

Character building in the digital era: Strategies of aqidah akhlak teachers in an Indonesian islamic junior high school

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ABSTRACT

Background: The rapid expansion of digital technology has reshaped students' learning environments and created new challenges for character education in Islamic schools. Social media, internet platforms, and digital communication increasingly influence students' moral behaviour, requiring Aqidah Akhlak teachers to adopt strategies that keep Islamic values relevant in contemporary digital contexts.

Aims: This study examines the pedagogical strategies used by Aqidah Akhlak teachers to foster students' character, identifies the challenges encountered, and explores adaptive responses implemented in an Indonesian Islamic junior high school

Methods: A qualitative case study was conducted at MTs Darul Huda Sukabumi, Bandar Lampung. Participants were selected purposively and included an Aqidah Akhlak teacher, the headmaster, and seventh-grade students. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, then analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive model.

Results: Three themes emerged. First, character development was implemented through exemplary practice, habituation, contextualized moral instruction, and school-family partnerships. Second, implementation was challenged by digital influences, limited supervision outside school, and differing levels of family support. Third, teachers responded through persuasive moral guidance, continuous reinforcement, and collaborative monitoring involving parents and the madrasah. These findings show that character education becomes more effective when Islamic values are connected to students' everyday digital experiences.

Conclusion: Character education in Islamic junior high schools should extend beyond conventional religious instruction by integrating exemplary practice, contextual learning, sustained moral reinforcement, and collaboration among teachers, families, and schools.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed how students access information, communicate, and construct their social identities. The widespread use of social media, internet-based platforms, and mobile digital devices has expanded learning opportunities while simultaneously introducing complex challenges to character development and ethical behavior among adolescents (Hossain et al., 2020; Hruska & Maresova, 2020). Contemporary educational environments are increasingly confronted with issues such as exposure to inappropriate online content, misinformation, cyberbullying, aggressive digital communication, and the normalization of instant gratification, all of which may influence students' moral reasoning, emotional well-being, and social relationships (Bajovic & Rizzo, 2021; Bosacki et al., 2023; Tian & Tang, 2025). These developments have shifted the role of schools beyond knowledge transmission toward fostering students' moral resilience and responsible digital citizenship. Consequently, character education has become an increasingly important educational priority, requiring pedagogical approaches that are adaptive, contextual, and capable of responding to the realities of the digital era.

Within the context of Islamic education, character formation has long been regarded as a central objective that integrates cognitive, spiritual, and moral development. Islamic educational philosophy

emphasizes the cultivation of noble character (*akhlak*) alongside the acquisition of religious knowledge, positioning moral education as an inseparable component of the learning process (Abdalla, 2025). In Indonesian madrasahs, the Aqidah Akhlak subject occupies a strategic position because it introduces students to the fundamental principles of Islamic faith while simultaneously guiding them to internalize ethical values in their daily lives (AlJahsh, 2024; Riaz et al., 2023). Accordingly, Aqidah Akhlak teachers are expected not only to deliver religious content but also to serve as moral role models who help students interpret Islamic values within contemporary social contexts, including those shaped by rapid digital transformation (Islamic et al., 2024; Muis, 2026). Their pedagogical role has therefore expanded from transmitting doctrinal knowledge to facilitating students' moral adaptation in increasingly complex digital environments.

Despite the enduring importance of moral education, conventional approaches to character development are becoming increasingly insufficient for addressing the ethical challenges emerging from digital life. Strategies such as lectures, advice, exemplary behavior, and habitual practice remain fundamental components of Islamic education, yet they often struggle to compete with the continuous influence of social media, algorithm-driven digital content, and peer interactions occurring beyond the classroom (David et al., 2024; Krause et al., 2025; Teledahl et al., 2025). The rapid circulation of visual information, unrestricted online communication, and limited teacher supervision outside school have created situations in which values taught during classroom instruction are frequently challenged by stronger external influences (Alenezi et al., 2023; Garlinska et al., 2023; Wang & Liu, 2025). Consequently, a growing disconnect has emerged between formal Aqidah Akhlak instruction and students' everyday digital experiences, highlighting the need for more adaptive pedagogical strategies that enable Islamic moral values to remain meaningful and applicable within contemporary digital culture (Amin et al., 2022; Nafisah, 2025).

