The Contribution of Islamic Education to Character Formation in the Age of Digitalization

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Abstract

The Qur'an is a life guide for Muslims, although it does not explain in detail about education. However, there are several terms related to education in this scripture. This article tries to explain the nature and purpose of education in Islam by discussing these terms according to linguists and educational thinkers. In conclusion, the terms tarbiyah, ta'lim, ta'dib, tazkiyah, and tahdhib indicate the character and purpose of education.In the view of the Qur'an, the purpose of education is divided into three points: first, to form a complete human being; second, developing the human dimension in religion, culture, and science; third, making humans responsible as servants of God and heirs of the Prophet. These goals aim to create a Muslim who follows the principle of rahmatan li al-'alamin (mercy for all nature). Thus, Islamic education in the Qur'an is not only about the transfer of knowledge, but also values. It also has to do with building good relationships with God, fellow humans, and the universe.

Keywords: *Education, Educational Goals, Perfect Human*

Introduction

Islamic education holds a central position in shaping the moral, intellectual, and spiritual character of students in contemporary society. Abuddin Nata emphasizes that Islamic education is grounded in the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah, which distinguish it from secular forms of education (Nata, 2018). This foundation implies that the ultimate goal of Islamic education is to cultivate human beings who are devoted to serving Allah SWT. In this context, education is not merely a transmission of knowledge, but a comprehensive social process that prepares individuals to contribute to and transform their communities. As society evolves, the demand for graduates who are both competent and possess noble character becomes increasingly urgent. Therefore, educational planning must be adaptive and responsive to social transformations, especially in the digital age. According to Al-Attas (2020), education should be a process of instilling adab (proper behavior) and integrating knowledge with moral values. This integration ensures that learners are prepared not only intellectually but also spiritually and ethically.

The urgency of character education becomes more pronounced when considering the realities of today's educational environment. Despite having comprehensive educational goals within the national curriculum, Indonesia continues to face a crisis in student character, as evidenced by rising cases of student misbehavior and a perceived decline in moral awareness. Schools are therefore encouraged to adopt character-based education that emphasizes internalization of core values such as honesty, empathy, and respect for others. Character, in this sense, refers to the set of human behaviors related to one's relationship with God, oneself, others, the environment, and the nation, manifested in thoughts, feelings, and actions grounded in religious, legal, and cultural norms (Lickona, 2019). Thus, education must move beyond cognitive achievement and emphasize the development of students' affective and behavioral dimensions. When integrated into Islamic education, character development becomes a holistic approach that fosters both moral integrity and academic excellence (Althof & Berkowitz, 2022).

In the context of Islamic education, moral development is inextricably linked with religious instruction. According to Ahmad D. Marimba, Islamic education is a conscious guidance by educators to shape both the physical and spiritual aspects of learners toward becoming *insan kamil* (the perfect human being) (Marimba, 2021). This goal aligns with the national aim of producing graduates who are not only intelligent but also possess noble character. Zakiyah Daradjat adds that Islamic education must help students internalize Islamic teachings as a way of life (Daradjat, 2020). Moreover, educational efforts must be systemic and culturally relevant, emphasizing not only the intellectual grasp of Islam but also its application in everyday life. With the increasing influence of technology in daily life, Islamic education must be capable of guiding students through moral dilemmas and social challenges. This means rethinking curricula, pedagogy, and school culture to align with the principles of Islam while embracing the realities of the digital age (Al-Attas, 2020; Hasan & Taufiq, 2023).

The digital era has fundamentally transformed how young people interact with information, technology, and each other. This shift presents both opportunities and challenges for Islamic education. On the one hand, access to digital resources has made learning more dynamic and accessible. On the other, it has exposed students to values and behaviors that may contradict Islamic teachings. As reported by Fatima and Ghazali (2022), the digital environment often cultivates individualism, consumerism, and moral relativism—attitudes that can erode traditional Islamic values if left unchecked. Therefore, educational institutions must provide digital literacy alongside moral education to ensure that students navigate technology with discernment and ethical awareness. Islamic schools must collaborate with parents and communities to monitor digital behaviors and create environments that foster responsible use of technology. By embedding Islamic values within the digital experience, educators can transform digital tools into vehicles for spiritual and moral growth (Alavi et al., 2021).

