been carried out through various strategies, such as the integration of Islamic values in digital media, strengthening Islamic-themed digital literacy, teacher training, and collaboration between schools and parents. However, there are still obstacles such as the gap in teachers' digital competence and unequal access to technology. This study emphasizes the importance of making the digital era an opportunity, not a threat, in forming students' contextual and relevant Islamic character. These findings are expected to provide practical contributions to the development of an integrative and adaptive Islamic character education model.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Character education is an important foundation in forming the personality of the younger generation (Mujahid, 2021). From an Islamic perspective, character education not only includes moral or ethical aspects, but also spiritual, social and intellectual values based on the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah (Faizah, 2022). The main aim of Islamic character education is to form human beings who are faithful, devout, have noble character, and are able to live harmoniously in society (Wijaya & Aini, 2020). At the Junior High School (SMP) level, the adolescent phase is a crucial period for the formation of identity, so character education is very much needed as a guiding direction (Bandi, 2011).

However, along with the entry of the digital era, the flow of information is increasingly unstoppable. Junior high school-aged teenagers are now active users of digital technology such as social media, online games, and entertainment applications that are not always in line with the values of Islamic character education (**Susanto, 2024**). Exposure to negative content, hoaxes, permissive culture, and digital individualism also shape the character of students outside the control of educational institutions and families. Data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2023 showed that 72.4% of children aged 10-14 years actively use the internet, with an average duration of use of more than 3 hours per day. This indicates that the digital environment is a "second teacher" that also influences the formation of adolescent character (**Nursinggah, Ruuhwan, & Mufizar, 2024**).

This phenomenon presents a serious challenge in the implementation of Islamic character education in schools. Many educators complain about the erosion of values such as responsibility, honesty, and manners towards teachers due to the influence of cyberspace. Islamic schools have not been fully able to answer this digital challenge with an adaptive approach. The character education curriculum tends to be normative and not contextual with the dynamics of technology. As a result, there is a gap between the goals of Islamic character education that are taught and the real behavior of students in the digital world. Facing these challenges, there needs to be innovation in Islamic character education that does not reject digitalization, but instead utilizes it as an effective educational medium. This approach can be in the form of integrating Islamic values into technology-based activities, utilizing character education applications, strengthening digital literacy with an Islamic nuance, and the active involvement of teachers and parents in guiding students in the digital space. Schools must become agents of moderation, not only teaching goodness, but also accompanying students to be able to filter digital content and practice Islamic values contextually.

Several previous studies have discussed character education in the digital era. For example, Aji Priyambodo's research shows that implementing character education through digital media can improve students' understanding of religious values, but its effectiveness is highly dependent on teacher involvement (**Priyambodo, 2017**). Meanwhile, a study by Mulyadi et al. stated that social media can be an effective means for internalizing Islamic values if packaged with interesting and educational content (**Mulyadi, Inayati, & Hasan, 2023**). However, there has not been much research that specifically examines how the strategy and implementation of Islamic character education are carried out concretely at the

Junior High School level in the context of students' and teachers' daily lives. Therefore, an in-depth case study is needed to find relevant and applicable learning patterns.

This study aims to examine how the process of Islamic character education is implemented in Junior High Schools in facing the challenges of the digital era. This study also wants to explore the strategies of educators and schools in synergizing Islamic values with digital media, and assess the extent to which the approach taken is able to shape students' Islamic character amidst the rapid flow of information technology. Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide practical contributions to the development of a contextual, humanistic, and adaptive Islamic character education model to the development of the times. The urgency of this study lies in the increasingly important role of Islamic schools in maintaining the moral integrity of the younger generation in an era full of digital distractions. Character education that is not adaptive to the times will be left behind and ineffective. Moreover, adolescents are at a critical age in determining the direction of the values they will adhere to throughout their lives. If Islamic character education does not immediately innovate, there will be a dissonance between Islamic teachings and the social reality of students. Therefore, this study is important to provide alternative solutions through empirical and contextual approaches.

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method (**Huberman & Jhonny, 2014; Sugiyono, 2010**). The research location will be focused on one of the Islamic Junior High Schools that has implemented digital-based character education. Data collection techniques are carried out through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and documentation of learning activities. Data are analyzed using thematic analysis techniques by tracing patterns of Islamic character education that appear in the school's digital activities and students' daily lives. Data validity is maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, as well as member checks with key informants.

The novelty in this study lies in the focus of the study of Islamic character education which is specifically linked to the digital life practices of junior high school students. If most previous studies only stop at the conceptual or normative level, this study tries to present a more concrete and contextual understanding through real case studies in the field. This study also offers a practical approach based on Islamic digital media that has not been widely studied in previous

literature. In addition, this study raises the importance of collaboration between schools, families, and digital ecosystems in shaping students' Islamic character.

2. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method (**Sugiyono, 2015**). This approach was chosen because it was considered the most appropriate to explore in depth the practice of Islamic character education amidst the challenges of the digital era. The focus of the research was directed at one Islamic Junior High School that actively applies Islamic-based character values through digital and non-digital strategies. Data collection techniques were carried out through direct observation of learning activities and student lives, in-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, students, and parents, as well as documentation of learning media, school programs, and digital platforms used. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to obtain flexible data but remain focused according to the focus of the research.

The data obtained was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, namely by identifying, classifying, and interpreting the main themes that emerged from the results of interviews and observations (**Creswell, 2022**). Data validity is maintained by using source triangulation and method triangulation techniques, as well as member checks with informants to confirm the accuracy of the data. Researchers also noted the social and cultural dynamics of schools as contexts that influence the character education process. With this method, it is hoped that a complete picture can be found regarding the strategy and effectiveness of Islamic character education in responding to digital challenges at the Junior High School level.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Transformation of Islamic Character Education in the Digital Landscape of Junior High Schools

The digital era has brought fundamental changes in various aspects of life, including in the world of education (**Susanto, 2024**). Advances in information technology have not only changed the way students learn, but have also reshaped the way they interact, think, and absorb moral values (**Fetra Bonita Sari, Risda Amini, 2020**). Amidst these changes, Islamic character education at the Junior High School (SMP) level is faced with serious challenges as well as new opportunities. The transformation of character education can no longer rely solely on conventional methods, but must adapt to the digital landscape that is now part of students' daily lives.

The results of this study indicate that Islamic schools at the junior high school level are beginning to realize the importance of making digital media part of their character learning strategy. Educators no longer position technology as a mere threat, but as an instrument that, if used wisely, can become an effective and contextual media for internalizing Islamic values. For example, some teachers use Islamic video content, Islamic podcasts, and digital platforms such as Google Classroom to insert character messages such as honesty, responsibility, and manners. With this approach, students not only become users of technology, but are also invited to interpret the digital world through the lens of Islamic values.

However, this character education transformation did not go without obstacles. One important finding from this study is that there is still a gap between the objectives of Islamic character learning and students' behavior in cyberspace. Many students are active on social media, but have not been maximally facilitated in terms of digital literacy based on Islamic values. As a result, values such as being polite in commenting, being wise in sharing information, and maintaining good manners in online interactions have not been fully embedded. This shows that even though digitalization has penetrated the classroom, the transformation of values has not automatically occurred without a process of mentoring and structured learning design.

Furthermore, the role of teachers as transformation facilitators is crucial. Teachers are not only teachers of material, but also role models and digital mentors. In this study, it was found that teachers who actively accompany students in digital spaces, such as by creating educational WhatsApp groups or giving reflection assignments through social media, were more successful in instilling Islamic character than teachers who completely handed over the digital process to students **(Herdiyanti, Janah, & Susanto, 2025)**. Teachers who are sensitive to digital dynamics also find it easier to recognize new challenges faced by students, such as cyberbullying, game addiction, or exposure to negative content, and respond to them with a wise Islamic approach **(Wahyudi, Nuriana, & Irfan, 2025)**.

The transformation of Islamic character education also occurs at the institutional level. Several schools that are the objects of the study have begun to formulate digital school policies that support character formation, such as the implementation of Islamic digital ethics, a code of ethics for the use of social media by students, and collaboration between schools and parents in monitoring children's digital activities. This holistic approach reflects the school's efforts to

make the digital environment part of an integrated character education ecosystem (**Yahuda, Susanto, Widodo, & Kolis, 2024**). Herein lies the paradigm shift: character education is no longer just a matter of the classroom, but also extends to digital spaces that are part of students' lives. One form of transformation that is quite prominent is the use of value-based digital platforms. Some schools have developed their own digital learning media that insert Islamic character content, such as animated videos on the theme of honesty, quiz applications on teacher etiquette, and e-books of exemplary stories of the Prophet. This media not only attracts students' attention, but also provides space for their active involvement in learning. With this approach, character values are not conveyed dogmatically, but rather through fun and interactive learning experiences.

However, there are still structural challenges that need to be considered. Some teachers admit that they do not yet have adequate digital competence to design innovative Islamic character learning. In addition, not all students have equal access to technology, so that digital transformation is still partial. Therefore, the transformation of character education in the digital era must be balanced with teacher training, the provision of equitable digital infrastructure, and the development of a character curriculum that is responsive to changes in the times. In this context, the transformation of Islamic character education is not only a change in method, but also a change in approach, mindset, and strategy (**Susanto, Ali, & Hidayat, 2024**). Schools can no longer rely on lectures and punishments as a way to instill character, but must create learning experiences that are reflective, contextual, and relevant to students' digital realities. Islamic character education must be able to answer the needs of a generation born and raised in the internet era, without losing the spirit of Islamic teachings that are full of love, exemplary, and civility.

Thus, it can be concluded that the transformation of Islamic character education in Junior High Schools in the digital landscape is both a necessity and an opportunity. The success of this transformation is highly dependent on the synergy between teachers, students, parents, and school policies that support integrative and adaptive character education. This study underlines the importance of making the digital era not a barrier, but rather a new field for instilling noble Islamic values in a more effective and relevant way to the development of the times.

Internal School Strategy in Instilling Islamic Values Amidst the Digitalization Flow

The digitalization current has changed the patterns of social interaction, ways of thinking, and behavior of the younger generation, including students at the junior high school level (**Romdhoni & Anam, 2025**). Amidst the rapid flow of information through the internet and social media, Islamic values as the foundation of students' character face serious challenges. Schools as formal educational institutions play an important role in responding to this change, especially through internal strategies designed to instill Islamic values that are adaptive to the development of the times. Internal school strategies in this context involve curriculum planning, teacher training, strengthening school culture, and utilizing value-based digital media. In several Islamic schools that were the objects of the study, instilling values such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and manners towards teachers was carried out through the integration of values in general subjects, daily religious activities, and strengthening the exemplary role of teachers as role models. This strategy is not only written in the vision-mission document, but is also implemented in daily policies and practices in the school environment (**Ekawati, 2025**).

One form of internal strategy that is quite effective is the implementation of Islamic school culture. For example, the habit of reading prayers before studying, praying Dhuha together, and the "one day one hadith" program are a means of habituating values in routine activities. Furthermore, schools have also begun to utilize digital media as part of character internalization. Religious teachers, for example, create short da'wah content in the form of videos and distribute them through student WhatsApp groups. Students are also given the task of creating positive content based on Islamic values on their social media, so that character learning does not stop in the classroom, but continues in the digital world (**Puji, Hani, & Kumalasari, 2025**).

In addition, teacher coaching is an important part of the internal strategy. Teachers are given training on Islamic digital literacy and technology-based character learning methods. This aims to ensure that educators are not technologically illiterate and are able to instill character values through an approach that is relevant to the digital generation. Creative and tech-savvy teachers tend to be more successful in attracting students' attention and are able to position themselves as spiritual guides and wise digital partners. No less important is the support of a consistent monitoring and evaluation system. Schools compile indicators for the success of character instillation, either in the

form of observations of student behavior, daily journals, or self-evaluations carried out by students periodically. The use of digital applications also helps in monitoring the development of student character individually. In some cases, schools involve parents through digital communication forums, such as Zoom or WA parent groups, to synergize character education at home and school (Susanto & Sugiyar, 2023).

With these internal strategies, schools try to ensure that Islamic values do not drown in the midst of the wave of digitalization. Adaptation does not mean giving up on the times, but making technology a tool for preaching and education that is child-friendly. Therefore, schools are not enough to just have formal Islamic programs, but must ensure that every element in the education system - teachers, curriculum, media, and school culture - consistently supports the formation of a solid and contextual Islamic character.

Synchronization of Islamic Character Values and Digital Culture in Middle School Environment

The development of digital technology today has significantly changed the landscape of human life, including in the world of education. At the Junior High School (SMP) level, students who are classified as digital natives are increasingly familiar with gadgets, social media, and various digital platforms in their daily lives. Easy access to information, unlimited online interaction, and the dominance of visual content have created a strong digital culture among students. However, this culture also brings serious challenges to the internalization of character values, especially Islamic characters that prioritize manners, honesty, politeness, and responsibility. Therefore, synchronization between Islamic character values and digital culture is very important in the SMP environment (Antoro, Nurhidayah, & Ali, 2025).

Islamic character values are an inseparable part of Islamic education that not only emphasizes cognitive aspects, but also affective and psychomotor aspects. Values such as amanah, tawadhu', justice, patience, and respect for parents and teachers are principles that shape students' noble morals. However, in practice, a free and individualistic digital culture often conflicts with these values. For example, the behavior of spreading information without verification, rude comments on social media, to dependence on digital entertainment that neglects learning and worship duties. If not managed properly, this digital culture risks weakening the Islamic character that should be the foundation of students' lives. Synchronization between Islamic character values and digital culture must start from a new paradigm in education. Schools can no longer position technology as

a threat to be avoided, but rather as a strategic medium to convey Islamic values creatively and relevantly. Teachers and schools as the vanguard of education must be able to make technology a means of preaching and strengthening character. For example, through the creation of learning content based on Islamic values that are disseminated via YouTube, TikTok Edu, or Islamic podcasts to reach students in a more personal and contextual way **(Dalimunthe et al., 2023; Susanto, Rohmah, Hidayanti, & Sugiyar, 2023)**.

In addition, the curriculum and school activities need to be designed in an integrative manner so that character values do not stand alone, but are internalized in all subjects and student activities. General subjects such as Indonesian, Social Studies, or even Mathematics can be infused with Islamic character content through a contextual approach. On the other hand, extracurricular activities and daily programs such as congregational prayer, *tadarus*, or religious mentoring must also be linked to the dynamics of students' digital lives. For example, in a mentoring session, teachers can raise topics about social media ethics in Islam or how to maintain manners in online conversations. In this process, the role of teachers is very central. Teachers are not only required to be teachers, but also role models and digital mentors. Teachers who understand digital literacy and have strong Islamic integrity will find it easier to instill values in students. For example, by actively discussing with students about the content they see on social media, teachers can insert values such as *tabayyun*, manners of speaking, and the importance of maintaining self-respect in cyberspace. Teachers can also invite students to create positive content together, such as inspirational videos on the theme of honesty or tolerance between religious communities.

No less important is the involvement of schools in building a comprehensive Islamic digital culture. This can be realized through rules for the use of digital media in schools, counseling on Islamic digital ethics, and the formation of student communities engaged in digital *da'wah*. Some schools have even started forming teams of "digital santri" or "character ambassadors" whose job is to spread moral messages and Islamic values through school social media **(Sampurna & Jannah, 2025)**. This is one way to build a digital environment that is not only informative, but also spiritually and morally transformative. This synchronization also requires parental involvement. Parents must be partners with the school in shaping students' character, especially since most of the students' digital activities occur outside of school. Therefore, schools need to routinely hold Islamic digital parenting seminars, build intensive

communication through WhatsApp groups of parents, and align their vision in educating children so that Islamic digital literacy is formed early on.

Finally, synchronizing Islamic character values and digital culture is not an instant effort, but rather a long-term process that requires consistency, innovation, and collaboration. With the right approach, the digital era is not a threat, but rather a great opportunity to strengthen Islamic character education. The digital world, which was previously considered a value-free area, can now become a new field for instilling noble morals if synergized effectively by schools, teachers, students, and parents.

4. CONCLUSION

Islamic character education in the digital era is an urgent need that must be responded to adaptively by educational institutions. The results of the study show that Islamic schools have begun to transform their approach to character education, by utilizing digital technology as a means of conveying Islamic values contextually. Teachers play a central role as spiritual and digital guides, while schools strive to build an educational ecosystem that supports Islamic character through internal policies and collaboration with parents. However, challenges such as limited digital competence of teachers and gaps in technological infrastructure are still obstacles to the optimal implementation of Islamic-based character education. Therefore, the transformation of character education requires not only changes in methods, but also mindsets, systems, and synergy between stakeholders. For further authors, it is recommended to expand the scope of the study by involving more than one school in order to obtain a comparison of Islamic character education practices in a more diverse digital context. The study can also be supplemented with quantitative analysis to measure the extent to which digital strategies are effective in shaping students' character statistically. In addition, an in-depth exploration of the role of parents and digital communities in the character education process can provide a more comprehensive perspective.

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