



Building Spirituality from an Early Age in the Digital Era: Innovative Strategies for Islamic Religious Education

Elsa Anjar Martiana^{1*}, Fajar Syarif², Ergun Yildirim³

^{1,2}*Pascasarjana Institut Ilmu Al-Qur'an (IIQ) Jakarta, Indonesia*

³*Social Work Departement, Yalova Universitesi Turkiye, Turkey*

*Corresponding Author: Elsa Anjar Martiana

E-mail: elsa88.anjar@gmail.com

Received: March 19, 2024

Revised: April 22, 2025

Accepted: May 25, 2024

Online: June 30, 2025

ABSTRACT

The digital era has profoundly transformed early childhood education, creating both opportunities and challenges for Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Young children are increasingly exposed to digital media that influences their cognitive, emotional, and moral development from an early age. This condition requires innovative educational strategies that not only enhance religious knowledge but also foster spirituality, moral character, and ethical awareness rooted in Islamic values. This study employs a qualitative literature review approach, analyzing scholarly works published between 2018 and 2023 related to early childhood spirituality, Islamic education, digital literacy, and character education. The findings reveal that effective spiritual development in Islamic early childhood education requires an integrated framework that combines the internalization of *aqidah*, *ibadah*, and *akhlak* with value-based digital literacy, child-centered pedagogy, and character-oriented curriculum design. Furthermore, the success of these strategies depends on strong collaboration among educators, families, and communities, as well as continuous formative evaluation. This study contributes a conceptual foundation for developing spiritually grounded, pedagogically innovative, and contextually responsive Islamic early childhood education in the digital era.

Keywords: *Islamic early childhood education, spirituality development, digital era*

Journal Homepage

<https://ejournaluinmybsk.ecampus.id/index.php/ijecer/index>

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-SA license

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

How to cite:

Martiana, E.A., Syarif, F., Yildirim, E., (2024). Building Spirituality from an Early Age in the Digital Era: Innovative Strategies for Islamic Religious Education. *Indonesian Journal of Early Childhood Educational Research (IJECER)*, 3(1), 85-93.
<https://doi.org/10.31958/ijecer.v3i1.161705>

Published by:

Universitas Islam Negeri Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of the digital ecosystem has fundamentally transformed early childhood education, including Islamic Religious Education. Children today grow up surrounded by digital devices, visual media, and online content that shape their cognitive, emotional, and moral development from an early age. While digital technology offers opportunities for interactive learning and access to educational resources, it also exposes children to values and information that may not align with Islamic teachings. Therefore, Islamic early childhood education is increasingly required to go beyond the transmission of religious knowledge and actively foster spirituality, moral character, and ethical awareness in a holistic and contextual manner (Hasanah, 2023; Nasruddin et al., 2021).

Spirituality in early childhood occupies a central position in Islamic education, as it forms the foundation for the development of faith, emotional self-regulation, and moral

sensitivity. In the Islamic perspective, spirituality is closely connected to the internalization of *tawhid*, the practice of worship, and the cultivation of noble character (*akhlak karimah*) through daily habits and meaningful experiences. In the digital era, however, children face increasing challenges in managing attention, interpreting information, and filtering external influences. These conditions highlight the need for spiritual education that equips children not only with religious understanding but also with the capacity to navigate digital environments in ways that remain rooted in Islamic values (Mubasyaroh, 2016; Nugraha, 2020).

Recent literature emphasizes the importance of integrating Islamic Religious Education with digital literacy in early childhood settings. Digital literacy involves the ability to understand and interpret images, texts, and videos, to express ideas through media, and to evaluate information critically. When aligned with Islamic learning content such as *aqidah*, worship practices, daily prayers, and moral education digital literacy can function as a means to strengthen children's faith and character rather than merely enhancing technical skills. Such integration supports holistic learning that is relevant to children's everyday experiences within digitally mediated families and communities (F. F. Hasanah, 2023; Isnaeni & Suryadilaga, 2020).

