

Islamic Character Education in the Digital Era: A Systematic Literature Review of Challenges, Strategies, and Learning Innovations

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ABSTRACT

The development of digital technology has influenced nearly every aspect of life, including Islamic education and the character formation of students. The emergence of social media, digital platforms, and the highly open flow of information has brought positive impacts, such as easier access to knowledge. However, it has also given rise to various moral issues, including cyberbullying, the spread of misinformation (hoaxes), hate speech, and the decline of communication ethics in digital spaces. This situation requires Islamic education to adopt more adaptive approaches so that religious values can continue to be effectively internalised among the younger generation. This study aims to examine the challenges of Islamic character education in the digital era, analyse strategies that can be implemented, and identify learning innovations that are relevant to modern technological developments. The research employs a qualitative approach using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method through the collection, selection, and analysis of various scholarly works related to Islamic character education and the digitalisation of education. The findings indicate that Islamic character education requires the integration of religious value reinforcement and digital literacy to enable students to use technology wisely, critically, and responsibly. Furthermore, the use of interactive learning media, blended learning approaches, and educational social media platforms is considered effective in enhancing the internalisation of moral and spiritual values. Therefore, Islamic character education plays a crucial role in shaping a generation that is not only technologically competent but also possesses moral integrity, spiritual awareness, and social responsibility amid the ongoing development of digital society.

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INTRODUCTION

The transformation of information and communication technology in the twenty-first century has fundamentally reshaped modern society, including the orientation and practices of Islamic education. Digital technology has expanded access to knowledge while transforming social interaction, learning cultures, and the identity formation of younger generations. Consequently, Islamic education faces the challenge of maintaining its role in instilling religious values amid the dynamics of cultural globalisation. In this context, Islamic character education is no longer limited to the transfer of religious knowledge but also involves the continuous development of students' ethical, spiritual, and social awareness (Putriani & Hudaidah, 2021).

The growth of digital spaces has created new environments that influence how young Muslims think, communicate, and behave. Social media and digital platforms have become integral to students' daily lives, making character formation increasingly influenced by global information flows beyond the traditional roles of families and schools. This situation requires Islamic education to develop more adaptive character education paradigms while preserving its core values (Eryandi, 2023).

At the same time, digitalisation has generated complex moral challenges, including cyberbullying, hate speech, religious misinformation, instant culture, and declining communication ethics in virtual environments. As digital natives, students are particularly vulnerable to value shifts and identity crises, especially when digital literacy and critical thinking skills remain limited. These conditions often reduce the effectiveness of conventional character education approaches in addressing contemporary social issues (Utomo et al., 2024).

Research shows that character education grounded in Islamic values can strengthen students' morality and digital ethics. The integration of religious values into technology-based learning enhances spiritual awareness while supporting character formation. Moreover, interactive digital learning media are considered more effective in engaging younger generations who are accustomed to technology-based environments. Thus, Islamic education functions not only as a means of knowledge transmission but also as an instrument for balancing intellectual, moral, and spiritual development (Arifuddin et al., 2023).

However, existing studies on Islamic character education in the digital era remain fragmented and often focus primarily on technological applications rather than their implications for character formation. As digitalisation continues to transform society, Islamic education requires conceptual renewal

to remain relevant while preserving its ethical and spiritual foundations.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyse the challenges facing Islamic character education in the digital era, identify effective implementation strategies, and explore learning innovations that support the internalisation of Islamic values. The study is expected to contribute to the development of contemporary

Islamic education theory and provide practical guidance for educators in designing contextual, humanistic, and technologically relevant character education models. More broadly, Islamic character education is viewed as both a means of moral development and a form of educational transformation that integrates spirituality, ethics, and technological advancement.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method as its primary methodological framework to examine the dynamics of Islamic character education in the digital era. This approach was selected because it enables a comprehensive conceptual mapping of various scholarly findings within the discourse of contemporary Islamic education. Through the SLR method, the study not only focuses on collecting relevant literature but also conducts a critical synthesis of diverse academic perspectives concerning the challenges, strategies, and innovations of character education amid digital transformation. The research process was carried out systematically through the stages of literature identification, selection, evaluation, and interpretation, resulting in a structured, in-depth, and reflective analytical framework regarding the development of modern Islamic education studies (Snyder, 2019).