Although character education in the digital era has received growing scholarly attention, existing studies have predominantly examined the issue from broader educational or religious education perspectives rather than focusing specifically on the pedagogical strategies employed by Aqidah Akhlak teachers. Previous research has generally emphasized the importance of strengthening character education, promoting moral awareness, and adapting educational practices to digital transformation. For example, Suciati et al., (2023) argue that character education in the digital era requires discipline and continuous pedagogical innovation to preserve moral values amid rapid social and technological change. Likewise, Pallathadka et al., (2023) highlights that Islamic education fundamentally aims to cultivate individuals with strong moral character through the internalization of Islamic values. While these studies provide important conceptual foundations, they primarily discuss normative principles and educational objectives without adequately explaining how Aqidah Akhlak teachers translate these ideals into concrete classroom practices when responding to students' real experiences in digital environments.

Recent studies have begun to recognize the need for learning approaches that are more responsive to the characteristics of digitally connected students. Fiqih et al., (2022) emphasize that Aqidah Akhlak learning strategies should be adapted to students' characteristics to strengthen the relationship between instructional content and their everyday experiences. This argument reflects an important pedagogical direction but remains focused primarily on instructional adaptation rather than examining how teachers practically address contemporary moral challenges associated with social media use, aggressive digital communication, instant culture, and weakened behavioral supervision beyond school settings. At the same time, Bularca et al., (2024) demonstrate that cyberbullying has evolved into a significant social phenomenon affecting students' psychological well-being and interpersonal relationships. These findings reinforce the urgency of strengthening character education in response to digital transformation, yet they provide limited empirical understanding of how Islamic moral education is operationalized through teachers' pedagogical practices within madrasah contexts. Consequently, the literature continues to offer only a partial understanding of how Aqidah Akhlak teachers navigate increasingly complex moral challenges in the digital era.

Building upon these limitations, this study addresses an important gap by examining the pedagogical strategies employed by Aqidah Akhlak teachers to foster students' character in the context of digital transformation. Specifically, this study investigates how teachers respond to moral challenges arising from students' engagement with digital environments, identifies the obstacles encountered during the character-building process, and explores the collaborative efforts undertaken by teachers and the madrasah to reinforce Islamic moral values among students. Unlike previous studies that generally discuss character education, Islamic education, or digital challenges as separate issues, this study integrates these dimensions into a single analytical framework centered on teachers' pedagogical practices. Therefore, this study contributes to the growing literature on Islamic character education by providing empirical evidence regarding adaptive character-building strategies in Indonesian madrasahs and by offering practical insights for developing more contextual, responsive, and sustainable Aqidah Akhlak instruction in the digital era.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of the strategies implemented by Aqidah Akhlak teachers in fostering students' character in the digital era. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to investigate educational phenomena within their natural setting while capturing participants' perspectives, experiences, and pedagogical practices comprehensively (Greenhalgh, 2025; Le, 2026). The study was conducted at MTs Darul Huda Sukabumi Bandar Lampung, an Islamic junior high school that consistently integrates character education into both curricular and extracurricular activities while facing the growing influence of digital technology on students' daily lives.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that all informants possessed direct experience relevant to the objectives of the study. The participants consisted of one Aqidah Akhlak teacher, one headmaster, and twelve seventh-grade students who actively participated in Aqidah Akhlak learning activities and school-based character education programs. The Aqidah Akhlak teacher was selected because of direct responsibility for designing and implementing character education, while the headmaster provided institutional perspectives regarding school policies supporting students' moral development. Student participants were selected based on their active involvement in classroom learning and school activities to obtain diverse perspectives regarding the implementation of character-building strategies.

