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From Religious Practices to Internalised Values: Developing Students' Religious Character in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

The development of students' religious character has become increasingly challenging in the digital era, as digital media influences students' attitudes, behaviours, and religious practices. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) therefore plays an essential role in fostering religious values through meaningful and sustainable educational practices. This study aims to examine the strategies employed by PAI teachers to develop students' religious character and identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in their implementation. A qualitative descriptive case study approach was employed, with data collected through interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation. The data were analysed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, while source and method triangulation were used to strengthen data credibility. The findings indicate that PAI teachers develop students' religious character through positive habituation, role modelling, religious activities, and the integration of Islamic values into classroom learning and school culture. These strategies contribute to students' religious obedience, tolerance, and harmonious social relationships. However, inconsistent religious practices outside school and the influence of digital media remain significant challenges. The study implies that religious character education requires more contextual and creative teaching strategies, responsible digital media use, consistent teacher role modelling, and collaboration among schools, families, and communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping individual character and the development of society. Beyond transferring knowledge, education prepares young people to become responsible individuals who possess intellectual abilities, moral awareness, and social sensitivity (Nur'aena, 2023; Yalvaç Arıcı,

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2025). Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has an important position in this process because it does not merely provide students with religious knowledge but also aims to cultivate spiritual awareness, moral values, and religious behaviour. Through Islamic education, students are expected to develop a balanced relationship between intellectual development and spiritual maturity (Ainiyah et al., 2025; Mustain & Bakar, 2025). Religious character is particularly important in preparing younger generations to face social changes and increasingly complex challenges. Students who possess strong religious values are expected to demonstrate honesty, discipline, responsibility, tolerance, and respect for others. Therefore, strengthening religious character through education is essential for building a morally responsible society.

The importance of religious character formation has become increasingly significant amid the rapid development of digital technology. The digital era has transformed how students communicate, access information, establish relationships, and develop their identities. Social media, online platforms, and digital communication provide considerable opportunities for learning and obtaining religious information (Kusumawati et al., 2023; Trianita et al., 2025). However, these developments also expose students to various forms of content that may contradict religious and moral principles. Hoaxes, radicalism, pornography, excessive consumerism, and hedonistic lifestyles are among the challenges that may influence students' attitudes and behaviour. Without appropriate guidance, continuous exposure to such content can weaken students' moral awareness and religious commitment. Consequently, Islamic Religious Education must respond to these changes through more relevant learning approaches (Hadi & Prayogi, 2025; Maududi & Darmawan, 2025). Teachers need to help students develop the ability to use technology wisely while maintaining Islamic values as the foundation of their behaviour in everyday life.

One of the major challenges in Islamic Religious Education is the limited effectiveness of conventional teaching approaches in responding to students' characteristics in the digital era. Learning activities that predominantly rely on textbooks and lectures may reduce students' participation and make religious material less connected to their daily experiences (Azizah & Widad, 2026; Hasanah et al., 2026). This situation is also reflected in the preliminary observations conducted at SMP Negeri 21 Bandar Lampung. The school has implemented several religious activities, including morning Qur'an recitation, Islamic spiritual development activities (imtaq), and congregational prayers. The school has also introduced laboratory-based learning activities to familiarise students with digital learning resources. Nevertheless, classroom observations in class VIII B indicated that Islamic Religious Education still tended to rely on conventional instructional approaches. Students appeared relatively passive

during learning activities, suggesting a gap between the school's religious development programmes and classroom learning practices.

Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of integrating technological developments into Islamic Religious Education to strengthen students' spiritual understanding and religious character (Mahirah et al., 2026; Zulfaida & Farisi, 2026). The use of digital technology in learning can provide students with broader opportunities to access religious information, explore Islamic teachings, and engage in more interactive educational activities. Furthermore, Islamic Religious Education teachers have an important responsibility to guide students in evaluating digital information and using technological resources appropriately. Teachers are not only responsible for delivering religious knowledge but also for helping students distinguish between information that supports Islamic values and content that may negatively influence their behaviour. Other educational approaches emphasise the importance of developing creative, innovative, and student-centred learning activities. These perspectives indicate that technology can become a valuable educational instrument when integrated with appropriate pedagogical strategies and clear religious objectives. Thus, teachers' instructional decisions remain essential in connecting digital learning experiences with the development of students' religious character.

Although previous studies have discussed the relationship between technology, Islamic Religious Education, and students' moral development, several aspects still require further investigation. Existing discussions generally emphasise the benefits of technology in education or the broad responsibilities of religious teachers without sufficiently explaining the specific strategies implemented in classroom practices. In particular, limited attention has been given to how Islamic Religious Education teachers combine conventional teaching methods, digital learning resources, religious activities, and personal guidance to strengthen students' religious character. Furthermore, the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing the implementation of these strategies need to be examined in greater detail. This limitation creates an important research gap because the effectiveness of religious education depends not only on its curriculum and learning materials but also on how teachers translate religious values into meaningful educational experiences (Munawarsyah, 2023; Putri et al., 2025). Therefore, investigating teachers' actual strategies and students' learning experiences is necessary to understand religious character formation in contemporary digital learning environments.

The novelty of this study lies in its examination of Islamic Religious Education teachers' strategies for developing students' religious character through an integrated perspective involving pedagogy, digital technology, and

Islamic values. Rather than focusing exclusively on the use of technology or the theoretical responsibilities of teachers, this research examines how educational strategies are implemented in actual school practices. Particular attention is given to the relationship between classroom instruction, religious habituation, teacher guidance, and students' participation in religious activities. This approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of how teachers respond to the challenges of digitalisation while maintaining the fundamental objectives of Islamic education. The study also considers the supporting and inhibiting conditions that influence the implementation of religious character development strategies. Its contribution is expected to provide practical insights into developing more adaptive, interactive, and meaningful Islamic Religious Education that remains relevant to students' contemporary learning experiences.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine the strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education teachers in developing students' religious character in the digital era and to identify the factors supporting and hindering their implementation. Specifically, this research addresses two fundamental questions: how do Islamic Religious Education teachers implement strategies to develop students' religious character in the digital era, and what factors support and constrain the implementation of these strategies? This study argues that strengthening students' religious character cannot be achieved solely through the transmission of religious knowledge or the provision of digital learning facilities. Instead, it requires the integration of adaptive instructional approaches, consistent teacher role modelling, continuous guidance, and religious habituation. Through these interconnected efforts, students are expected to internalise Islamic values and demonstrate them in their everyday behaviour, including their interactions within digital environments.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach using a case study design to investigate Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers' strategies for developing students' religious character in the digital era. This design was selected because the research sought to explore educational practices, interactions, and experiences within their actual school context (Al Makrufah et al., 2025; Suhartini et al., 2025). A qualitative perspective enabled the researcher to understand the phenomenon through participants' experiences and perspectives rather than through numerical measurement. Furthermore, the case study approach provided an opportunity to examine the implementation of religious character development strategies in greater depth and detail. This design was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to identify teaching practices, contextual conditions, and challenges influencing religious

character formation (Aripin et al., 2025; Subandi et al., 2025). The investigation therefore focused on understanding the phenomenon comprehensively within its educational setting.

This research was conducted at SMP Negeri 21 Bandar Lampung. The school was purposively selected based on its relevance to the research focus, particularly the implementation of Islamic Religious Education amid the challenges of digital technological development. The selection also considered the existence of religious activities and instructional practices that provided an appropriate context for examining students' religious character development. The research participants consisted of Islamic Religious Education teachers and students who were selected based on their direct involvement in teaching and learning activities (Mundofi, 2025; Zuhri et al., 2026). These participants were considered relevant because they could provide information about instructional strategies, religious learning experiences, and the implementation of character development practices. Informant selection was guided by their knowledge, experiences, and involvement in the phenomenon under investigation, ensuring that the information collected was closely related to the research objectives.

Data were collected through three principal techniques: interviews, non-participatory observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with Islamic Religious Education teachers and selected students to obtain detailed information about teaching strategies, religious character development activities, and challenges encountered during instructional implementation. The interviews followed a structured format to ensure that the information addressed the research focus consistently. Non-participatory observation was employed to examine classroom activities, teacher–student interactions, and students' participation without directly intervening in the learning process. This technique enabled the researcher to document educational practices within their natural setting. Documentation was used to complement the interview and observation findings through the examination of photographs, school archives, learning materials, administrative records, and other relevant documents. These techniques provided complementary empirical information for understanding the research phenomenon.

Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organizing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation according to the research objectives. Subsequently, the condensed information was displayed in descriptive narratives to identify patterns, relationships, and relevant findings. The final stage involved interpreting the displayed information, drawing conclusions, and verifying them against the available

empirical evidence. To ensure data trustworthiness, triangulation was applied through source and technique triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from teachers and students, while technique triangulation examined the consistency of interview results, observational evidence, and documentation. These procedures were implemented to strengthen the credibility, consistency, and accuracy of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Religious Character Development among Students

The research findings were obtained through cross-examination of information collected from classroom observations, interviews with research participants, and examination of supporting school documents. The analysis focused on five indicators of religious character: obedience to religious teachings, tolerance toward followers of other religions, interreligious harmony, religious habituation in school activities, and the development of students' faith and religious commitment in the digital era. These indicators provided the basis for examining how religious character development was implemented through instructional practices, institutional programmes, teacher guidance, and students' everyday behaviour. The findings demonstrate variations in the implementation of each indicator, particularly between religious practices conducted within the school environment and students' consistency in applying religious values outside school. The following table presents the five indicators used to organize the research findings.

Table 1. Indicators of Religious Character

No.	Indicators	Description
1	Obedience to Religious Teachings	Students' compliance with religious teachings and obligations in everyday life.
2	Tolerance toward Other Religions	Students' attitudes of respecting and appreciating people from different religious backgrounds.
3	Interreligious Harmony	Students' ability to maintain harmonious relationships and cooperate with people of different religions.
4	Religious Habituation	Students' participation in routine religious activities and the consistent practice of religious values at school.
5	Development of Faith and Religious Commitment	Students' development of faith and religious commitment in accordance with their developmental stages, particularly in the digital era.

Table 1 presents the five indicators used to examine students' religious character development. These indicators encompass individual religious commitment, attitudes toward religious diversity, social relationships, habitual

religious practices, and the development of faith in response to digital influences. Together, they provide an empirical framework for describing the implementation of religious character education in the school environment.

Obedience to Religious Teachings

Classroom observations revealed that most students regularly participated in obligatory religious practices, particularly congregational midday prayers at school. This activity was supported by institutional regulations requiring collective worship and established schedules for religious activities. Nevertheless, several students continued to demonstrate behaviour that did not fully reflect religious discipline, including arriving late at school and showing insufficient seriousness during worship. These observations indicated differences in students' levels of religious commitment despite their participation in the same institutional programmes.

Interviews with Islamic Religious Education teachers revealed that habituation and exemplary behaviour were the primary approaches used to strengthen students' obedience to religious teachings. Teachers provided religious explanations during classroom instruction and accompanied students during worship activities. The principal also confirmed that morning Qur'an recitation and congregational prayers constituted institutional programmes designed to strengthen students' religious character.

School documentation included congregational prayer schedules, worship regulations, and records of religious activities. These documents demonstrated that religious development programmes had been organized systematically. The findings indicate that students' obedience was supported by institutional arrangements, teacher supervision, and repeated participation in religious practices, although individual consistency remained different among students.

Tolerance toward Followers of Other Religions

Observations indicated that students generally demonstrated positive attitudes toward classmates from different religious backgrounds. Their interactions appeared harmonious, and no discriminatory behaviour was identified during the observed activities. Students were able to participate in classroom learning and other school activities collaboratively without showing negative treatment based on religious differences.

Interviews with Islamic Religious Education teachers revealed that tolerance was introduced through learning activities emphasizing the Islamic principles of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and appreciation of differences. The principal explained that although the school had not established

a structured interfaith programme, tolerance was encouraged through shared activities involving students from different backgrounds.

Documentation of school policies and student activities provided additional evidence of efforts to promote togetherness and mutual respect. The findings demonstrate that tolerance was expressed not only through students' understanding of religious values but also through their everyday interactions. Their ability to cooperate and maintain harmonious relationships represented an observable aspect of religious character development.

Harmony among Followers of Different Religions

Field observations showed that students generally maintained harmonious relationships with classmates from different religious backgrounds. No conflicts arising specifically from religious differences were identified during the research period. Students also demonstrated the ability to cooperate in group assignments and extracurricular activities, indicating positive social relationships within the school environment.

Interviews with Islamic Religious Education teachers revealed that spiritual development extended beyond the performance of individual religious obligations. Teachers emphasized the importance of developing concern for others, respecting differences, and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships. Teachers also assumed a mediating role when minor conflicts occurred among students, helping them resolve disagreements appropriately.

Documentation of student council and extracurricular activities showed positive interactions among students. These activities provided opportunities for cooperation and social participation across different backgrounds. Overall, the findings indicate that religious character development was reflected in students' social relationships, particularly through cooperation, mutual respect, conflict resolution, and the maintenance of harmonious interactions.

Religious Habituation in School Activities

Observations identified several routine religious activities organized by the school, including morning Qur'an recitation, prayers before and after lessons, and congregational prayers. Most students participated in these activities regularly, although a small number still required reminders and supervision to participate consistently.

Interviews with Islamic Religious Education teachers indicated that religious habituation was maintained through repetition and continuous reinforcement. Teachers also established a religious atmosphere in classrooms through simple practices, including greeting one another and praying together before and after learning activities.

School documentation included religious activity schedules, attendance records, and the academic calendar. These documents demonstrated that religious activities had been incorporated into the school's educational arrangements. The findings indicate that religious habituation was implemented through a combination of institutional scheduling, teacher involvement, and student participation. However, differences in individual participation suggested that the consistency of religious practices still required attention.

Development of Faith and Religious Commitment in the Digital Era

Observations indicated that students' religious development was relatively positive within the school environment but was not yet fully consistent outside school. Differences in students' behaviour could be identified between their participation in religious activities at school and their religious practices in other environments. This suggested that institutional supervision and structured activities played an important role in maintaining students' religious discipline.

Interviews with students revealed that digital media had two contrasting functions. On the one hand, digital platforms provided opportunities to access religious learning materials and information. On the other hand, digital activities sometimes became distractions that interfered with the consistency of religious practices. Islamic Religious Education teachers similarly identified the responsible use of technology as a major challenge in developing students' religious character.

Documentation of students' spiritual development assessments showed that religious attitudes had been evaluated systematically. Nevertheless, supervision and guidance beyond the school environment remained areas requiring further attention. The findings indicate that students' religious development was influenced by both institutional educational practices and their ability to manage digital activities responsibly.

Summary of Research Findings

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Islamic Religious Education teachers' strategies for developing students' religious character were implemented through habituation, exemplary behaviour, religious activities, and the integration of religious values into school practices. These approaches contributed to positive developments in students' religious participation, tolerance, social relationships, and religious discipline. However, the implementation of these strategies was not equally reflected in all aspects of students' behaviour. In particular, differences remained in the consistency of individual religious practices and the application of religious values outside school. The influence of digital media also presented challenges because students

used technology both as a source of religious information and as a potential distraction. These findings indicate that religious character development had progressed within the institutional environment but still required stronger continuity between school-based activities and students' everyday lives.

Discussion

The findings show that religious habituation has become a fundamental strategy for strengthening students' obedience to religious teachings through morning Qur'an recitation, congregational prayers, and collective supplication. These activities demonstrate that repeated religious practices can establish behavioural patterns and encourage students to become familiar with religious obligations. However, participation in institutional activities does not necessarily indicate the complete internalization of religious values. Some students remain inconsistent in practising religious obligations outside the school environment. This condition suggests that habituation should not be limited to scheduled activities or institutional regulations but should also encourage personal awareness and understanding. Theoretically, religious character development involves the transformation of repeated external practices into internal values that guide individual behaviour. Therefore, teachers need to combine habituation with reflection, explanation, and opportunities for students to understand the meaning of every religious activity.

Teacher role modelling represents another important dimension of religious character development. The findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education teachers contribute not only through classroom instruction but also through direct participation in religious activities and everyday interactions with students. This approach enables students to observe how religious principles are translated into actual behaviour. The effectiveness of role modelling, however, depends on the consistency between the values communicated by teachers and the behaviour they demonstrate (Putri et al., 2025; Sugianto, 2024). When teachers consistently display discipline, responsibility, respect, and religious commitment, students have opportunities to develop similar behavioural patterns. The theoretical implication is that character education is fundamentally relational because students acquire values through direct interaction and observation. In practical terms, schools should strengthen teachers' roles as educators, mentors, and behavioural examples. Consequently, the development of religious character requires consistency between instructional content, institutional expectations, and teachers' everyday conduct.