From a pedagogical standpoint, value-based learning models grounded in Islamic educational tradition remain highly relevant for early childhood education in the digital era. Approaches such as *Uswatun Hasanah* (exemplary role modeling), habituation, storytelling, and consistent moral reinforcement have been widely recognized as effective strategies for internalizing religious values. These approaches align with modern early childhood education principles that emphasize child-centered learning, inclusivity, and character formation. When supported by appropriate and ethically guided use of digital media, such pedagogical models can enhance children's engagement while preserving the spiritual essence of Islamic education (Nugraha, 2020; Sit & Nurmawati, 2019).

Based on these considerations, this article aims to develop a conceptual framework and identify innovative strategies for fostering spirituality in early childhood within the context of the digital era. The discussion focuses on three interconnected dimensions: (1) the cultivation of Islamic values and moral character, (2) the integration of value-based digital literacy, and (3) the design of curricula and learning methodologies that are responsive to technological and media developments. By synthesizing relevant literature published between 2018 and 2023, this study seeks to contribute to the discourse on Islamic early childhood education that is spiritually grounded, pedagogically innovative, and responsive to contemporary digital challenges (F. F. Hasanah, 2023; Nasruddin et al., 2021).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design using a literature review approach to examine strategies for fostering spirituality in early childhood Islamic education within the digital era. The literature reviewed consists of scholarly journal articles, books, and research reports published between 2018 and 2023 that address key themes such as early childhood spirituality, Islamic Religious Education, digital literacy, value-based learning, and the role of family and community in early childhood education. Sources were selected through a systematic search of academic databases and institutional repositories using relevant

keywords, including *Islamic early childhood education*, *spirituality development*, *digital literacy*, and *character education*. Only peer-reviewed and academically credible sources relevant to the research focus were included to ensure the validity and reliability of the data.

The data analysis was conducted through a thematic analysis process, involving stages of data reduction, categorization, and synthesis. Relevant findings from the selected literature were analyzed to identify recurring concepts, theoretical perspectives, and practical strategies related to the integration of spirituality and digital literacy in Islamic early childhood education. The results of the analysis were then synthesized to construct a conceptual framework that highlights innovative and context-responsive strategies for spiritual development in the digital era. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of existing research trends while providing analytical insights to support the formulation of pedagogical and curricular recommendations for Islamic early childhood education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conceptualization of Spirituality in Islamic Early Childhood Education

The findings of the literature review indicate that spirituality in Islamic early childhood education is consistently conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing faith (*aqidah*), worship practices (*ibadah*), and moral character (*akhlak*). Spirituality is not understood merely as ritual compliance, but as an internalized awareness of divine presence that shapes children's emotions, behaviors, and social interactions. Several studies emphasize that early childhood is a critical period for spiritual development, as children are highly receptive to values transmitted through habituation, emotional attachment, and role modelling (Mubasyaroh, 2016; Sit & Nurmawati, 2019). This understanding aligns with Islamic educational philosophy, which views spiritual formation as a gradual process rooted in lived experience rather than abstract instruction.

In the context of the digital era, the literature highlights a shift in how spirituality must be cultivated. Children's exposure to digital media from an early age introduces new cognitive and emotional stimuli that may influence their moral reasoning and attention patterns. As a result, spirituality is increasingly framed as a protective and guiding force that enables children to navigate digital environments without losing ethical orientation (Isnaeni & Suryadilaga, 2020; Udin et al., 2022). Rather than rejecting technology outright, scholars argue for the integration of spiritual values into children's interactions with digital tools, ensuring that faith-based principles remain central to their developmental experiences (Hasanah et al., 2023; Robinson, 2020).

Moreover, spirituality in Islamic early childhood education is closely linked to the development of emotional regulation and social responsibility. Studies indicate that children who are guided through spiritual practices such as daily prayers, expressions of gratitude, and respectful behavior toward others tend to demonstrate higher levels of empathy and self-control. These traits are particularly important in digital contexts, where impulsive behavior and reduced face-to-face interaction are common concerns (Nasruddin et al., 2021). Thus, spirituality functions not only as a religious objective but also as a foundational element of holistic child development.