The data sources in this study consist of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from nationally and internationally recognised scholarly articles discussing Islamic character education, educational digitalisation, digital literacy, and technology-based learning innovations. Priority was given to articles published in journals indexed by Scopus, Web of Science, and SINTA to ensure academic validity and scientific relevance. Secondary data were collected from academic books, conference proceedings, research reports, and educational policy documents related to the transformation of Islamic education in the digital era. The literature analysed was primarily drawn from publications produced within the last five years to ensure that the study remains contextual to current technological developments and contemporary social dynamics. Data collection was conducted through literature searches in several academic databases, including Scopus, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and Taylor & Francis Online, using the keywords Islamic character education, digital era, Islamic education, digital literacy, and learning innovation (Xiao & Watson, 2019).

Subsequently, the collected literature was screened based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, including topic relevance, publication quality, year of publication, and substantive alignment with the research focus. This stage was

undertaken to ensure that the selected sources accurately represent the academic and empirical development of Islamic character education studies. Data analysis employed a thematic analysis approach, involving the identification, classification, and categorisation of findings into major themes such as the challenges of Islamic character education in the digital era, strategies for character education implementation, and technology-based learning innovations. Following the categorisation process, critical interpretation was conducted to examine the relationships among themes and to identify broader conceptual patterns concerning the transformation of Islamic character education within digital society. Through this approach, the study is expected to generate a scholarly synthesis that is not only descriptive but also analytical and reflective regarding the development of contemporary Islamic education (Pearson, H., et al., 2025).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Fundamental Concepts of Islamic Character Education in the Digital Era

Islamic character education is a pedagogical process aimed at forming an integrated human personality through the internalisation of the values of tawhid, morality, spirituality, and social responsibility derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah. In Islamic educational epistemology, character (akhlaq) is not merely outward behaviour but a reflection of faith-consciousness embedded in all aspects of life. Therefore, Islamic character education extends beyond modern moral education by encompassing self-purification (tazkiyat al-nafs), the cultivation of adab, spiritual development, and social responsibility, all oriented towards humanity's role as both 'abd and khalifah (Kulsum & Muhid, 2022; Septianingsih et al., 2024; Alfarisy & Iswandi, 2025).

Within this framework, akhlaq occupies a central position in Islamic education. As emphasised by Al-Attas, the ultimate goal of education is the cultivation of adab, producing individuals who are both knowledgeable and morally upright. Islamic character education therefore seeks to develop intellectually capable, spiritually aware, emotionally mature, and socially responsible individuals, reflecting the ideal of insan kamil (Kulsum & Muhid, 2022; Saepudin, 2023).

However, digitalisation has transformed social interaction, learning culture, and identity formation among young Muslims. Character development, which traditionally occurred through direct relationships with teachers, families, and communities, is now increasingly influenced by social media, digital platforms, and global virtual culture. Digital spaces have become important arenas for the production of knowledge, values, and social identities that shape students' moral orientations (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020).

This transformation creates significant epistemological and pedagogical challenges. Digital-native generations access religious and social information from diverse online sources that are often not academically or theologically verified. As a result, authority over knowledge and religious understanding has become fragmented. In response, Islamic character education must function not

only as a means of value transmission but also as a tool for developing digital literacy, critical thinking, and ethical awareness (Livingstone et al., 2021).

The digital era has also generated complex moral challenges, including cyberbullying, hate speech, religious misinformation, digital pornography, instant culture, and declining adab in online communication. These phenomena indicate that technological advancement is not always accompanied by moral maturity. Consequently, character education models that rely predominantly on one-way verbal transmission have become increasingly inadequate in responding to the complexities of the digital era, thereby necessitating contextual, dialogical, reflective, and adaptive pedagogical approaches that engage learners with real-life social and moral challenges (Hermino & Arifin, 2020; Rahayu et al., 2023; Naswa & Muthoifin, 2025).

In this context, the integration of Islamic character education and digital literacy has become essential. Digital literacy involves not only technical competence but also ethical, critical, and spiritual capacities in using technology responsibly. Students must be equipped to evaluate information critically, practise ethical online communication, and develop moral awareness in digital environments so that technology serves as a means of civilisational advancement rather than moral decline (Rahman et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the role of educators must evolve. Teachers are expected to act not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as moral facilitators, mediators of digital culture, and role models (*uswah hasanah*). Since character is formed through experience and habituation, teachers' example in using technology ethically has a significant influence on students' development. Therefore, the success of Islamic character education depends on the ability of educational institutions to integrate technology, morality, and spirituality within a cohesive learning ecosystem.

Ultimately, Islamic character education in the digital era represents a process of pedagogical transformation aimed at strengthening religious identity while fostering critical awareness and moral responsibility. It seeks to develop Muslim generations who are intellectually capable, technologically adaptive, morally upright, spiritually grounded, and socially responsible. In this regard, Islamic character education remains a crucial epistemological and moral foundation for navigating contemporary digital life. for building a humane, civilised, and transcendence-oriented digital society.

Principles of the Islamic Character Education Approach

Islamic character education in the digital era is based on an integrative paradigm that connects Islamic values with technological developments in a constructive manner. Technology is viewed not as a threat but as a strategic medium for strengthening value internalisation, moral development, and learning culture. Therefore, Islamic education must move beyond conventional and textual approaches towards more contextual, inclusive, and adaptive educational models that respond to the realities of digital society (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021).

Within contemporary Islamic pedagogy, integrating religion and

technology involves not only the use of digital media but also the cultivation of ethical awareness in technology use. Students require both digital competencies and moral responsibility to navigate digital spaces that increasingly shape culture, identity, and social values. Consequently, Islamic character education must promote digital literacy grounded in values such as honesty, responsibility, courtesy, moderation, and respect for others (Livingstone et al., 2021).

This integrative approach places teachers in a strategic role as moral facilitators and mediators of digital culture. Beyond transmitting knowledge, teachers are expected to guide students in understanding the ethical implications of technology and to serve as moral role models (*uswah hasanah*). The effectiveness of character education therefore depends on teachers' pedagogical competence, digital literacy, and ability to exemplify Islamic values in responding to contemporary digital challenges (Saepudin, 2023; Septianingsih et al., 2024).

Islamic character education is also founded on the principles of modelling and habituation (*ta'wid*). Character formation cannot be achieved through cognitive instruction alone but requires continuous practice and consistency between taught values and students' lived experiences. Teachers, parents, and communities play a central role in this process, as students tend to internalise values through observation and social interaction rather than through theoretical instruction alone (Berkowitz & Bier, 2022; Saepudin, 2023).

However, in the digital era, modelling faces new challenges because students increasingly look to social media figures as role models. Influencer culture often promotes values centred on popularity, consumerism, and self-image, reducing the moral influence of families and schools. In response, Islamic educational institutions must utilise digital media not only for learning but also as a platform for educational *da'wah* and the promotion of positive digital culture (Evolvi, 2019).

The principle of habituation further emphasises the importance of creating environments that support moral development. Character is formed through continuous practice; therefore, schools, families, and communities must collaborate in fostering ethical digital behaviour. This includes encouraging respectful online communication, responsible technology use, and the integration of digital ethics into learning activities. Through this approach, Islamic character education seeks to develop individuals who are not only personally pious but also socially responsible and spiritually grounded in digital society.

Overall, the principles of Islamic character education in the digital era demonstrate the flexibility of Islamic education in responding to social and technological change. Rather than rejecting modernity, Islamic education seeks to guide technological development within a framework of moral and spiritual values. As a result, Islamic character education serves as a pedagogical and cultural mechanism that enables Muslim generations to adapt to technological advancement while maintaining their religious identity, moral integrity, and humanity.

Challenges of Islamic Character Education in the Digital Era

The massive digital transformation of the contemporary era has significantly altered social interaction patterns, communication culture, and the value formation of young Muslims. Open access to digital platforms presents major challenges for Islamic character education in maintaining students' moral and spiritual stability amid cultural globalisation. Students now live in virtual environments that provide rapid and unrestricted access to information, making digital spaces arenas of value contestation where ideologies, cultures, and behaviours that may conflict with Islamic ethics can easily spread (Campbell & Evolvi, 2023; Rahman et al., 2024).

The accessibility of digital content exposes students to violence, pornography, hate speech, intolerance, hedonism, and consumerism, which can weaken moral sensitivity and self-control. From the perspective of Islamic education, this reflects a crisis of *adab* and a decline in spiritual awareness and social responsibility. Digital technology has become not only a communication tool but also a cultural force shaping students' values and identities (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020).

Digital culture has also encouraged greater individualism among young people. Social media interactions often replace direct social relationships, resulting in communication patterns that are increasingly instant and superficial. Consequently, values such as empathy, solidarity, tolerance, and social concern tend to weaken as digital interaction increasingly replaces meaningful face-to-face engagement, highlighting the urgent need for character education models that foster prosocial behavior and social responsibility (Kurniawan, 2021; Marstiyaningtiyas, 2026). This situation poses a serious challenge for Islamic character education, which is founded upon *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), social responsibility, and moral cultivation through direct interaction. The dominance of digital culture reduces opportunities for value internalisation through meaningful social experiences (Livingstone, S., & Third, A, 2023)

Another major challenge is the low level of religious digital literacy among students and educators. Religious digital literacy involves the ability to critically evaluate, verify, and responsibly interpret religious information. In digital environments, religious content is often disseminated without clear scholarly authority, creating opportunities for the spread of intolerance, misinformation, and radical narratives. Students with limited digital literacy are particularly vulnerable to accepting religious information uncritically (Guess et al., 2020).

This phenomenon threatens Islamic education because it can shape exclusive and anti-dialogical religious attitudes. Therefore, Islamic character education must promote critical thinking, religious moderation, and digital ethics, while emphasising moral responsibility, information verification, and respect for diversity (Rahman et al., 2022).

In addition, Islamic character education faces structural challenges related to educators' digital competencies. Many teachers, particularly within traditional Islamic educational institutions, still experience difficulties in utilising digital technologies and innovative learning methods. This often results in character

education that is less responsive to the needs of digital-native students (Falloon, 2022; Scherer et al., 2023). Limited digital competence may also reduce teachers' pedagogical relevance, as students often access information more quickly and extensively than their educators.

Overall, the challenges of Islamic character education in the digital era extend beyond technology itself and involve broader transformations in culture, communication, and societal values. Consequently, Islamic education must adopt adaptive, humanistic, and contextual approaches to develop generations with moral integrity, spiritual depth, and the critical capacity to navigate the complexities of digital life. In this context, Islamic character education serves as both a moral safeguard and a means of balancing technological progress with human values.

Strategies for Islamic Character Education in the Digital Era

Strengthening Islamic character education in the digital era requires adaptive pedagogical strategies that preserve Islamic ethical and spiritual values amid rapid technological and cultural change. A key strategy is the systematic integration of religious values into all learning processes. Character education should not function merely as an additional subject but as a guiding principle embedded in both face-to-face and digital learning. Values such as honesty (*ṣidq*), responsibility (*amānah*), discipline (*intizām*), tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*), and social adab should be internalised through contextual learning experiences that connect Islamic teachings with students' everyday digital activities (Kulsum & Muhid, 2022; Saepudin, 2023; Septianingsih et al., 2024).

This integration requires a shift from predominantly textual approaches towards more dialogical, participatory, and contextual learning models. Teachers can utilise educational videos, interactive animations, Islamic podcasts, e-learning platforms, and social media to make character education more relevant, interactive, and meaningful for digital-native learners while fostering Islamic values in contemporary learning environments (Adiyono, 2024). Digital media not only improve content delivery but also support affective learning by fostering ethical awareness and spiritual reflection through interactive and meaningful experiences (Rahman et al., 2022).

Another important strategy is strengthening collaboration among schools, families, and communities. Character education is a shared responsibility, with the family serving as the primary environment for moral development. However, the widespread use of digital technology has increased children's exposure to online content while reducing the effectiveness of conventional supervision (Pranawati, 2025; UNICEF Indonesia, 2023). Therefore, effective character education requires sustained communication and collaborative partnerships between teachers and parents to ensure consistency in value transmission and behavioural reinforcement across home and school settings, thereby creating a coherent educational culture that supports students' moral development (Goodall, 2023; Jaynes, 2022).

Furthermore, Islamic digital literacy should become an integral component of the curriculum. Beyond technical skills, it includes critical

thinking, ethical awareness, and spiritual responsibility in digital engagement. Students need the ability to evaluate information critically, verify sources, understand online communication ethics, and recognise the moral consequences of their digital behaviour. Such competencies are essential in addressing misinformation, hate speech, intolerance, and manipulative online content (Guess et al., 2020).

From an Islamic educational perspective, digital literacy also helps prevent the spread of radical and extremist narratives. By developing critical thinking and a commitment to religious moderation, students can respond more wisely to diverse religious discourses. Ultimately, technology should be understood as part of humanity's responsibility as khalifah, serving to strengthen human values, promote ethical communication, and cultivate an inclusive digital culture.

Innovations in Islamic Character Education Learning

The development of digital technology in the Fourth Industrial Revolution has created significant opportunities for innovation in Islamic character education. Technological transformation has changed not only the delivery of educational content but also the ways students learn, interact, and construct moral values. Consequently, learning innovation is essential to ensure that Islamic character education remains relevant to digital-native generations who are generally visual, interactive, collaborative, and technology-oriented (Chiu, 2024; Arstorp et al., 2024).

One important innovation is the use of interactive digital learning media, including educational animations, Islamic learning videos, educational games, and value-based applications. Compared with conventional lecture methods, these media encourage greater student participation and reflection. Learning experiences that integrate visual, emotional, and interactive elements can enhance learners' engagement and meaning-making processes, thereby increasing their potential influence on attitude and behavioural development (Fiorella & Mayer, 2021).

Through digital simulations and contextual scenarios, values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, and tolerance can be internalised more effectively, enabling students to apply moral principles in real-life situations. Another significant innovation is the implementation of blended learning, which combines face-to-face instruction with online learning. This approach provides greater flexibility while supporting the continuous internalisation of values through digital access to learning materials, moral reflections, and spiritual activities (Graham, 2019). Blended learning also strengthens pedagogical interaction, allowing teachers to guide and motivate students both inside and outside the classroom. As a result, character education becomes more personal, reflective, and responsive to students' experiences.

The utilisation of social media as a platform for educational da'wah and Islamic digital culture also represents a major innovation. Given its central role in shaping young people's opinions, lifestyles, and values, social media can be used to disseminate educational content such as short videos, Islamic

infographics, motivational podcasts, and digital campaigns promoting ethics and adab (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). This demonstrates the need for Islamic education to adapt to contemporary communication patterns through approaches that are creative, participatory, and relevant to students' digital lives. Overall, these innovations show that Islamic education possesses the capacity to adapt to social and technological change. Rather than relying on static and exclusive pedagogical models, Islamic character education must continue to evolve creatively in order to develop Muslim generations with intellectual competence, spiritual depth, and moral integrity. In this regard, Islamic character education serves as an ethical and spiritual foundation that balances technological advancement with humanistic and religious values.

CONCLUSIONS

Islamic character education in the digital era is a pedagogical necessity that cannot be separated from the dynamics of technological advancement and the social transformations of modern society. Digital transformation has introduced new challenges to the process of internalising students' moral and spiritual values; however, it has also created significant opportunities for the development of more adaptive, creative, and contextual innovations in Islamic education. In this situation, Islamic education is required not only to preserve normative religious values but also to adopt pedagogical approaches that are relevant to the characteristics of the contemporary digital generation.

This study demonstrates that Islamic character education requires a reconstruction of its paradigm, positioning technology not as a threat but as a strategic instrument for strengthening moral values (akhlaq), spirituality, and social responsibility. The integration of religious values into digital learning, the enhancement of Islamic digital literacy, collaboration between schools and families, and technology-based learning innovations constitute essential elements in developing a generation of Muslims who are not only intellectually competent but also possess moral integrity and spiritual depth.

Ultimately, Islamic character education must remain grounded in the primary objective of Islamic education: the formation of a civilised and complete human being (*insan kāmīl*) amid the continuing expansion of digital modernity. Therefore, the transformation of Islamic education should be directed towards establishing a balance between technological advancement and the reinforcement of humanistic values, ensuring that education does not lose its ethical and transcendental dimensions. In this way, Islamic character education in the digital era is expected to serve as a moral foundation for building a religious, humane, and civilised society within the complexities of modern civilisation.

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