Data were collected over a three-month period through semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews enabled participants to describe their experiences and perceptions while allowing the researchers to explore issues emerging during the interview process. Classroom observations focused on instructional interactions, teacher practices, students' behavioral responses, and the integration of character education during Aqidah Akhlak lessons. Documentary evidence, including lesson plans, school regulations, student activity records, and supporting institutional documents, was examined to complement and strengthen the empirical findings. The overall research procedure adopted in this study is presented in Figure 1.

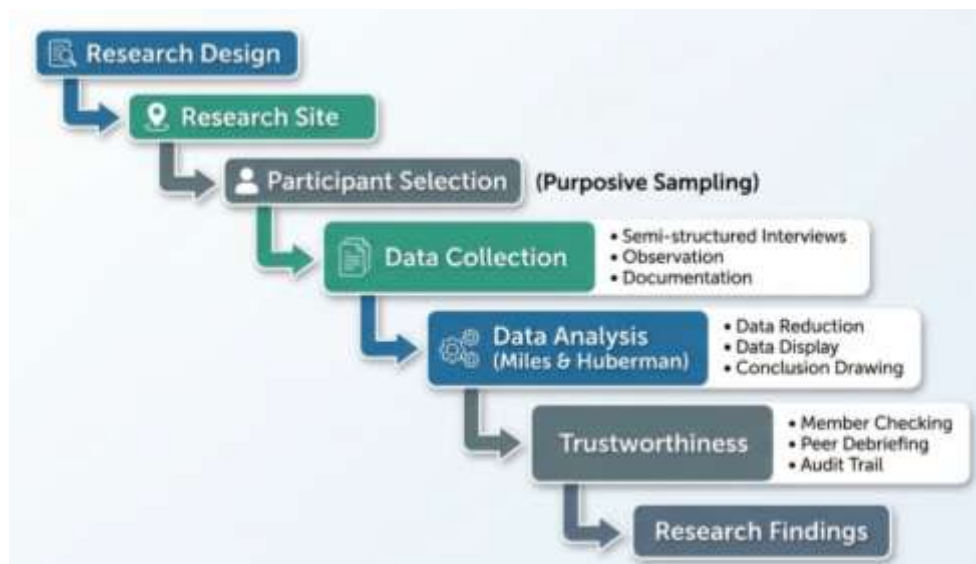


Figure 1. Research Procedure of the Study

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (1997), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and repeatedly reviewed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences. The researchers then conducted open coding to identify meaningful units of information before organizing similar codes into broader categories. These categories were subsequently synthesized into overarching themes representing teachers' character-building strategies, challenges encountered during implementation, and adaptive efforts undertaken to respond to students' moral development in the digital era. Throughout the analytical process, data obtained from different participants and collection techniques were continuously compared to strengthen the consistency of the emerging interpretations.

The trustworthiness of the study was established through several qualitative validation procedures. Member checking was conducted by confirming interview summaries and preliminary interpretations with key participants to ensure that the findings accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives. An audit trail documenting the research process, coding procedures, analytical decisions, and theme development was maintained throughout the study to enhance dependability and transparency. Peer debriefing with fellow researchers was also undertaken to discuss emerging interpretations and minimize potential researcher bias during data analysis. Prior to data collection, all participants were informed about the objectives of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process by ensuring that participants' identities were not disclosed in either the analysis or the reporting of findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The qualitative analysis of interview transcripts, classroom observations, and documentary evidence generated three overarching themes through an iterative coding process involving the identification, categorization, and synthesis of recurring patterns across all data sources. These themes describe how Aqidah Akhlak teachers implemented character-building strategies in the digital era, the major challenges encountered during implementation, and the adaptive responses developed to sustain students' moral development. Collectively, the themes demonstrate that character building in the digital era is not limited to classroom instruction but represents a continuous educational process requiring pedagogical adaptation and collaboration among teachers, students, families, and the school community. A summary of the thematic findings is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Themes and Categories Identified from the Qualitative Analysis

