



Innovative Strategies for Building Children's Spirituality: Reconstructing Islamic Religious Education in the Metaverse Ecosystem

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Received: September 17, 2025	Revised: October 21, 2025	Accepted: November 24, 2025	Online: December 30, 2025
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ABSTRACT

The post-digital transformation of education has fundamentally reshaped learning ecosystems, positioning digital technologies as integral to pedagogical practices, identity formation, and value construction. Within this context, the emergence of the metaverse introduces immersive virtual environments that profoundly influence children's spiritual development. While virtual culture presents risks such as identity fragmentation, diminished reflective capacity, and the erosion of traditional spiritual practices, it also offers opportunities for innovative, experiential, and relational learning. This study employs a qualitative literature review to examine the intersection of post-digital education, children's spirituality, and the metaverse, with particular attention to the reconstruction of Islamic Religious Education. Drawing on interdisciplinary scholarship in education, digital culture, spirituality, and identity studies, the article synthesizes key challenges and pedagogical possibilities arising from immersive technologies. The findings suggest that a reconstructed approach to religious education grounded in ethical governance, experiential learning, and cultural sensitivity—can function as a strategic framework for nurturing children's spirituality within metaverse ecosystems. The study argues that fostering spiritual well-being in post-digital contexts requires not resistance to technological innovation, but intentional pedagogical design that aligns immersive digital environments with transcendent values and holistic human development.

Keywords: *Post-Digital Education, Children's Spirituality, Metaverse*

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

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How to cite: Martiana, E.A., Slamet, M.U.A., Mustofa, T.A., (2024). Innovative Strategies for Building Children's Spirituality: Reconstructing Islamic Religious Education in the Metaverse Ecosystem. *Indonesian Journal of Early Childhood Educational Research (IJECER)*, 3(2), 188-197.

<https://doi.org/10.31958/ijecer.v3i1.16706>

Published by: Universitas Islam Negeri Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary educational landscape has undergone a profound transformation as digital technologies have become deeply embedded in pedagogical practices, institutional cultures, and policy frameworks. The transition from a digital to a post-digital condition signals not the end of digitality, but rather its normalization as an inseparable element of social, material, and epistemic life. Post-digital education emphasizes the convergence of analogue and digital domains, the entanglement of human and non-human actors, and the growing influence of political-economic structures such as platformization and datafication on learning processes (Jandrić & Knox, 2021; Knox, 2019). These shifts demand renewed attention to how education shapes not only cognitive outcomes but also values, identities, and meaning-making practices in increasingly immersive digital environments.

Within this post-digital ecosystem, concerns have emerged regarding the spiritual and moral development of children, particularly as virtual cultures reshape patterns of interaction, attention, and identity formation. Empirical studies indicate that excessive engagement with digital media may disrupt traditional family rituals, weaken intergenerational transmission of values, and contribute to what some scholars describe as a “spiritual crisis” in parent–child relationships (Duisenbayev et al., 2021; Sirotkin et al., 2021). At the same time, digital environments can mediate children’s encounters with cultural narratives, ethical norms, and spiritual symbols, producing ambivalent effects that range from alienation and identity fragmentation to new forms of meaning construction and community support (Gur & Reich, 2023; Semchuk, 2021). These dynamics highlight the urgency of addressing spirituality as a core dimension of education in virtual and post-digital contexts.

The emergence of the metaverse further intensifies these challenges by introducing immersive, three-dimensional environments in which identity and values are actively performed, negotiated, and reconstructed. In the metaverse, children and learners are not merely consumers of content but participants who embody avatars, engage in narrative-driven interactions, and internalize norms embedded in platform architectures and governance systems. Drawing on dramaturgical and media theory perspectives, scholars argue that identity in such spaces becomes performative and potentially hyperreal, blurring boundaries between authentic selfhood and digitally constructed personas (Wang, 2023; Wu & Wenxiang, 2023). Consequently, the metaverse functions as a powerful socio-cultural arena where ethical orientations, spiritual sensibilities, and value systems may be cultivated or eroded, depending on how these environments are designed and regulated.