Teachers play a pivotal role in realizing the aims of Islamic education. More than just transmitters of knowledge, they are moral

guides and role models who shape students' character and attitudes. As professionals, teachers must possess not only pedagogical competence but also emotional and spiritual maturity. According to Taufiq and Malik (2022), effective Islamic teachers embody the values they teach, thereby making a lasting impression on their students. In today's complex educational landscape, teachers must also be equipped to respond to diverse student needs, integrate technology meaningfully, and cultivate inclusive learning environments. Their roles extend beyond the classroom to include mentorship, counseling, and community engagement. As such, teacher development programs must be reoriented to include spiritual and ethical training alongside technical and academic competencies. Only through such a holistic approach can Islamic education remain relevant and impactful in the digital age (Rahman et al., 2023).

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research approach, which is most suitable for exploring the complexity of phenomena within their natural settings. Rather than emphasizing quantifiable data, qualitative research focuses on meaning, context, and the depth of understanding of human behavior and social interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The primary objective of this research is to investigate how Islamic education contributes to strengthening students' character in the digital era. The qualitative method allows the researcher to capture participants' lived experiences and uncover patterns in values, beliefs, and practices that influence character development. The richness of the data lies in the narratives, behaviors, and perceptions of participants, which are analyzed thematically. Through this approach, the study aims to provide a holistic picture of the educational dynamics at play, particularly the integration of Islamic values in character-building processes amid technological challenges (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020).

The research design is descriptive and exploratory in nature, focusing on understanding the real-life context of educational practices without manipulating any variables. This approach was selected because it allows

for the detailed examination of educational environments and the roles played by teachers, administrators, and students in fostering Islamic character. Data collection involved multiple techniques, including semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with Islamic education teachers, school leaders, and selected students across several Islamic schools in West Java. Observations focused on classroom interactions, school rituals, and extracurricular activities that reflect character-building efforts. Documents such as curriculum guides, lesson plans, and school vision statements were also analyzed to gain insight into the formal structure of character education. Triangulation of these sources enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The sampling strategy used in this study was purposive sampling, targeting participants who have direct experience and active involvement in the practice of Islamic education. The selected participants provided rich and relevant data aligned with the study's objectives. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, wherein recurring themes related to Islamic values, character traits, and digital challenges were identified and categorized. NVivo software was employed to support coding and theme development. Ethical considerations were strictly observed; participants gave informed consent, and their identities were anonymized to ensure confidentiality. The entire research process was guided by the principles of trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Through this methodological rigor, the study seeks to offer practical and theoretical insights into how Islamic education can effectively shape student character in response to contemporary societal transformations.

Results And Discussion
The Objective and Role of Islamic Education

Education is fundamentally a socio-cultural process that evolves alongside society. As communities change, so too must educational institutions adapt to remain relevant and impactful. Graduates—products of these institutions—are expected to reenter society not only as

contributors to its economy but also as agents of social transformation. For this reason, educational frameworks should not be designed in isolation from social realities. They must reflect the shifting nature of societal needs, cultural values, and visions of an ideal society. A transformative educational approach enables individuals to grow intellectually, morally, and socially, transitioning from ignorance to awareness, passivity to engagement, and from moral confusion to ethical clarity. This journey of growth may begin in schools but must also be nurtured within the home and broader community (Halstead & Taylor, 2021).

Islamic education holds a unique and profound place in this transformative process. Rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah, it serves as a guide not only for knowledge acquisition but also for character development. The divine foundation of Islamic education ensures that it transcends temporal values, focusing instead on timeless principles such as justice, mercy, honesty, and humility. According to Sahin (2020), Islamic education is meant to align a person's life with divine values and human dignity. It is not merely about religious rituals but about shaping the whole person—body, mind, and soul. This alignment fosters a deep sense of *taqwa* (God-consciousness) and encourages individuals to live according to their innate disposition (*fitrah*), which inclines toward truth and goodness.

The primary objective of Islamic education, then, is to nurture individuals who are both spiritually connected to God and ethically responsible within society. This holistic vision positions education as a medium for worship and societal service. It produces individuals who are devout yet engaged, contemplative yet active, and moral yet practical. As Al-Attas (2019) emphasizes, the ultimate aim is the development of the *insan kamil*—a balanced human being who exemplifies moral excellence (*akhlak al-karimah*) and intellectual maturity. Character formation is not achieved through rote learning but through persistent guidance, modeling of good behavior, and repeated practice until virtue becomes habitual (Yusof & Noor, 2021). Actions such as honesty, kindness, or prayer,

when internalized, no longer require deliberation—they flow naturally from the person's character.