Theme	Categories	Representative Findings
Pedagogical Strategies for Character Building	Exemplary pedagogical practice	Teachers consistently modeled discipline, honesty, responsibility, and respectful communication during classroom interaction and daily school activities.
	Habituation-based character learning	Islamic moral values were reinforced through daily routines, including greetings, collective prayers, discipline, and respectful communication.
	Contextualized moral instruction	Learning activities linked Aqidah Akhlak content with students' experiences related to social media, internet use, and digital communication.
	School–family partnership	Character education was strengthened through communication and cooperation between teachers, parents, and the madrasah.
Multidimensional Challenges in Character Building	Digital influence on students' behaviour	Students were exposed to online content and communication patterns that were not always aligned with Islamic moral values.
	Limited behavioural supervision	Teachers experienced difficulties monitoring students' behaviour beyond the school environment.
	Variations in family support	Differences in parental involvement influenced the consistency of students' character development.
Adaptive Responses for Sustainable Character Development	Persuasive moral guidance	Teachers prioritised dialogue, reflection, and gradual behavioural improvement when addressing students' moral issues.
	Continuous character reinforcement	Positive behaviours were strengthened through repeated practice, encouragement, and integration of moral values into daily school activities.
	Collaborative monitoring	Teachers, parents, and the madrasah worked together to maintain consistency in students' character development across different learning environments.

Pedagogical Strategies for Character Building

The coding process identified four interconnected pedagogical strategies employed by Aqidah Akhlak teachers to facilitate students' character development in the digital era. These strategies consisted of exemplary pedagogical practice, habituation-based character learning, contextualized moral instruction, and school–family partnership. Although each strategy was implemented through different educational activities, all were directed toward strengthening students' internalization of Islamic moral values within both school and digital environments.

Exemplary pedagogical practice emerged as the foundation of character building. Teachers consistently demonstrated discipline, honesty, responsibility, respectful communication, and ethical behaviour during classroom instruction and daily interactions within the madrasah. Rather than relying exclusively on verbal instruction, teachers intentionally positioned themselves as behavioural models

whose attitudes and actions could be directly observed by students. This approach encouraged students to experience character education through authentic interaction with teachers during everyday learning activities.

Habituation-based character learning represented another dominant category identified through the analysis. Islamic moral values were reinforced through structured daily routines, including greeting others politely, participating in collective prayers, maintaining classroom discipline, fulfilling responsibilities, and demonstrating respectful communication with teachers and peers. These recurring activities enabled students to practice desirable behaviours repeatedly, allowing moral values to become integrated into their daily habits instead of remaining as abstract religious concepts.

The findings further indicate that teachers adopted contextualized moral instruction by connecting Aqidah Akhlak learning materials with situations commonly experienced by students in digital environments. Classroom discussions incorporated examples related to social media interactions, online communication, responsible internet use, and ethical behaviour in digital spaces. Students were therefore encouraged to relate Islamic moral principles to contemporary situations that they encountered beyond the classroom. Character-building efforts were further strengthened through continuous communication between teachers, parents, and the madrasah, enabling moral guidance to extend across both school and home environments.

Multidimensional Challenges in Character Building

The analysis revealed that character building in the digital era was influenced by several interconnected challenges originating from technological, familial, and educational contexts. These challenges affected both teachers' pedagogical practices and students' opportunities to consistently apply Islamic moral values in their daily lives. The most prominent challenge involved the growing influence of digital technology on students' behaviour. Easy access to social media, online entertainment, and unrestricted digital communication exposed students to behavioural patterns that were not always compatible with the moral values promoted through Aqidah Akhlak learning. Teachers observed that students frequently encountered inappropriate language, negative online interactions, and digital content capable of shaping their attitudes and communication styles.