From an educational standpoint, the post-digital condition calls for pedagogical frameworks that move beyond instrumental uses of technology toward ecologically and ethically grounded approaches. Concepts such as networked learning and ecopedagogy emphasize relationality among learners, technologies, communities, and environments, while foregrounding sustainability, social justice, and cultural sensitivity (Hodgson & McConnell, 2019; Jandrić & Knox, 2021). Research also underscores the importance of leadership, curriculum design, and digital literacy in shaping learning ecosystems that support holistic development, including moral and spiritual dimensions (Awodiji et al., 2023; Lacković, 2020). However, much of this literature remains focused on higher education or general digital competencies, leaving gaps in understanding how spirituality—particularly children’s spirituality—can be meaningfully addressed within immersive virtual environments such as the metaverse.

In response to these gaps, this article argues for a reconstruction of religious education—specifically Islamic Religious Education—as a strategic framework for nurturing children’s spirituality in the metaverse era. By synthesizing post-digital theory, studies on children’s spirituality in virtual cultures, and emerging scholarship on identity and values in the metaverse, the article proposes innovative, ethically grounded strategies for spiritual education that are context-sensitive and future-oriented. Such a reconstruction is not merely adaptive but transformative, positioning religious education as a critical mediator between technological innovation and the preservation of transcendent values, moral agency, and spiritual well-being in the lives of children navigating post-digital and metaverse ecosystems.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative literature review approach to examine the transformation of educational ecosystems in the post-digital era and its implications for children's spirituality and religious education within metaverse environments. Relevant scholarly sources were identified through academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ERIC. The search strategy utilized key terms including *post-digital education*, *children's spirituality*, *virtual culture*, *metaverse and identity*, *digital religious education*, and *Islamic religious education*. Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and conference proceedings published primarily between 2018 and 2024 were prioritized to ensure conceptual relevance and theoretical currency. The inclusion criteria focused on works that explicitly addressed educational theory, digital or post-digital learning environments, spirituality or values education, and identity formation in immersive or virtual contexts.

The collected literature was analyzed using a thematic and critical synthesis method. Sources were first categorized according to major analytical themes, including post-digital learning paradigms, spiritual development in digital cultures, identity and value construction in the metaverse, and pedagogical strategies for religious education. Subsequently, a comparative analysis was conducted to identify convergences, tensions, and gaps across disciplinary perspectives, particularly between educational technology studies and religious or moral education scholarship. This analytical process enabled the formulation of a conceptual framework that integrates post-digital theory with spiritually oriented educational strategies, providing a theoretically grounded basis for reconstructing Islamic Religious Education within emerging metaverse ecosystems.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Post-Digital Educational Ecosystem and the Reconfiguration of Learning Spaces

The findings of this literature review indicate that the post-digital educational ecosystem is characterized by the dissolution of boundaries between online and offline learning spaces. Digital technologies are no longer positioned as supplementary tools but function as constitutive elements of pedagogical practice, institutional governance, and knowledge production. Scholars emphasize that post-digital education reflects a condition in which learning is shaped by the entanglement of human actors, technological infrastructures, and socio-material contexts (Jandrić & Knox, 2021; Knox, 2019). This condition challenges traditional assumptions about where and how education occurs, shifting attention toward hybrid and immersive environments such as the metaverse.

Within this ecosystem, learning is increasingly mediated through platforms that embed specific values, economic logics, and modes of interaction. Platformization influences curriculum design, assessment metrics, and student engagement, often prioritizing efficiency, data extraction, and performance indicators (Knox, 2019). As a result, educational experiences risk becoming fragmented and instrumentalized, with limited attention to affective, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. These tendencies raise critical questions about the capacity of post-digital systems to support holistic child development.