Digital Era Challenges to Spiritual Development in Early Childhood

The literature reveals that the digital era presents complex challenges to the spiritual development of young children. One prominent issue is excessive screen exposure, which can reduce opportunities for reflective practices, interpersonal interaction, and embodied religious experiences. Several studies note that prolonged engagement with digital media may contribute to shortened attention spans and decreased sensitivity to moral cues, potentially weakening children's capacity for spiritual reflection (Nugraha, 2020). These conditions necessitate deliberate educational interventions to balance digital engagement with meaningful spiritual activities.

Another significant challenge identified is the value-neutral or value-conflicting nature of much digital content accessible to children. Without proper guidance, children may encounter messages that normalize consumerism, aggression, or individualism, which contrast with Islamic ethical teachings. Scholars emphasize that early childhood educators and parents play a crucial role in mediating children's digital experiences by contextualizing content and reinforcing Islamic values through discussion and example (Abubakar et al., 2023; Nur'aena, 2023). This mediation is essential to prevent passive consumption of content that may undermine spiritual formation.

Furthermore, the digital divide among educational institutions and families contributes to unequal implementation of spiritually oriented digital learning. Differences in infrastructure, teacher digital literacy, and parental involvement affect how effectively technology can be integrated into Islamic early childhood education. Studies highlight that inadequate teacher preparation often results in superficial use of digital media that prioritizes entertainment over value-based learning (Nasruddin et al., 2021). These disparities underscore the importance of capacity building and contextual adaptation in developing spiritually responsive digital education strategies.

Integration of Value-Based Digital Literacy in Islamic Early Childhood Education

One of the most prominent findings of the literature review is the growing emphasis on value-based digital literacy as a core component of Islamic early childhood education. Digital literacy is no longer defined solely as technical competence but as the ability to interpret, evaluate, and use digital content in ethically responsible ways. In Islamic contexts, this competence is closely linked to the internalization of faith-based values, ensuring that children understand digital media as tools that can support learning and worship rather than distractions from spiritual growth (Hasanah, 2023).

Research indicates that integrating digital literacy with Islamic content enhances learning relevance and engagement. For example, digital storytelling, animated Qur'anic stories, and interactive prayer guides allow children to experience religious narratives in visually and emotionally engaging formats. These approaches support multimodal learning while reinforcing spiritual messages embedded in the content (Jabeen et al., 2023; Marlatt, 2021). When guided appropriately, such media can strengthen children's emotional connection to religious values rather than diminishing them.

However, the literature also cautions against uncritical adoption of digital tools. Without intentional pedagogical design, digital media risks becoming a passive consumption activity that lacks reflective depth. Scholars argue that value-based digital literacy requires

active facilitation by educators who frame digital experiences within moral discussions and real-life applications (Nasruddin et al., 2021). This pedagogical stance positions technology as a means to deepen spiritual understanding rather than an end in itself.

Pedagogical Models for Fostering Spirituality in the Digital Era

The review identifies several pedagogical models that are particularly effective for fostering spirituality in Islamic early childhood education within digital contexts. Among these, *Uswatun Hasanah* (exemplary role modeling) emerges as a consistently emphasized approach. Teachers' behavior, language, and interactions serve as powerful transmitters of spiritual values, especially when children observe consistency between digital content and adult conduct (Sit & Nurmawati, 2019). This approach reinforces the notion that spirituality is learned through lived example rather than instruction alone.

Habituation-based learning is another widely supported model. Daily routines such as beginning activities with prayers, practicing gratitude, and demonstrating respectful online behavior help children internalize spiritual values through repetition. Studies suggest that when these routines are integrated with digital activities—such as reciting short prayers before using educational apps—children develop a sense of spiritual continuity across learning contexts (Alfiyanto, Hidayati, et al., 2022; Alfiyanto, Ibrahim, et al., 2022). This integration prevents the compartmentalization of religious practices and digital engagement.