Students' positive interactions across religious differences demonstrate that religious character development also has an important social dimension. The absence of observed religion-based conflicts and the presence of cooperation in

classroom and extracurricular activities indicate that students have developed relatively positive attitudes toward diversity (Amriani et al., 2023; Bahiyah, 2025). These findings suggest that religious education can contribute to social harmony when religious principles are translated into respect, mutual understanding, and responsible relationships. Nevertheless, tolerance-related activities at the school remain largely implicit and have not been supported by systematically organized interfaith programmes. This situation indicates the need to strengthen students' understanding of diversity through more structured educational experiences. The practical implication is that schools can provide collaborative activities, social projects, and opportunities for constructive dialogue among students from different backgrounds. Such activities may strengthen the relationship between individual religious commitment and social responsibility while promoting a more inclusive educational environment.

The findings also reveal that digital technology has not yet been fully integrated into Islamic Religious Education learning, despite its considerable potential to support students' engagement. Students use digital platforms to access religious information, but technology can also become a source of distraction that interferes with their religious activities. This dual function demonstrates that technological development does not automatically strengthen students' religious understanding or behaviour. Its educational value depends on how teachers select, manage, and integrate digital resources into learning activities. The theoretical implication is that religious character education in the digital era requires an approach that connects religious knowledge, technological competence, and ethical awareness (Siliwangi, 2026; Trisnantari et al., 2026). Practically, teachers can introduce interactive learning media, educational videos, and digital religious resources while guiding students to evaluate online information critically. Therefore, digital integration should be directed toward meaningful learning experiences rather than simply increasing the use of technological devices.

The inconsistency between students' religious behaviour at school and outside the school environment highlights a significant challenge in sustaining religious character development. School programmes provide structured opportunities for religious participation, but students encounter different social influences and digital experiences beyond institutional supervision. Consequently, the values introduced at school may not always be consistently practised in everyday life (Adawiyah, 2023; Akhyar et al., 2025). This condition indicates that religious character development cannot depend exclusively on formal educational institutions. It requires continuous support from families, teachers, and the wider community. The theoretical implication is that students' religious development is shaped by interconnected educational and social

environments. In practical terms, schools need to strengthen communication with parents, provide continuous guidance, and encourage responsible digital behaviour. These efforts may help establish continuity between religious practices at school, family environments, and students' interactions in digital spaces.

The contribution of this study lies in its examination of five interconnected dimensions of religious character development, namely obedience, tolerance, interreligious harmony, religious habituation, and the development of faith and religious commitment in the digital era. The findings demonstrate that habituation and teacher role modelling constitute important foundations for religious character formation, while limited digital integration and inconsistent behaviour outside school remain significant challenges. The study contributes to a broader understanding of religious education by showing that successful character development requires more than the implementation of routine religious programmes (Rukmana et al., 2024; Shawmi et al., 2025). It also requires meaningful internalization, social interaction, appropriate technological guidance, and cooperation between educational institutions and families. The practical contribution is to provide insights for developing more adaptive Islamic Religious Education strategies that connect religious values with students' everyday experiences. Ultimately, these integrated efforts can support the development of students who demonstrate consistent religious commitment and responsible behaviour in contemporary digital society.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the development of students' religious character in the digital era requires more than the implementation of routine religious activities; it depends on the integration of positive habituation, teacher role modelling, and religious values into classroom instruction and school culture, supported by students' internal awareness. The most important finding is that these strategies contribute to the development of religious obedience, tolerance, and harmonious social relationships, although consistent religious practice outside school remains a challenge. The study's scholarly contribution lies in highlighting the importance of connecting religious habituation and role modelling with the internalisation of religious values, thereby providing a more comprehensive perspective on religious character education in the context of digital transformation. Nevertheless, this research is limited by its focus on one school and its qualitative descriptive approach, which restrict the transferability of the findings and do not establish the long-term effectiveness of the strategies. Future research should examine more diverse educational settings and develop and evaluate an integrated digital-based Islamic Religious Education model, such

as *technopedagogical religious learning*, to investigate how technology, pedagogy, and Islamic values can strengthen the sustained internalisation of religious character. The **implications** of this study are both theoretical and practical: theoretically, it reinforces the importance of integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions in religious character development; practically, it highlights the need for more creative and contextual PAI instruction, responsible use of digital media, consistent teacher role modelling, and stronger collaboration among schools, families, and communities to foster students' religious character in a sustainable manner.

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