From a pedagogical perspective, post-digital learning foregrounds networked and relational approaches to education. Networked learning theory emphasizes the importance of connections among learners, educators, knowledge resources, and communities, situating learning within broader socio-historical and material conditions (Hodgson & McConnell, 2019). Such perspectives align with ecopedagogical approaches that highlight sustainability, responsibility, and the interdependence between humans and technological environments. However, the integration of these principles into formal education remains uneven, particularly in contexts concerned with moral and spiritual education.

The literature suggests that immersive technologies, including virtual and augmented reality, intensify the experiential dimension of learning. These technologies offer opportunities to create embodied and affective learning experiences that may deepen engagement and meaning-making (Jandrić & Knox, 2021). Yet, without intentional pedagogical design, immersive environments can also amplify distraction, simulation without reflection, and value-neutral content consumption. This dual potential underscores the need for normative frameworks that guide the ethical and spiritual orientation of post-digital education.

Virtual Culture and the Challenge of Children's Spiritual Degradation

A recurring theme across the reviewed literature is the concern that virtual culture may contribute to the degradation of children's spirituality. Spirituality, understood as the capacity to seek meaning, transcendence, and ethical orientation, is deeply shaped by relational and ritual practices within families and communities. Digitalization alters these practices by restructuring time, attention, and modes of interaction, often privileging screen-mediated engagement over embodied communal activities (Sirotkin et al., 2021). Consequently, children's exposure to virtual culture may weaken traditional pathways of spiritual socialization.

Several studies highlight the phenomenon of diminished attention and increased dependency on digital media among children. Excessive internet use and digital gaming have been associated with reduced reflective capacity, emotional regulation challenges, and disruptions to contemplative practices that are central to spiritual development (Semchuk, 2021). These patterns are particularly concerning during early childhood, a critical period for the formation of values, habits, and identity. Without adequate guidance, digital environments may prioritize instant gratification over deeper existential inquiry.

Changes in family dynamics also emerge as a significant factor influencing children's spirituality. Research indicates that digital media often displaces shared rituals, storytelling, and intergenerational dialogue that traditionally transmit spiritual and moral values (Duisenbayev et al., 2021). Parents may struggle to mediate their children's digital experiences, leading to gaps between familial values and online norms. This disjunction can generate confusion and identity fragmentation in children navigating multiple value systems.

Despite these risks, the literature does not portray digital culture as inherently detrimental to spirituality. Several authors argue that virtual spaces can serve as resources for spiritual learning when intentionally designed and contextually grounded. Online religious content, virtual communities, and digital storytelling can support spiritual exploration and

coping, particularly for families facing social or geographic constraints (Gur & Reich, 2023; Rodrigues et al., 2023). The challenge, therefore, lies in balancing digital engagement with reflective, relational, and culturally sensitive practices.

Metaverse as an Immersive Space for Identity and Value Formation

The metaverse represents a significant evolution of virtual culture, offering immersive, three-dimensional environments where identity and values are actively constructed. Unlike conventional digital platforms, the metaverse enables users to embody avatars, engage in real-time interactions, and participate in shared narratives. Scholars drawing on dramaturgical theory suggest that identity in such spaces becomes performative, shaped by impression management, symbolic representation, and social norms embedded within platforms (Wang, 2023). For children, this performativity can profoundly influence self-concept and moral orientation.

The literature highlights that avatar-based interaction allows for experimentation with identity, including aspects of gender, culture, and social roles. While such experimentation can foster creativity and empathy, it also raises ethical concerns related to authenticity, responsibility, and moral accountability (Wu & Wenxiang, 2023). The distinction between the “real self” and the “virtual self” may become blurred, particularly for younger users who are still developing stable identities. This ambiguity necessitates educational interventions that promote reflective engagement with digital identities.

Values within the metaverse are not neutral but are shaped by platform governance, economic incentives, and community norms. Studies emphasize that issues such as digital integrity, respect, and justice must be explicitly addressed to prevent harmful behaviors and exclusion (Shim & Kim, 2023). Without ethical scaffolding, immersive environments may normalize aggression, consumerism, or superficial social relations. Conversely, well-designed metaverse spaces can cultivate collaboration, empathy, and shared responsibility.

From an educational standpoint, the metaverse offers opportunities to integrate narrative-based and experiential learning. Research on metaverse-based education suggests that immersive storytelling and collaborative problem-solving can enhance engagement and deepen understanding of complex concepts (Dreamson & Park, 2023; Sánchez-López et al., 2022). When aligned with moral and spiritual objectives, such environments may support transformative learning experiences. However, this potential remains underexplored in the context of religious and spiritual education for children.

Reconstructing Islamic Religious Education in Post-Digital and Metaverse Contexts

The reviewed literature underscores the need to reconstruct Islamic Religious Education (IRE) to remain relevant within post-digital and metaverse ecosystems. Traditional approaches to IRE have often emphasized cognitive transmission of doctrinal knowledge, with limited integration of experiential and contextual learning. In immersive digital environments, such approaches risk becoming disconnected from learners' lived realities. Reconstruction thus involves reorienting IRE toward holistic spiritual formation that engages cognition, emotion, and practice.

A reconstructed IRE framework must account for the socio-material conditions of post-digital learning. This includes recognizing the influence of platforms, algorithms, and digital labor on educational experiences (Knox, 2019). Educators are called to critically engage with these structures, guiding learners to reflect on the ethical implications of technology use. Such critical digital consciousness aligns with Islamic ethical principles that emphasize accountability, balance, and intentionality.

The literature also points to the evolving role of educators in post-digital religious education. Teachers are increasingly positioned as facilitators and moral guides rather than sole authorities of knowledge. In metaverse environments, this role expands to include curating immersive experiences, moderating interactions, and fostering reflective dialogue. Professional development that integrates technological competence with spiritual and ethical literacy is therefore essential (Awodiji et al., 2023).

Importantly, reconstruction does not imply abandoning tradition but recontextualizing it. Islamic spiritual practices, narratives, and values can be translated into immersive formats that resonate with contemporary learners while preserving theological integrity. Virtual simulations of historical events, ethical dilemmas, and communal rituals may offer meaningful pathways for spiritual engagement. Such innovations require careful pedagogical design to avoid trivialization or misrepresentation of religious content.

Innovative Strategies for Nurturing Children's Spirituality in the Metaverse

One of the key findings of this review is the emergence of innovative strategies that leverage immersive technologies to support spiritual development. Experiential learning approaches, such as virtual simulations of moral decision-making or reflective journeys, can engage children emotionally and cognitively. These strategies align with constructivist and experiential learning theories, emphasizing active participation and meaning-making (Jandrić & Knox, 2021). When grounded in ethical frameworks, immersive experiences may deepen spiritual awareness.

Gamification also appears as a promising strategy for integrating spirituality into digital learning. Game-based learning can foster motivation, collaboration, and ethical reasoning by embedding values within narrative structures and challenges (Dhakar, 2018; Toquero et al., 2021). In the context of religious education, games may simulate scenarios that encourage empathy, responsibility, and self-reflection. However, scholars caution that gamification must avoid reducing spirituality to mere rewards or competition.

Another significant strategy involves strengthening collaboration among schools, families, and digital platforms. The literature emphasizes that children's spirituality is shaped across multiple contexts, requiring coordinated efforts to align values and practices (Gur & Reich, 2023). Parental involvement in guiding digital engagement is particularly crucial, as families provide the primary context for spiritual socialization. Educational institutions can support this process through culturally sensitive resources and communication.

Ethical governance and supervision of metaverse environments are also critical. Scholars highlight the need for clear guidelines on privacy, safety, and appropriate conduct to protect children's well-being (Wu & Wenxiang, 2023). Educational stakeholders must advocate for child-centered design principles that prioritize developmental and spiritual needs

over commercial interests. Such governance is integral to creating environments conducive to spiritual growth.

Synthesis of Key Findings

To clarify the relationships among key themes identified in the literature, Table 1 presents a synthesis of challenges, opportunities, and educational implications related to children's spirituality in post-digital and metaverse contexts.

Table 1. Synthesis of Literature on Children's Spirituality in Post-Digital and Metaverse Education

Dimension	Key Challenges	Potential Opportunities	Educational Implications
Post-digital learning	Platformization, instrumentalization	Networked and relational learning	Holistic curriculum design
Virtual culture	Attention disruption, identity fragmentation	Access to spiritual resources	Digital-spiritual literacy
Metaverse environments	Ethical ambiguity, hyperreality	Immersive learning	Reflective pedagogical design
Religious education	Cognitive reductionism	Experiential spirituality	Curriculum reconstruction
Governance and policy	Commercial dominance	Child-centered regulation	Ethical and inclusive frameworks

The synthesis illustrates that challenges and opportunities are deeply intertwined. Addressing spiritual degradation requires not the rejection of digital innovation but its ethical and pedagogical reorientation. Educational strategies must integrate technological affordances with cultural and spiritual sensitivity.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research

The findings of this review carry important implications for educational policy and practice. Policymakers are urged to consider the spiritual and ethical dimensions of digital transformation, moving beyond narrow performance metrics. Policies that support inclusive, sustainable, and value-oriented digital education are essential to mitigate the risks of post-digital environments (Knox, 2019). Such policies should also address environmental and social impacts of digital infrastructures.

For practitioners, the reconstruction of religious education entails developing competencies that bridge technology and spirituality. Teacher education programs must equip educators with skills in digital pedagogy, ethical reasoning, and cultural sensitivity. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities can further enhance the effectiveness of spiritual education initiatives.

Future research is needed to empirically examine the long-term effects of immersive digital environments on children's spirituality. Longitudinal and mixed-methods studies may provide deeper insights into how identity, values, and spiritual practices evolve over time.

Additionally, research focusing on diverse cultural and religious contexts will enrich understanding and inform contextually grounded interventions.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the post-digital transformation of educational ecosystems, intensified by the emergence of the metaverse, has fundamentally reshaped the ways children construct identity, values, and spirituality. Immersive virtual environments offer both significant risks and transformative opportunities: while unregulated virtual culture may contribute to attention fragmentation, identity ambiguity, and spiritual degradation, thoughtfully designed digital spaces can facilitate meaningful moral reflection, experiential learning, and spiritual engagement. The findings highlight that spirituality should be recognized as a central dimension of holistic education, rather than a peripheral concern, within post-digital and metaverse-based learning environments.

Furthermore, the reconstruction of Islamic Religious Education emerges as a strategic and ethical response to these challenges. By integrating post-digital pedagogical principles, immersive learning strategies, and culturally grounded spiritual values, religious education can function as a mediating force between technological innovation and transcendent meaning. Such reconstruction requires collaborative efforts among educators, families, policymakers, and platform designers to ensure that metaverse ecosystems are guided by ethical governance, inclusivity, and child-centered values. Ultimately, nurturing children's spirituality in the post-digital era is not a matter of resisting technology, but of consciously shaping its educational and moral trajectories toward human flourishing and spiritual well-being.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to all scholars and researchers whose works in the fields of post-digital education, children's spirituality, virtual culture, and metaverse studies have provided the theoretical foundation for this article. Their critical insights and interdisciplinary perspectives have been invaluable in shaping the conceptual framework and analytical depth of this study. Appreciation is also extended to academic peers and reviewers whose constructive feedback contributed to the refinement of the arguments and structure of the manuscript.

The author also acknowledges the support of educational institutions and professional communities that foster scholarly dialogue on the integration of technology, spirituality, and religious education. Although this research did not receive specific funding from public, commercial, or non-profit sectors, the intellectual environment and access to academic resources played a crucial role in enabling the completion of this study. Any limitations of the analysis remain the sole responsibility of the author.

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