Additionally, storytelling and play-based learning are highlighted as effective strategies for embedding spiritual values in child-centered ways. Digital storytelling platforms allow educators to present moral narratives that resonate with children's imagination while conveying Islamic ethical principles. Research indicates that such approaches promote emotional engagement and moral reasoning, particularly when followed by guided reflection and discussion (Mubasyaroh, 2016). These findings affirm the compatibility of traditional Islamic pedagogies with innovative digital methods.

Curriculum Design Oriented Toward Spiritual and Character Development

Curriculum design plays a critical role in ensuring that spirituality remains central to Islamic early childhood education in the digital era. The literature emphasizes the importance of integrating *aqidah*, *ibadah*, and *akhlak* into thematic and experiential learning frameworks. Rather than treating religious instruction as a separate subject, scholars advocate for embedding spiritual values across all learning activities, including digital-based tasks (Assa'idi, 2021). This approach supports coherence between spiritual objectives and children's everyday experiences.

Studies also highlight the relevance of character-oriented curricula that align with broader educational reforms emphasizing holistic development. By focusing on values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, and discipline, Islamic early childhood curricula can address both spiritual and social dimensions of development. Digital tools, when aligned with these goals, provide opportunities for collaborative learning and ethical decision-making in simulated environments (Nasruddin et al., 2021). This alignment ensures that technology use reinforces rather than dilutes moral education.

However, effective curriculum implementation requires flexibility and contextual sensitivity. The literature notes that rigid curricula may fail to accommodate variations in institutional capacity, cultural context, and technological access. As such, curriculum

frameworks should provide guiding principles rather than prescriptive content, allowing educators to adapt strategies based on local needs while maintaining core spiritual objectives (Alfiyanto et al., 2023). This balance is essential for sustainable implementation across diverse early childhood settings.

Role of Family and Community in Supporting Spiritual Development

The findings consistently underscore the central role of family and community in supporting children's spiritual development, particularly in digital contexts. Families are described as the primary environment where spiritual values are modeled and reinforced through daily interactions. Parental involvement in guiding children's digital media use significantly influences the effectiveness of spiritually oriented educational strategies (Hasanah, 2023). Without alignment between home and school, children may receive conflicting messages regarding values and behavior.

Community institutions, including Islamic early childhood centers and local religious organizations, also contribute to creating supportive ecosystems for spiritual development. Collaborative programs that involve parents, teachers, and community leaders help reinforce consistent value transmission across contexts. Studies indicate that such collaboration enhances children's sense of belonging and moral accountability (Riley, 2019). In digital contexts, community-based initiatives can also provide shared guidelines for ethical technology use.

Despite their importance, family and community engagement faces practical challenges. Variations in parental digital literacy and time availability can limit consistent supervision and value reinforcement. The literature suggests that parent education programs focused on value-based digital literacy can help address these challenges (Isnaeni & Suryadilaga, 2020). These programs empower parents to serve as effective role models and facilitators of spiritual learning in digital environments.

Evaluation of Spiritual Development in Islamic Early Childhood Education

Evaluating spiritual development in early childhood education presents methodological challenges due to its abstract and affective nature. The literature emphasizes the need for multidimensional assessment approaches that capture cognitive understanding, emotional disposition, and observable behavior. Rather than relying on standardized tests, scholars recommend qualitative indicators such as behavioral observation, reflective dialogue, and parental feedback (Nugraha, 2020). These methods align with the developmental characteristics of young children.

Digital tools offer new possibilities for documenting and monitoring spiritual development. For instance, digital portfolios can record children's participation in religious activities, reflections, and moral behavior over time. When used ethically, such tools provide valuable insights for educators and parents without reducing spirituality to quantifiable metrics (Mulang & Putra, 2023). However, careful consideration must be given to privacy and data protection, especially when working with young children.