Another challenge concerned the limited capacity of teachers to supervise students beyond the school environment. Although character education was consistently implemented during classroom instruction and reinforced through various school-based activities, teachers acknowledged that their supervision was largely confined to the madrasah setting. Outside school hours, students spent considerable time interacting with digital technologies, including social media platforms, online communication applications, and internet-based entertainment, where teachers had little opportunity to observe or guide their behaviour directly. This situation created a gap between the character-building practices promoted at school and students' actual experiences within digital environments. As a result, teachers reported difficulties in ensuring that the moral values introduced during Aqidah Akhlak learning were consistently reflected in students' daily behaviour beyond the classroom. The findings further indicate that maintaining continuity between school-based character education and students' behaviour outside the madrasah remained one of the most significant practical challenges encountered during the implementation of character-building programs.

The findings also demonstrate that variations in family support contributed substantially to differences in students' character development. The analysis revealed that parental involvement differed considerably across families, particularly regarding supervision of students' digital activities and reinforcement of Islamic moral values at home. Some parents actively monitored their children's use of digital devices, maintained regular communication with teachers, and consistently encouraged behaviours aligned with the values promoted in the madrasah. In contrast, other families relied primarily on the school to assume responsibility for students' moral education, resulting in less consistent reinforcement of character-building practices outside the classroom. These differences influenced not

only the continuity of moral guidance received by students but also the effectiveness of school-based character education efforts. Students who experienced consistent support from both home and school generally demonstrated greater consistency in applying expected moral behaviours, whereas inconsistent family involvement often reduced the continuity of character formation across different social environments.

Adaptive Responses for Sustainable Character Development

Despite the various challenges encountered during the implementation of character education, the analysis identified several adaptive responses developed by Aqidah Akhlak teachers and the madrasah to maintain the continuity of students' moral development in the digital era. These responses emerged from teachers' efforts to address the influence of digital technology while ensuring that Islamic moral values remained integrated into students' everyday learning experiences. Three interrelated categories were identified within this theme: persuasive moral guidance, continuous character reinforcement, and collaborative monitoring involving teachers, parents, and the school community.

Persuasive moral guidance emerged as the primary adaptive response implemented by Aqidah Akhlak teachers. Rather than responding to students' behavioural problems through punitive measures alone, teachers consistently adopted dialogical and reflective approaches that encouraged students to recognize the consequences of their actions. Classroom interactions frequently involved discussion, personal advice, and gradual behavioural guidance designed to help students understand moral issues associated with digital communication and online behaviour. This approach enabled teachers to build closer relationships with students while creating opportunities for self-reflection and personal responsibility. Instead of emphasizing punishment, teachers prioritised educational guidance that supported students in improving their behaviour through continuous mentoring and constructive communication.

Continuous character reinforcement also became an important component of the adaptive strategies identified in the study. Islamic moral values were not introduced only during formal Aqidah Akhlak lessons but were consistently integrated into daily school routines, extracurricular activities, and teacher–student interactions. Teachers repeatedly reinforced expected behaviours through reminders, encouragement, classroom routines, and practical demonstrations of moral conduct, allowing students to encounter consistent moral messages throughout their educational experiences. The findings indicate that repeated exposure to these values contributed to maintaining students' awareness of appropriate behaviour despite the growing influence of digital environments beyond the school setting.