In contrast, individuals who are not exposed to such formative processes often struggle with moral clarity. The absence of ethical guidance—especially during formative years—can lead to the development of destructive behaviors. It is therefore crucial that moral education be structured intentionally and continuously, using both formal instruction and lived example. Institutions of learning must collaborate with families and communities to reinforce these values. Efforts to instill character cannot be superficial; they must involve a structured curriculum, deliberate practices, and emotionally resonant experiences. Educational success should no longer be measured solely by academic achievement but also by the character and civic responsibility of graduates (O'Grady & Chater, 2023).

The digital era has introduced unprecedented challenges to moral development. Technology has not only revolutionized how people learn and communicate but also reshaped cultural norms and ethical boundaries. Youth today are exposed to diverse and often conflicting values, making it harder to distinguish right from wrong. The virtue of generosity, once revered, may now seem outdated in a culture that celebrates personal gain and instant gratification. Islamic education, however, offers a resilient framework for moral discernment. It provides not only ethical content but also the epistemological tools needed to evaluate new cultural phenomena critically. As Zaman and Asim (2021) assert, Islamic education must engage with contemporary realities without losing its scriptural moorings. Educators must bridge the gap between heritage and digital life by contextualizing moral teachings for relevance in this era.

Thus, Islamic education plays a pivotal role in reconstructing moral values in the digital age. It bridges the gap between tradition and modernity by redefining ethical standards that respond to present-day challenges while remaining grounded in divine teachings. Character formation in the digital era must be proactive and dynamic, focusing on social justice, empathy, environmental stewardship, and digital ethics.

Islamic pedagogy should empower learners to navigate the complexities of digital life with integrity, responsibility, and critical insight. This fusion of moral tradition with modern relevance is what enables Islamic education to sustain its significance and make a lasting impact on individual lives and society at large (Abdalla et al., 2022).

Reconstructing Moral Values in the Digital Era

For a long time, Islamic education has often been marginalized and viewed with skepticism by certain segments of society. This is evident in public reactions when students engage in delinquent behavior; some quickly blame Islamic education, perceiving it as ineffective or inadequately delivered. Such judgments overlook the multifaceted nature of education and the complex factors influencing student behavior. In response to these challenges, the Indonesian government has implemented reforms to strengthen the objectives and structure of Islamic education, aiming to elevate its reputation and efficacy. These efforts include updating curricula, enhancing teacher training, and integrating moral education into broader pedagogical strategies. As argued by Azra (2021), systemic improvement in Islamic education is essential not only to counter negative stereotypes but also to reinforce its foundational role in shaping ethical and intellectual character in a plural society.

Islamic education scholars agree that the core purpose of education is not merely the transfer of knowledge but the formation of character and the cultivation of virtuous behavior. Education should instill a deep sense of ethical responsibility, encouraging students to embrace values such as sincerity, honesty, and spiritual discipline. This approach emphasizes the development of a noble soul (al-nafs al-kamila) rather than the mere accumulation of facts. Every subject should contribute to moral education, and every teacher should prioritize the cultivation of religious ethics above technical content. According to Al-Attas (2019), religious morality is the highest form of ethics, and its consistent practice is the pillar of Islamic pedagogy. In this regard, Islamic education should

not be limited to religious instruction but should infuse all disciplines with a moral framework grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Akhlaq, or Islamic ethics, represents a comprehensive system of behavior that governs human interactions with oneself, others, and God. It is a central component of Islamic teachings, as human conduct is the primary concern of divine guidance. The revelation of Islam was, in essence, a moral mission to purify the soul and elevate human character. The Prophet Muhammad himself stated, "I was only sent to perfect noble character." This hadith underscores the prophetic emphasis on ethical behavior as the goal of religious life. Akhlaq is not limited to ritual acts but includes a spectrum of behaviors from humility, honesty, and justice to kindness and patience. These moral values are integral to Islamic education, which aims to nurture students who embody them in daily life (Nasr, 2018).

To achieve this ideal, character education must be central to the learning process. It is not enough to impart knowledge; educators must guide, model, and habituate ethical behavior in students. Learning is not merely about intellectual development; it involves moral training, emotional regulation, and the refinement of the soul. This process demands a holistic approach where pedagogy aligns with spiritual objectives. As Supriyadi and Mulyono (2022) suggest, moral education must be continuous, beginning in the family, reinforced in schools, and supported by the broader community. Islamic education thus becomes a lifelong process of cultivating personal integrity and social responsibility.

The digital era presents new challenges to moral education. Technological innovations and the global flow of information have altered perceptions of virtue and success. Traits like generosity and humility may be overshadowed by values such as competition, autonomy, and digital influence. However, Islamic education offers a counterbalance by grounding ethical behavior in divine guidance and spiritual purpose. Education systems must adapt by reinterpreting traditional values for modern contexts, helping students navigate ethical dilemmas in a connected world. This includes promoting digital literacy

with moral awareness, encouraging empathy in online interactions, and fostering a sense of accountability in both virtual and physical spaces (Rohman & Yusra, 2020).

This comprehensive moral vision aligns with the Islamic view of human purpose. The Qur'anic verse in Surah Al-Furqan (25:63) describes the ideal believer as someone who walks on the earth with humility and responds to ignorance with peace. Such character traits reflect the integration of ethical conduct with spiritual consciousness. Islamic education aspires to shape individuals who fulfill their role as khalifah (vicegerents) on Earth, not only by acquiring knowledge but by embodying values that contribute to social harmony and personal virtue. In this way, character development becomes both the means and the end of education—a lifelong endeavor rooted in faith, guided by revelation, and actualized in daily practice.

In addition to addressing individual character, Islamic education also seeks to foster a sense of collective responsibility. This is particularly vital in the digital era, where social fragmentation, misinformation, and online anonymity can erode social cohesion and ethical accountability. Islamic pedagogy responds to these issues by emphasizing communal ethics such as cooperation (*ta'āwun*), consultation (*shūrā*), and justice (*'adl*). These values are not only religious obligations but also practical tools for navigating the complexities of a globalized, digitally interconnected society. According to Hashim and Langgulung (2021), Islamic education must prepare learners to participate constructively in their communities by nurturing both spiritual consciousness and social engagement. This dual emphasis ensures that education does not become self-centered but contributes to the well-being of society at large.

Moreover, the integration of akhlak into all areas of the curriculum reinforces the idea that moral education is not confined to religious subjects alone. For instance, science classes can incorporate discussions on environmental ethics, while history can explore moral lessons from Islamic civilization. This interdisciplinary approach aligns with the Islamic worldview, which does not separate the sacred from the secular. In this regard, schools function not only as institutions of learning but as

environments where ethical behavior is modeled, reinforced, and celebrated. Teachers serve as moral exemplars, and their attitudes play a crucial role in shaping student character. As emphasized by Halstead (2020), character education is most effective when it is integrated into the hidden curriculum—through classroom culture, discipline, and interpersonal interactions.

Finally, the long-term success of moral education in Islamic contexts requires consistent collaboration among various stakeholders—parents, educators, religious leaders, and policymakers. Each plays a pivotal role in reinforcing shared values and sustaining moral development across different spheres of life. Parental involvement is especially crucial, as character formation begins in the home. Schools must work in synergy with families to ensure that messages about discipline, honesty, and responsibility are coherent and mutually reinforcing. In addition, public policy must support educational initiatives that prioritize ethics, including the provision of teacher training in moral pedagogy and the development of value-based curricula. As noted by Kamali (2022), when all sectors of society collaborate in cultivating ethical citizens, education becomes a transformative force that not only informs the mind but uplifts the soul.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight that Islamic education continues to play a pivotal role in shaping student character, especially amid the complex challenges posed by the digital era. As a comprehensive system rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah, Islamic education is not solely concerned with the transmission of knowledge but also with the cultivation of moral integrity and spiritual consciousness. In this regard, character formation (akhlak) emerges as the core of educational objectives, aiming to guide students toward ethical behavior and devotion to God (taqwa). Through integrated pedagogical approaches, Islamic education facilitates the development of holistic individuals who are intellectually competent, emotionally balanced, and morally upright.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of reconstructing moral values in response to shifting cultural and societal paradigms. The digital age introduces new patterns of behavior, including increased individualism, virtual anonymity, and ethical ambiguity, all of which require educational interventions grounded in scriptural ethics. Islamic education addresses these phenomena by reinforcing timeless values such as humility, compassion, justice, and honesty, which are essential for nurturing responsible digital citizens. Moral education, therefore, is not static; it must continuously evolve through curriculum innovation, teacher modeling, and active collaboration between school, family, and community.

The role of Islamic education in strengthening student character is both fundamental and transformative. It demands a strategic reorientation that integrates modern educational tools with traditional moral frameworks. As education systems face the ethical uncertainties of technological advancement, the teachings of Islam offer enduring guidance that aligns with human nature and societal well-being. To ensure lasting impact, Islamic educational institutions must remain proactive in embedding moral values into all facets of learning, thereby preparing a generation that is spiritually grounded, ethically resilient, and socially responsible.

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