Continuous evaluation is also essential for improving program quality. Feedback loops involving educators, parents, and administrators help identify strengths and areas for improvement in spiritually oriented digital education. Studies emphasize that evaluation should be formative rather than punitive, focusing on growth and development rather than

comparison (Nasruddin et al., 2021). This approach supports reflective practice and sustained innovation in Islamic early childhood education.

Table 1. Synthesis of Key Strategies for Fostering Spirituality in the Digital Era

Dimension	Key Strategies	Supporting Literature (2016–2023)
Spiritual Foundations	Internalization of <i>aqidah</i> , <i>ibadah</i> , and <i>akhlaq</i> through daily practices	Mubasyaroh (2016); Sit & Nurmawati (2019)
Digital Literacy	Value-based interpretation and ethical use of digital media	Hasanah (2023); Isnaeni & Suryadilaga (2020)
Pedagogy	Role modeling, habituation, storytelling, play-based learning	Mubasyaroh (2016); Nugraha (2020)
Curriculum	Integrated, character-oriented, and flexible design	Hasanah (2023); Nasruddin et al (2021)
Family & Community	Parental guidance, school–home collaboration	Hasanah (2023); Isnaeni & Suryadilaga (2020)
Evaluation	Qualitative, formative, and holistic assessment	Nasruddin et al (2021); Nugraha (2020)

CONCLUSION

This literature review demonstrates that fostering spirituality in early childhood within the digital era requires an integrated and holistic approach to Islamic early childhood education. Spiritual development cannot be separated from the cultivation of *aqidah*, *ibadah*, and *akhlaq*, nor can it be detached from children’s increasing engagement with digital media. The findings indicate that value-based digital literacy, spiritually grounded pedagogical models, and character-oriented curricula are essential to ensuring that technology functions as a supportive tool rather than a disruptive force. When spiritual values are consistently embedded in learning experiences, digital environments can be transformed into meaningful spaces for moral growth and religious internalization.

Furthermore, the success of spiritually oriented Islamic early childhood education in the digital era is highly dependent on synergy among educational institutions, families, and the wider community. Teachers’ exemplary conduct, parental guidance in children’s digital engagement, and continuous formative evaluation collectively strengthen the internalization of spiritual values across learning contexts. This study underscores the importance of flexible curriculum design, sustained professional development for educators, and family-centered support systems to address diverse institutional capacities and digital challenges. Future research is encouraged to explore empirical and longitudinal evidence on the long-term impact of spiritually integrated digital learning on children’s moral and religious development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to all scholars and researchers whose works have contributed significantly to the development of this article. Their studies on Islamic early childhood education, spirituality, character education, and digital literacy

provided essential theoretical foundations and empirical insights that enriched the analysis presented in this paper.

Appreciation is also extended to academic colleagues and reviewers for their constructive feedback and scholarly discussions, which helped refine the structure and arguments of this article. Finally, the author acknowledges the support of educational institutions and families involved in Islamic early childhood education, whose dedication to nurturing children's spiritual and moral development continues to inspire ongoing research in this field.