The analysis further revealed that collaborative monitoring strengthened the implementation of character education across different learning environments. Teachers maintained regular communication with parents regarding students' behavioural development and encouraged families to participate actively in supervising digital activities at home. The madrasah also supported these efforts by promoting cooperation between teachers, school administrators, and parents to maintain consistency in students' moral guidance. This collaborative approach enabled character education to extend beyond classroom instruction and provided students with more consistent supervision across both school and family settings. Collectively, these adaptive responses illustrate how character-building initiatives were continuously maintained through coordinated educational efforts involving multiple stakeholders within and beyond the madrasah environment.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that character building in the digital era extends beyond the conventional transmission of religious knowledge and requires pedagogical strategies that enable Islamic moral values to remain relevant within students' contemporary social realities. The prominence of exemplary pedagogical practice, habituation-based learning, and contextualized moral instruction indicates that moral development is sustained through the continuous integration of values into students' everyday

experiences rather than through cognitive understanding alone. This finding suggests that the effectiveness of Aqidah Akhlak learning depends not only on the content delivered by teachers but also on the ways moral values are consistently experienced, practiced, and reinforced throughout students' educational environments. Such a pedagogical orientation reflects a shift from teacher-centred moral instruction toward a more experiential process in which students actively construct ethical understanding through repeated interaction with teachers, peers, and their surrounding environments. Consequently, character education in Islamic schools should be understood as a continuous educational process that connects classroom learning with students' daily social and digital experiences.

The dominance of exemplary pedagogical practice and habituation-based character learning further highlights that moral education remains fundamentally relational. Although digital technology has transformed the way students communicate, access information, and interact socially, the presence of teachers as credible moral role models continues to play a decisive role in shaping students' behaviour. This finding is consistent with Zuhri et al., (2026), who argued that character education in the digital era requires adaptive educational practices capable of preserving moral values amid rapid technological and social transformation. Similarly, Saada, (2023) emphasized that Islamic education can no longer rely exclusively on traditional instructional approaches but must respond to the realities of contemporary society. However, the present study extends these perspectives by demonstrating that pedagogical adaptation should not replace the traditional foundations of Islamic moral education. Instead, exemplary behaviour and habituation remain the primary mechanisms through which moral values are internalized, while pedagogical innovation functions to strengthen rather than substitute these foundational educational practices. This finding reinforces the continuing importance of teachers as moral agents whose everyday interactions significantly influence students' character formation despite the growing presence of digital learning environments.

Another important finding concerns the integration of contextualized moral instruction into Aqidah Akhlak learning. Rather than presenting Islamic moral principles as abstract religious concepts, teachers connected classroom discussions with students' experiences related to social media, online communication, and responsible digital behaviour. This pedagogical adaptation enabled students to interpret religious values within situations that they encounter in everyday digital life, thereby reducing the gap between formal religious instruction and contemporary social experience. These findings support (Young, 2025), who emphasized that Aqidah Akhlak learning should be adapted to students' characteristics and lived experiences to strengthen the relevance of instructional content. Likewise, Sanderse, (2024) argued that Islamic education aims not only to transmit religious knowledge but also to cultivate morally responsible individuals capable of applying Islamic values in everyday life. Nevertheless, the present study contributes additional empirical evidence by demonstrating that contextualization represents more than a pedagogical adjustment; it functions as a strategic mechanism through which Islamic moral education remains meaningful within increasingly digital learning environments. Consequently, the effectiveness of character education appears to depend on teachers' capacity to continuously relate religious values to the evolving realities experienced by students in contemporary society.

The findings further reveal that the challenges associated with character building in the digital era should not be understood as isolated behavioural issues but rather as the consequence of increasingly complex interactions between technological, educational, and social environments. Unlike previous educational contexts in which schools functioned as the primary setting for moral socialization, students today construct values through continuous engagement with multiple digital platforms that operate beyond teachers' direct supervision. Consequently, the influence of digital environments extends beyond access to information and increasingly shapes patterns of communication, social interaction, and behavioural norms. This changing educational landscape suggests that character education can no longer rely exclusively on classroom-based instruction because students simultaneously negotiate moral values across both physical and virtual environments. Therefore, the challenge faced by Aqidah Akhlak teachers

lies not only in delivering Islamic moral values but also in ensuring that these values remain meaningful within increasingly dynamic digital spaces.

This interpretation is consistent with Li, (2025), who argued that character education in the digital era is confronted by rapid technological development, changing patterns of social interaction, and unrestricted information flows that influence students' moral development. Similarly, Hamami & Nuryana, (2022) emphasized that educational institutions must continuously adapt their approaches because students' character is increasingly shaped by social transformations occurring beyond formal learning environments. While these studies primarily describe the broad challenges of digital transformation, the present findings provide a more contextual understanding by demonstrating how these challenges are experienced directly within Aqidah Akhlak learning. Rather than viewing digital technology solely as an external threat, this study indicates that the principal challenge lies in the growing disparity between the moral expectations promoted through Islamic education and the diverse values encountered by students during their everyday digital interactions. This perspective broadens previous discussions by illustrating that character education in Islamic schools now requires pedagogical approaches capable of bridging formal religious instruction with students' continuously evolving digital experiences.

Another important dimension emerging from this study concerns the role of family support in sustaining students' character development. The findings indicate that differences in parental supervision and involvement substantially influence the continuity of moral education beyond the school environment. This observation suggests that character formation is shaped by an interconnected educational ecosystem in which schools, families, and the wider social environment contribute simultaneously to students' moral development. Such findings complement the work of Tao et al., (2022), who demonstrated that cyberbullying and other forms of negative digital interaction have become significant challenges affecting students' psychological well-being and social relationships. Although cyberbullying represents only one manifestation of digital risk, the present study shows that broader patterns of digital interaction also influence the consistency with which students practice Islamic moral values in everyday life. Accordingly, the effectiveness of character education should be viewed not merely as the outcome of successful classroom instruction but as the product of sustained collaboration among schools, families, and the surrounding social environment. This broader perspective extends previous research by emphasizing that strengthening students' character in the digital era requires educational strategies that address both pedagogical practice and the wider ecological conditions influencing students' moral development.

The adaptive responses identified in this study further demonstrate that character education in the digital era requires pedagogical flexibility rather than reliance on conventional disciplinary approaches. The prominence of persuasive moral guidance indicates that teachers increasingly function as facilitators of students' moral reflection rather than merely transmitters of religious knowledge or enforcers of behavioural rules. This shift reflects the changing nature of students' learning environments, where moral decisions are continuously negotiated through interactions occurring both inside and outside the classroom. Consequently, character education becomes a process of guiding students to critically interpret and apply Islamic moral principles within rapidly evolving digital contexts. Such an approach enables teachers to strengthen students' moral awareness while simultaneously encouraging greater personal responsibility in responding to ethical issues encountered in everyday digital life.

These findings also highlight the importance of collaborative educational practices involving teachers, families, and school institutions. Character development was found to be more sustainable when moral guidance extended beyond classroom instruction and was reinforced through consistent communication between schools and parents. This observation supports Sakti et al., (2024), who argued that character education becomes more effective when integrated holistically within the educational environment and supported by multiple educational stakeholders. Similarly, Brown et al., (2023) emphasized that character education should be embedded within broader educational systems

capable of connecting curriculum implementation with supportive learning environments. However, the present study advances these perspectives by providing empirical evidence that collaboration among teachers, parents, and the madrasah is not merely a complementary educational practice but an essential pedagogical strategy for maintaining the continuity of students' moral development in increasingly digital social environments. This finding reinforces the view that successful character education depends on sustained cooperation across different educational contexts rather than on isolated classroom interventions.

Beyond its practical implications, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on Islamic character education by offering a contextual understanding of how Aqidah Akhlak teachers adapt pedagogical practices to respond to contemporary digital challenges. Previous studies have generally discussed character education, digital transformation, or Islamic education as separate areas of inquiry. In contrast, the present study demonstrates that these dimensions operate simultaneously within everyday teaching practices, where exemplary behaviour, habituation, contextualized instruction, persuasive guidance, and collaborative partnerships collectively support students' moral development. This integrated perspective contributes to educational research by positioning character building as a dynamic pedagogical process shaped through continuous interaction among teachers, students, families, and digital environments. Accordingly, the findings suggest that future character education initiatives should move beyond content-oriented religious instruction toward more adaptive learning approaches capable of connecting Islamic moral values with the realities of students' everyday digital experiences. Such an orientation provides a stronger conceptual foundation for developing sustainable character education within contemporary Islamic schooling while offering practical direction for teachers, school leaders, and educational policymakers seeking to strengthen students' moral resilience in the digital era.

IMPLICATIONS

This study provides both theoretical and practical implications for the development of Islamic character education in the digital era. The findings suggest that character building should be understood as a dynamic pedagogical process that extends beyond the transmission of religious knowledge and requires the continuous integration of moral values into students' everyday experiences. Theoretically, this study enriches the discourse on Islamic education by demonstrating that exemplary pedagogical practice, habituation-based learning, contextualized moral instruction, and collaborative engagement among teachers, families, and schools operate as interconnected mechanisms supporting students' moral development in digital environments. Practically, the findings encourage Aqidah Akhlak teachers to adopt learning strategies that connect Islamic moral values with students' digital experiences while strengthening collaboration with parents and school leaders. The study also provides useful insights for school administrators and educational policymakers in designing character education programs that are more adaptive, context-sensitive, and responsive to the challenges of digital transformation.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research was conducted as a single qualitative case study in one Islamic junior high school, limiting the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts with different institutional, cultural, or geographical characteristics. Second, although the study involved teachers, school leaders, and students, it did not directly include parents as research participants, despite their important role in supporting character education beyond the school environment. Third, the study primarily focused on exploring pedagogical strategies and participants' experiences without evaluating the long-term effectiveness of these strategies in shaping students' character development. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as context-specific insights rather than universally applicable conclusions.

SUGGESTIONS

Future research is encouraged to expand the scope of investigation by involving multiple madrasahs or educational institutions with diverse characteristics to obtain a broader understanding of character-building practices across different contexts. Comparative studies examining variations in pedagogical strategies between Islamic and general secondary schools may also provide valuable insights into the influence of institutional culture on students' moral development. In addition, future studies should incorporate parents more actively as research participants and examine how school-family partnerships influence the sustainability of character education in digital environments. Employing mixed-methods or longitudinal research designs would further strengthen the evidence by evaluating the long-term effectiveness of adaptive pedagogical strategies in promoting students' moral resilience and responsible digital citizenship.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that character building in the digital era requires pedagogical approaches that extend beyond the conventional transmission of Islamic moral knowledge. Aqidah Akhlak teachers play a central role in fostering students' character through the integration of exemplary pedagogical practice, habituation-based learning, contextualized moral instruction, and collaborative engagement with families and the madrasah. Although digital transformation presents multidimensional challenges, including the influence of social media, limited supervision beyond the school environment, and variations in family support, these challenges can be addressed through adaptive pedagogical responses emphasizing persuasive guidance, continuous moral reinforcement, and sustained collaboration among educational stakeholders. The findings contribute to the growing discourse on Islamic character education by demonstrating that effective character building is a dynamic and context-sensitive process requiring the continuous alignment of religious values with students' everyday digital experiences. Accordingly, strengthening character education in contemporary Islamic schools depends not only on curriculum implementation but also on the capacity of teachers, families, and educational institutions to establish coherent and sustainable moral learning environments that respond to the realities of the digital era.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Dila Novi Fitria conceptualized the study, designed the research methodology, conducted data collection and analysis, and prepared the original manuscript draft. Gani contributed to data interpretation, critically reviewed the manuscript, and refined the theoretical and methodological content. Devi Sela Eka supervised the overall research process, provided academic guidance throughout the study, and reviewed and edited the manuscript to improve its intellectual content. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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