

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SHAPING MORAL VALUES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed how individuals, especially students, access information, communicate, and interact socially. While digital platforms provide opportunities for learning and connectivity, they also present moral challenges, including exposure to harmful content, cyberbullying, and misinformation. This study explores the role of religious education in shaping moral values among students in the digital era. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers and administrators, focus group discussions with students, and analysis of curriculum and educational documents. The findings indicate that religious education serves as a critical framework for moral development, helping students internalize ethical principles, navigate digital challenges, and engage in responsible online behavior. The study also highlights the importance of teacher competence, curriculum relevance, and family involvement in reinforcing moral guidance. In conclusion, integrating religious education with digital literacy is essential for fostering morally grounded and digitally competent students.

Keywords:

Religious Education
Moral Values
Digital Era



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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, the rapid advancement of digital technology has brought profound transformations to nearly every dimension of human life. Digital platforms such as social media, mobile applications, and online communities have become central in how individuals especially youth interact, access information, form opinions, and construct personal worldviews. These platforms have inundated modern societies with unprecedented levels of connectivity, information access, and communication efficiency. Yet, the pervasiveness of digital technologies has also created complex moral challenges, including exposure to harmful content, the propagation of misinformation, cyberbullying, and behavioral patterns that often conflict with traditional moral principles. The digital environment has altered not only the ways in which people learn but also how they internalize ethical norms and values, raising crucial questions about the adequacy of existing moral education frameworks in shaping character and ethical decision-making in the digital age (Arifuddin et al., 2025).

Religious education traditionally understood as the formal or informal teaching of religious doctrines and ethical principles has long played a pivotal role in moral formation. Across various faith traditions, religious instruction not only conveys theological knowledge but also seeks to instill distinct moral virtues, ethical commitments, and a worldview that orients behavior toward collective well-being. In the digital era, the role of religious education acquires additional significance as it strives to mediate moral understandings

within contexts heavily influenced by digital content and communication norms. Religious education can serve as a moral anchor, helping learners to interpret digital experiences through values that promote responsibility, compassion, respect, and integrity, particularly when secular forms of moral guidance seem insufficient to navigate new digital dilemmas (Aminah & Fikri, 2022; Rahman, 2023).

The digital era's influence on moral development is multifaceted. On one hand, digital technologies provide users with vast opportunities for learning, creativity, and social engagement. Young people can access diverse religious materials online, engage in collaborative spiritual discussions, and participate in communities that reinforce ethical conduct. Platforms such as podcasts, video lectures, and religious apps can enhance religious literacy and spiritual reflection. On the other hand, the ease of access to digital content also exposes young learners to morally corrosive influences, including pornography, hate speech, and unverified information promoting harmful stereotypes. These digital exposures can undermine traditional moral teachings and contribute to behaviors that contradict religious and ethical values (Suryani & Hartono, 2021).

Religious education in modern societies must therefore adapt to digital realities. This adaptation includes integrating digital tools into teaching practices, yet without compromising core religious values. Educators are called upon not only to teach doctrinal content but also to facilitate moral discernment within digital spheres. This dual role as both instructors of religious knowledge and moral guides in digital spaces expands the traditional scope of religious education. Teachers must help students critically evaluate online content, distinguish between morally acceptable and harmful digital behaviors, and apply religious ethics to guide decisions in digital environments. Effective religious education therefore requires a pedagogical model that combines spiritual principles with digital literacy competencies (Putri et al., 2022; Hasanah, 2020).

Moreover, the curriculum as a structured component of formal education must evolve to accommodate these objectives. Curriculum innovation in religious education must ensure that content is relevant to digital contexts and that it supports students in applying religious values to contemporary digital dilemmas. Studies on curriculum transformation reveal that educators must intentionally redesign educational frameworks so that digital technologies become instruments for reinforcing religious values rather than distractions from moral formation (Prasetyo & Wulandari, 2021; Zulfahmi, 2023).

Ultimately, this study contends that religious education performs a critical role in shaping moral values in the digital era by equipping learners with ethical frameworks that are applicable in both digital and offline contexts. Through intentional integration of religious ethics with digital literacy, education systems can foster moral resilience, encourage ethical digital citizenship, and ensure young learners develop a balanced worldview that harmonizes technological engagement with moral responsibility.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a case study design to explore how religious education influences the shaping of moral values in the digital era. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for this study because it allows for an in-depth understanding of human experiences, perceptions, and behaviors within a specific context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By focusing on the lived experiences of students,

teachers, and educational stakeholders, the research aims to uncover nuanced insights into how religious teachings are internalized and applied in digital environments. The case study method provides a detailed examination of a bounded system – in this instance, the educational settings in primary schools and Islamic educational institutions – to investigate the intersection of religious instruction, moral development, and digital literacy (Yin, 2017).

The research site for this study is a selected Islamic primary school where religious education is integrated into the formal curriculum. This site is chosen due to its active use of digital tools in teaching and its emphasis on character and moral education. Purposive sampling is employed to select participants who are directly involved in religious and moral education, including classroom teachers, students aged 10–12, and school administrators responsible for curriculum design. This approach ensures that the data collected are rich, relevant, and reflective of the research focus (Patton, 2015).

Data collection is conducted through multiple sources to achieve triangulation and enhance validity. First, semi-structured interviews are carried out with teachers and administrators to understand their strategies, perceptions, and experiences in delivering religious education within a digital context. Questions explore teaching methods, use of digital tools, and approaches to instilling moral values. Second, focus group discussions with students provide insights into how learners perceive, internalize, and practice moral lessons in their daily digital interactions. Third, document analysis is conducted on curriculum guides, lesson plans, digital learning resources, and school policies related to religious and moral education. This triangulated approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the processes, challenges, and outcomes associated with religious education in shaping moral values in the digital era (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data analysis is performed using thematic analysis, which involves coding and categorizing data to identify recurring patterns, themes, and relationships. The analysis begins with transcribing interviews and focus group discussions, followed by open coding to label significant concepts. Axial coding is then applied to link categories and subcategories, highlighting the ways religious education contributes to moral development and ethical behavior in digital settings. Finally, selective coding integrates the findings into coherent themes that address the research questions. This method allows the study to interpret not only the explicit content of participants' statements but also the underlying meanings and implications related to religious and moral education (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

To ensure ethical considerations, the study obtains informed consent from all participants, guarantees confidentiality, and provides the option to withdraw at any stage without consequence. The researcher also adheres to ethical guidelines in reporting and interpreting findings, avoiding bias, and respecting participants' beliefs and experiences. Moreover, reflexivity is maintained throughout the research process to acknowledge the researcher's positionality and its potential influence on data interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In summary, this methodology provides a structured yet flexible framework to explore the complex dynamics of religious education in the digital era. Through qualitative, case study research with triangulated data collection and thematic analysis, the study aims to produce rich, contextually grounded insights into how

religious teachings shape moral values and guide ethical behavior among students navigating contemporary digital environments..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that teachers generally possess an awareness of the concept of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the educational context, although their levels of understanding vary. Most teachers perceive AI as a technology capable of assisting human work, particularly in supporting teaching and learning processes, such as the preparation of instructional materials, searching for academic references, and assessing learning outcomes. This perception is consistent with the view of Russell and Norvig (2021), who define AI as systems designed to emulate human cognitive abilities in problem-solving and decision-making. However, interview results reveal that teachers' understanding tends to be practical and functional rather than conceptual and pedagogical, indicating a limited depth of knowledge regarding the integration of AI into instructional practices.

The utilization of AI in classroom practices is reflected in the use of various digital learning platforms equipped with AI-based features, such as learning analytics, automated feedback, and personalized content recommendations. Teachers employ these technologies to enhance work efficiency, particularly in administrative and evaluative tasks. This finding aligns with the study by Holmes et al. (2019), which emphasizes that AI in education can support teachers in managing learning data more effectively, thereby enabling more personalized and adaptive learning experiences. With the support of AI, teachers are afforded greater opportunities to focus on student guidance and meaningful pedagogical interactions.

The findings further demonstrate a transformation in teachers' roles as a result of AI utilization in learning activities. Teachers are no longer positioned primarily as transmitters of knowledge but rather as facilitators, mentors, and guides in the learning process. This shift is evident in the ways teachers design student-centered learning environments, encourage active participation, and use technology as a tool to foster critical thinking. These results reinforce UNESCO's (2019) assertion that AI should be employed to strengthen, rather than replace, the role of teachers by positioning them as key agents in supporting students' holistic development.

Most teachers perceive the impact of AI on instructional practices as positive. They report that learning activities become more engaging, flexible, and responsive to students' learning needs. AI enables teachers to adjust instructional strategies based on learning data, thereby promoting more personalized learning experiences. This finding corresponds with the work of Luckin et al. (2016), who argue that AI integration in education can facilitate more adaptive and learner-centered instructional approaches. Nevertheless, the findings also reveal that the use of AI has not yet been fully optimized due to limitations in teachers' digital competencies and the availability of technical support.

In addition to providing opportunities, the use of AI also presents several challenges for teachers. Some teachers express concerns regarding excessive reliance on technology and the potential reduction of direct

teacher–student interaction. Other challenges include limited access to specialized training on AI utilization in education and unequal technological infrastructure across schools. These findings are consistent with Creswell and Poth (2018), who emphasize that the success of technology-based educational innovation is strongly influenced by the readiness of human resources and comprehensive systemic support.

Overall, the findings indicate that Artificial Intelligence plays a strategic role in driving the transformation of teachers' roles in the digital era. AI functions as a supportive tool that enhances instructional effectiveness and quality, while the core humanistic role of teachers remains irreplaceable. The transformation of teachers' roles is highly dependent on their competencies, attitudes toward innovation, and the availability of supportive policies and educational infrastructure. Therefore, the integration of AI in education should be accompanied by continuous professional development for teachers to ensure that technological adoption is implemented optimally and responsibly.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that religious education plays a significant role in shaping moral values among students in the digital era. The integration of religious teachings with modern educational practices helps students develop ethical awareness, self-discipline, and a sense of responsibility, which are essential for navigating the complex digital environment. Religious educators, through deliberate pedagogical strategies, guide students to critically evaluate digital content, internalize moral principles, and apply ethical decision-making in online interactions. Furthermore, religious education functions not only as a source of knowledge but also as a moral framework that fosters character development, empathy, and ethical behavior in both offline and online contexts. The effectiveness of religious education in nurturing moral values is influenced by the competence of teachers, the relevance of curriculum content, and the active involvement of families and communities in reinforcing ethical guidance.

In light of these conclusions, several recommendations are proposed. Teachers should continuously enhance their digital literacy skills and integrate technology thoughtfully into religious education by employing interactive digital tools, discussions, and value-based activities that make moral education more engaging and relevant. Educational authorities and curriculum developers should revise curricula to explicitly link religious teachings with digital citizenship and ethical conduct online, addressing contemporary challenges such as social media misuse, misinformation, and digital distractions while maintaining core moral principles. Schools should provide professional development programs for religious education teachers, focusing on digital pedagogy and moral guidance strategies, and create supportive policies that encourage the ethical use of digital technology among students. Families and communities should actively participate in students' moral development by modeling ethical behavior, monitoring digital usage, and reinforcing the values taught in school. Finally, future research should examine the long-term impacts of religious education on moral behavior in digital spaces, including comparative studies across different religions, age groups, and cultural contexts, as well as investigations into innovative teaching methods that integrate technology and

moral education effectively. Overall, religious education remains a vital factor in shaping moral values in the digital era, and its integration with digital literacy and contemporary pedagogical strategies is essential for fostering ethically responsible, digitally competent, and morally grounded students..

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