REFERENCES

- Abubakar, B., Sanusi, Razali, Yeniningsih, T. K., & Mujiburrahman. (2023). Parenting Education in Islamic Families within the Framework of Family Resilience in Aceh, Indonesia. *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22373/sjkh.v7i2.17901>
- Alfiyanto, A., Azhar, Ikhwan, M., & Wahyudi, D. (2023). PAI Learning Model Based on NeNeMo Principles, Simple, Equal, and Sustainable in the Implementation of Islamic Character Education in Tulang Bawang Barat District Elementary Schools. *Edumaspul - Jurnal Pendidikan*, 7(1), 1090–1092. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33487/edumaspul.v7i1.5848>
- Alfiyanto, A., Hidayati, F., & Ilma, R. (2022). Implementation of Counseling Guidance in Shaping Students' Spiritual Intelligence at YPI Tunas Bangsa Palembang High School. *International Conference on Islamic Guidance and Counseling*, 2. <https://vicon.uin-suka.ac.id/index.php/icigc/article/view/701>
- Alfiyanto, A., Ibrahim, I., Mustika, A., & ... (2022). Pelaksanaan Bimbingan Konseling Dalam Membentuk Kecerdasan Spiritual Siswa. *Edumaspul: Jurnal* <https://ummaspul.e-journal.id/maspuljr/article/view/3072>
- Assa'idi, S. D. (2021). Religious education curriculum in Indonesian Islamic university in the digital age: Incepting thematic alquran of Fadlur Rahman. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 12(3).
- Hasanah, F. F. (2023). Integrasi Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Pengembangan Literasi Digital Untuk Anak Usia Dini. *Albanna*, 3(2), 83–100. <https://doi.org/10.24260/albanna.v3i2.1984>
- Hasanah, I., Hefniy, & Zaini, A. W. (2023). Strengthening Brand Identity: Embracing Local Wisdom through Character Education Management. *IJESS*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33650/ijess.v2i2.3435>
- Isnaeni, R. F., & Suryadilaga, M. A. (2020). Pendidikan Hadis Untuk Anak Usia Dini. *Jurnal Studi Hadis Nusantara*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.24235/jshn.v2i1.6745>
- Jabeen, S., Li, X., Amin, M. S., Bourahla, O., Li, S., & Jabbar, A. (2023). A review on methods and applications in multimodal deep learning. *ACM Transactions on Multimedia Computing, Communications and Applications*, 19(2). <https://doi.org/doi/abs/10.1145/3545572>
- Marlatt, R. (2021). *Literacies to grow and teach: Cultivating a spirit of inquiry through multimodal text*
-

sets.

- Mubasyaroh, M. (2016). Model of Religious Study and Moral Values in TK Putra Harapan Nalumsari Jepara. *Ta Dib*, 21(2), 191–200. <https://doi.org/10.19109/td.v21i2.1029>
- Mulang, H., & Putra, A. H. P. K. (2023). Exploring the Implementation of Ethical and Spiritual Values in High School Education: A Case Study in Makassar, Indonesia. *Golden Ratio of Social Science and Education*. <https://doi.org/10.52970/grsse.v3i1.105>
- Nasruddin, M., Sriwinarsih, E., Rukhiyah, Y., Supriyanti, S., & Khasanah, N. (2021). Pengaruh Pendidikan Agama Islam Di Sekolah Terhadap Perilaku Anak Di Rumah. *As-Sibyan Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 6(1), 77–88. <https://doi.org/10.32678/as-sibyan.v6i1.4592>
- Nugraha, E. (2020). Implementasi Program Tahfizh Qur'an Di PAUD Inklusif Dengan Model HOTS. *As-Sibyan Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 5(2), 95–106. <https://doi.org/10.32678/as-sibyan.v5i2.3569>
- Nur'aena, L. (2023). Transforming Children's Character Education in Islamic Da'wah in the Era of Social Media. *Jurnal Dakwah: Media Komunikasi Dan Dakwah*, 24(2). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14421/jd.2023.24204>
- Riley, K. (2019). Agency and belonging: What transformative actions can schools take to help create a sense of place and belonging? *Educational and Child Psychology*, 36(4).
- Robinson, C. (2020). To be 'formed' and 'informed': early years' educators' perspectives of spirituality and its affordance in faith-based early learning centres. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 25(3–4). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/1364436X.2020.1848810>
- Sit, M., & Nurmawati, N. (2019). Model Pengembangan Karakter Berbasis Mind Mapping Pada Anak Usia Dini. *Intiqad Jurnal Agama Dan Pendidikan Islam*, 11(2), 264–286. <https://doi.org/10.30596/intiqad.v11i2.3563>
- Udin, T., Alfiyanto, A., Hastuti, A., & ... (2022). Improving Children's Moral Values Through Al-Barokah Madrasah in Kota Daro 1 Village, Rantau Panjang District, Ogan Ilir Regency. ... *Dan Konseling*
-

Copyright Holder :

© Martiana et al. (2025).

First Publication Right :

© Indonesian Journal of Early Childhood Educational Research

This article is under:

