

Islamic Religion Education as an Instrument for Strengthening Character in an Era of Moral and Social Disruption

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ABSTRAK

The rapid advancement of digital technology has created moral and social disruption, posing serious challenges for character formation among younger generations. Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is increasingly viewed as a strategic instrument to strengthen moral resilience and instill Islamic values in this context. This study aimed to design and evaluate a contextual, character-based IRE model that adapts to the realities of disruption. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), classroom observations, and document analysis across three Islamic secondary schools in Indonesia. Thematic analysis revealed four key findings. First, differentiated learning supported by digital tools effectively fostered empathy, discipline, and responsibility among students. Second, teachers' digital literacy competence was crucial in contextualizing Islamic values within contemporary challenges. Third, teacher role-modeling emerged as a strong determinant of students' moral behavior, particularly in the digital domain. Finally, curriculum integration with digital citizenship education and collaboration with families and communities provided a sustainable framework for character building. The study concludes that an adaptive and contextual IRE model enhances honesty, empathy, responsibility, and digital ethics, equipping students to navigate the complexities of the digital era while maintaining their Islamic identity.

INTRODUCTION

The current era of digital transformation has not only generated extraordinary technological advances but also triggered a profound crisis of morality and social values. Rapid globalization, the dominance of social media, and the flood of unfiltered information have eroded noble values that once served as the moral foundation of society. The younger generation, in particular, is increasingly exposed to negative online content, the decline of interpersonal communication, and the weakening of parental and educational authority, resulting in a complex character crisis (Fathurrohman et al., 2025). Mungafif (2025) emphasizes that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and moral education remain the cornerstone of character building amid the disruption era, particularly in

countering destructive influences, shifting social relations, and declining respect for authority. Similarly, Hadiansyah (2024) highlights that curricular change, innovative pedagogical approaches, and the negative consequences of internet usage—ranging from moral degradation to digital dependency necessitate the safeguarding of Islamic values through integrated and adaptive education.

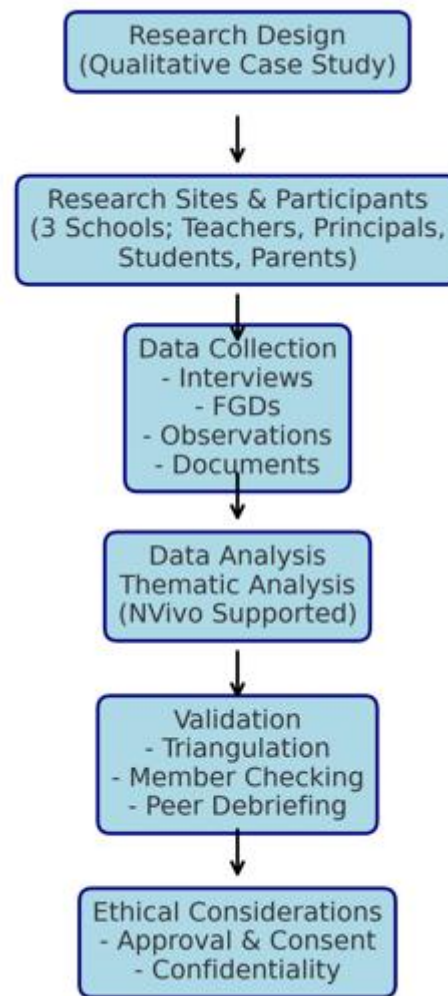
From a broader perspective, Irpan (2024) asserts that Islamic Religious Education plays a crucial role in strengthening social values such as empathy, care, and responsibility, which are vital in increasingly individualistic societies. Niskaromah, Abdullah, and Amalia (2025) further demonstrate the effectiveness of IRE in shaping students' religious character in primary schools, particularly through teacher role-modeling, habituated religious practices, and parental involvement. Nonetheless, challenges persist in maintaining continuity of values beyond the school environment. Idris (2023) corroborates these findings, showing how Islamic value-based approaches in MAN schools in South Sulawesi strengthen students' moral growth, with strong correlations between faith and ethics confirmed through both qualitative and quantitative analyses. Despite these contributions, a significant research gap remains. Much of the existing literature has addressed the urgency of IRE, the integration of character values, and the teacher's role as a model (Irpan, 2024; Niskaromah et al., 2025; Idris, 2023), yet few studies have investigated how contextual approaches in IRE can be systematically optimized to reinforce student character against moral disruption. Safitri (2024) is among the limited scholars who explore this issue, analyzing how Islamic values such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and cooperation are integrated into contextual learning. Her study underscores the importance of teachers' consistent behavior as role models; however, it remains geographically narrow and does not fully address broader disruptive realities such as digital culture and global moral relativism. Likewise, Hidayat (2025) points out the urgent need for Islamic character revitalization in the face of digital disruption, but offers limited practical models for how educational institutions can operationalize this transformation.

The novelty of the present study lies in its proposal of a character-based Islamic Religious Education model that integrates contextual learning with adaptive responses to moral and social disruption. Unlike previous works, this research emphasizes three dimensions simultaneously: (a) contextualization of Islamic values in relation to students' daily experiences, (b) integration of digital-structural strategies to harness technology selectively without compromising values, and (c) incorporation of local cultural traditions as complementary sources of moral education. For instance, recent attempts to integrate the Bara'an Malay tradition into IRE revealed its potential to strengthen character, yet such initiatives remain fragmented and under-researched (Integration of Bengkalis Malay Bara'an Tradition, 2024). Similarly, calls for digital-structured approaches to religious education (International Journal of Islamic Education Research, 2024) have highlighted the urgency of transformation, but still lack comprehensive frameworks that combine pedagogical, cultural, and technological dimensions. Accordingly, this research seeks to fill the gap by designing and evaluating an innovative model of IRE that is contextual, character-oriented, technologically responsive, and culturally grounded. The model not only aims to instill noble values such as honesty, empathy, and spiritual resilience but also addresses contemporary moral challenges such as cyberbullying, online radicalism, pornography, and the commodification of religion. Furthermore, by incorporating the family and community as active partners in character formation, the study provides a more holistic and

sustainable framework for moral education. Therefore, the objective of this study is: to design and evaluate a contextual, character-based Islamic Religious Education model that responds adaptively to moral and social disruption by integrating Islamic values, local traditions, digital literacy, and teacher role-modeling in partnership with families and communities. This approach contributes to both theory and practice by offering a comprehensive solution for strengthening the moral resilience of younger generations in an era of uncertainty and disruption.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study design with a descriptive-analytic approach to explore and evaluate a contextual, character-based Islamic Religious Education (IRE) model responsive to moral and social disruption. The research was conducted in three Islamic secondary schools representing urban, semi-urban, and rural contexts in Indonesia. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and included 12 IRE teachers, 6 principals, 36 students, and 18 parents, ensuring diverse perspectives from key stakeholders in the implementation of character education within the IRE framework. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), classroom observations, and document analysis. Interviews with teachers and principals investigated strategies and challenges in integrating Islamic values, while FGDs with students and parents captured lived experiences regarding moral and social disruption. Classroom observations provided direct insights into pedagogical practices, particularly contextual learning and teacher role modeling, whereas curriculum documents and lesson plans were analyzed to examine institutional support for character formation. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-step framework, supported by NVivo 12 to strengthen coding accuracy. Themes identified included contextual integration of Islamic values, teacher role-modeling, digital-structural strategies, and family or community involvement. Triangulation of methods, sources, and sites, along with member checking and peer debriefing, enhanced research trustworthiness. Ethical approval and informed consent were obtained, and confidentiality was strictly observed, ensuring the reliability and ethical integrity of the study.



Picture 1. Graph of Research Methodology

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight that Islamic Religious Education (IRE), when designed as a contextual, character-based model, can significantly strengthen students' moral resilience in an era of social and moral disruption. Using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), classroom observations, and document analysis, four major themes emerged: (1) differentiated learning supported by digital media, (2) teachers' digital literacy competence, (3) teachers as role models for digital ethics, and (4) the integration of curriculum and digital citizenship education. These findings are elaborated below, and discussed in light of recent scholarly contributions.

Contextual Integration of Islamic Values in Differentiated Learning

Classroom observations confirmed that differentiated learning strategies supported by digital media enhanced students' engagement in IRE. Teachers who adjusted assignments according to students' abilities such as using interactive Qur'anic recitation apps for weaker learners and debate forums for advanced students successfully fostered empathy, tolerance, and cooperation. This echoes Al Ihwanah, Idi, Karoma, Afifah, and Diana (2024), who found that differentiated IRE learning enriched by digital

technology cultivated discipline and empathy among elementary school students by ensuring that values like honesty and responsibility were embedded in individualized tasks. Similarly, Susanto (2024) showed that digital-supported innovations in IRE encouraged critical moral reasoning and improved student participation, particularly when learning methods were contextual and student-centered.

In addition, the research showed that contextualization of Islamic values in students' real-life situations, such as discussions on honesty in online interactions, allowed learners to better internalize Islamic ethics. Ar-Fahrudin (2024) supports this perspective, noting that digital literacy integration within IRE provides tools for students to interpret religious principles in the context of contemporary challenges, rather than confining them to theoretical abstraction. This aligns with broader educational theory, where character formation requires active engagement with learners' lived realities rather than rote transmission of doctrines (Zahraini, 2025).

Teachers' Digital Literacy as a Catalyst for Character-Based IRE

The ability of teachers to employ digital tools effectively emerged as a decisive factor in the success of contextual IRE. Teachers who possessed digital literacy skills were able to transform lessons into interactive experiences, such as online discussions about Islamic ethics in social media use. Conversely, teachers with limited digital competence struggled to engage students, often defaulting to lecture-based methods that students perceived as outdated. These findings resonate with Suly Eraku et al. (2021), who argued that IRE teachers must transition from traditional textbook-based teaching to ICT-based pedagogies to remain effective in the digital age. Similarly, Khairanis (2025) highlights that the integration of technology into Islamic education requires management strategies that foster not only academic performance but also digital character formation. Teachers who embraced this responsibility contributed to shaping students' resilience against harmful online behaviors such as cyberbullying and pornography. Maulana (2024) reinforces this argument, showing how pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) that adopted structured digital programs managed to instill moral values more effectively, even while facing infrastructural challenges. Beyond field findings, this study aligns with Ahmad and Nasir (2022), who emphasized that the digital literacy competence of Islamic education teachers not only improves instructional effectiveness but also fosters digital ethics awareness among students. Teachers who skillfully employ technology are better able to instill ethical consciousness in the use of social media and online platforms (Ahmad & Nasir, 2022).

Teachers as Exemplary Models of Digital Ethics

Another critical theme was the role of teachers as moral exemplars. Interviews and FGDs revealed that students were strongly influenced by teachers' behaviors in navigating digital ethics. Teachers who consistently demonstrated punctuality, fairness, and digital discipline—such as responsible use of smartphones during class—were perceived as authentic role models. These findings echo Sektingtyas (2025), who demonstrated that PAI teachers who combined worship habituation with explicit instruction on digital ethics prevented the erosion of student morality. Likewise, an

international comparative study confirmed that character education in Islamic schools depends heavily on teachers' ability to align personal conduct with pedagogical values (International Journal of Social and Cultural Studies [IJSOC], 2024). Furthermore, literature indicates that inconsistency between teachers' words and actions weakens students' trust in religious education (Ayunina & Jannah, 2025). This was corroborated in FGDs, where students expressed skepticism toward teachers who emphasized honesty but tolerated plagiarism in digital assignments. By contrast, teachers who embodied *uswah hasanah* (good example) in both digital and offline contexts were perceived as trustworthy guides. Such findings affirm that teacher role-modeling remains central to Islamic pedagogy, particularly in the face of digital temptations. These findings are further supported by Abdullah and Chong (2021), whose research demonstrated that teachers' exemplary behavior in daily practice exerts a stronger influence on the internalization of moral character than verbal instruction alone. They also found that inconsistencies between teachers' words and actions undermine the credibility of religious education (Abdullah & Chong, 2021).

Curriculum Reform and the Integration of Islamic Values with Digital Citizenship

Document analysis revealed that schools with integrated curricula blending Islamic values, digital awareness, and local cultural traditions achieved stronger outcomes in character development. For example, one school revised its IRE curriculum to include modules on "Islam and Digital Citizenship," which combined Qur'anic ethics with discussions on cyberbullying and online responsibility. This resonates with Zahraini (2025), who emphasized that Islamic education reform must modernize curricula to align with digital realities without compromising religious authenticity. Susanto (2024) further supports this point by showing that innovative IRE practices, such as digital storytelling and interactive simulations, encouraged critical engagement with moral issues. Moreover, broader comparative studies highlight that Islamic education reform worldwide increasingly integrates ICT as a strategy for maintaining relevance and efficacy (Zahraini, 2025; Gilster, 1997). The results are also consistent with Fatmawati (2023), who showed that integrating Islamic character education with digital literacy programs significantly enhances students' awareness of online ethics while reducing deviant behaviors in digital spaces. This underscores the importance of embedding digital literacy as an integral component of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum (Fatmawati, 2023).

Building Digital Citizenship Through Islamic Character Education

FGDs with students revealed that character-based IRE cultivated awareness of digital citizenship responsibilities. Students described becoming more conscious of ethical online behavior, such as verifying information before sharing and avoiding offensive comments in digital forums. Ayunina and Jannah (2025) argue that Islamic character education equips Generation Z with the moral compass necessary to participate ethically in digital society. Similarly, the International Journal of Technology in Education and Learning (INJOTEL, 2024) found that digital literacy embedded in Islamic pedagogy enhanced both academic and moral outcomes, ensuring students' preparedness to act responsibly online. Other studies corroborate that the cultivation of digital citizenship through Islamic education empowers students to balance freedom of

expression with responsibility, reinforcing empathy and respect in the online sphere (Khairanis, 2025; Maulana, 2024). Thus, the findings suggest that integrating digital ethics into IRE not only strengthens character but also prepares students for active, responsible engagement in digital society.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite these successes, several challenges emerged. Teachers highlighted insufficient training in digital pedagogy, while principals noted the absence of standardized frameworks for contextual IRE integration. Students admitted struggling to apply Islamic values consistently, especially under peer pressure and digital entertainment temptations. Parents expressed concern about the overpowering influence of globalized values, which sometimes undermined school and family efforts to shape character. These findings align with Suly Eraku et al. (2021), who noted that teacher readiness is the main barrier to ICT integration in Islamic education, and with Maulana (2024), who observed infrastructural gaps in pesantren implementing digital programs.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that a contextual, character-based Islamic Religious Education (IRE) model is both necessary and effective in strengthening students' moral resilience amid the challenges of moral and social disruption. Through differentiated digital-supported learning, teacher digital literacy, role-modeling of Islamic ethics, and curriculum integration with digital citizenship education, the findings demonstrate that IRE can be transformed into a holistic instrument for character formation. The research objective has been achieved by showing that contextual learning enables students to internalize Islamic values in real-life scenarios, particularly within digital environments. Teachers' digital competence and consistent moral exemplarity emerged as decisive factors in shaping students' ethical behavior. Likewise, curriculum reforms that integrate Islamic values with digital awareness, supported by family and community involvement, provide sustainable frameworks for character education. In essence, the study confirms that an adaptive IRE model fosters honesty, empathy, responsibility, and digital ethics, equipping students to navigate contemporary challenges while maintaining their Islamic identity. However, the success of such a model requires continuous teacher training, institutional support, and collaborative partnerships between schools, families, and communities. These findings provide both theoretical contributions to the discourse on Islamic pedagogy and practical guidance for policymakers and educators committed to character building in the digital era.

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