

The Ethical Competence of Islamic Education Teachers in Addressing Moral Decline Among Students in the Digital Age: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The digital age has brought about fundamental changes in society, including the emergence of an increasingly alarming phenomenon of moral degradation among students. This study aims to comprehensively examine the ethical competencies that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers must possess in addressing the phenomenon of moral degradation among students in the digital age through a literature review approach. The method used is a qualitative-descriptive analysis of various scientific literature, national and international journals, as well as relevant academic documents published between 2020 and 2025. The results of the study indicate that the ethical competencies of PAI teachers encompass four main dimensions, namely: (1) exemplary conduct (*uswatun hasanah*) as the most fundamental method of moral education; (2) the teacher's ability as an ethical digital educator; and (3) the teacher's capacity as an innovator of Islamic-values-based learning. This study concludes that the ethical competencies of PAI teachers are not merely supplementary but constitute the core of the entire moral education process for students, particularly in addressing the increasingly complex challenges of the digital age.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology in the 21st century has brought about fundamental changes in various aspects of human life, including the field of education. The integration of technology into learning reflects a strong belief among educators in the benefits of technology for enhancing the learning process, despite concerns regarding infrastructure and student readiness (Mar, 2024). The role of social media in Muslim communities has been found to be beneficial for spreading religious teachings, but it also poses moral risks if not used wisely in accordance with religious values.

One of the most alarming consequences of the digital age is the widespread decline in moral values among students. Social media, which offers a wide range of conveniences, often exposes users to negative content, and unfiltered use of these platforms erodes moral values, empathy, and social interaction (Puspitasari et al., 2025). Even children and teenagers with a limited understanding of religion are easily drawn into extremist narratives on social media (Kambali et al., 2023). This situation is further exacerbated by the lack of moral judgment among today's digital generation. Research conducted by (Yusnita et al., 2023) indicates that the digital technology boom is indeed correlated with increasingly widespread moral degradation, particularly among adolescents and the younger generation. Exposure to negative content, cybercrime, violence, pornography, hate speech, and even a loss of respect for parents and teachers are often linked to the use of digital media without adequate moral guidance. These findings underscore the urgency of a more in-depth study on the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers in this context.

In this context, Islamic Education teachers play a central role as the bulwark and driving force behind the moral renewal of the younger generation. Religious educators are positioned as moral agents who prevent moral deviations and guide students so they do not fall into sin (Nafiudin et al., 2024). Therefore, the moral competence of Islamic Education teachers is not merely an adjunct but rather the core of the entire character education process. The professionalism of Islamic Education teachers significantly influences the development of students' moral character, encompassing pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies. Teachers who possess these competencies can act as moral guides and use technology wisely to instill moral values, strengthen religious identity, and teach digital ethics (Asrofi et al., 2025). This is consistent with the role of Islamic Education teachers as role models who not only impart knowledge but also serve as examples of good character for their students.

Research across various levels of education indicates that the exemplary behavior of Islamic Education teachers is the most effective means of instilling good character; students directly emulate their teachers' honesty, discipline, courtesy, and piety (Dzikri and Hafidz, 2025). However, in this challenging digital age, Islamic Education teachers are required to continually develop and adapt their ethical competencies. Technology is ambivalent; specifically, technological advancements that do not align with adolescents' moral maturity contribute to moral decline, distancing them from religious ideals (Afni, 2023). In this context, Islamic Education teachers are tasked with fostering awareness, responsibility, integrity (honesty), and virtue in digital interactions and digital literacy (Sari and Putra, 2025). Not only technical skills, but also the ability to use, evaluate, and share digital content wisely and responsibly in accordance with Islamic values (Nurpriatna et al., 2025). Integrating values such as *tabayyun* (verification), *amanah* (integrity), and responsibility into digital literacy helps teenagers approach information with honesty and avoid spreading misinformation or engaging in plagiarism (Sholikhah et al., 2025).

Islamic Education teachers do more than just teach; they must also be able to foster Islamic digital character traits (trustworthiness, balance, honesty, and kindness) so that teenagers become wiser, more empathetic, and more responsible on social media (Putra et al., 2025). This statement highlights the need to examine Islamic Education teachers' ethical competencies in addressing students' moral decline in the digital age. Although previous studies have explored teachers' roles and character education, comprehensive literature reviews specifically investigating strategies to strengthen teachers' ethical competencies in responding to students' moral challenges remain limited, indicating a significant gap in existing research and scholarly understanding (Mahesa et al., 2025). However, few studies have specifically focused on the ethical competencies of Islamic Education teachers as the primary variable of their research. Based on the above discussion, this article aims to conduct an in-depth examination of the ethical competencies that PAI teachers must possess in addressing the phenomenon of moral degradation among students in the digital age, through a literature review approach by analyzing various relevant classical and contemporary literature.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research conducted in this journal is a literature review. A literature review is a qualitative research method that involves the collection, processing, analysis, and presentation of books, documents, and articles related to the moral competence of Islamic Education teachers in addressing the moral decline of students in the digital age. The primary data sources used are books and journals containing research on the moral competence of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers in addressing the moral degradation of students in the digital age. Additionally, the secondary data sources used are supporting books and journals related to the moral competence of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers in addressing the moral degradation of students in the digital age. The data were analyzed to identify theories related to the moral competence of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers in addressing the moral degradation of students in the digital age, and the results of the analysis were presented descriptively. Based on the conclusions drawn, this study aims to provide objective conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Ethical Competence Among Islamic Education Teachers from an Islamic Education Perspective

The ethical competence of Islamic Education teachers is an integral part of overall teaching competence. In the national education system, teacher competence encompasses four main dimensions: pedagogical, personal, social, and professional. However, in the context of Islamic education, these four competencies must be grounded in and imbued with Islamic ethical values derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Law No. 14 of 2005 outlines four core competencies for teachers; studies on Islamic Education indicate that in Islamic education, all aspects must be infused with religious and ethical values (personal-religious, social-religious, professional-religious, and pedagogical-religious) (Uljanah et al., 2024).

The cultivation of moral character is achieved through setting a good example, fostering the habit of worship, teaching stories from the Qur'an, and fair reward-and-punishment systems (Fauzan et al., 2024). The professionalism of Islamic Education teachers significantly influences the development of students' moral character, encompassing pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies. Teachers who possess these competencies can serve as role models, foster good habits, and create a conducive learning environment for reinforcing moral values. Additionally, continuous guidance by PAI teachers plays a crucial role in internalizing the values of *akhlakul karimah*. Both contemporary and classical Islamic Education literature consistently view the ethical competence of Islamic Education teachers not as an additional competency, but as the spirit that animates and infuses Islamic values into the four national competencies, so that the entire learning process leads to the development of students who are knowledgeable and of noble character.

Forms of Moral Decline Among Students in the Digital Age

Moral degradation among students in the digital age presents an increasingly complex and alarming picture. The moral crisis in the digital age is characterized by a rise in deviant behaviors such as individualism, hedonism, the spread of misinformation, and the erosion of ethical values, making it imperative to develop comprehensive, values-based solutions to rebuild the character of both individuals and society. Widespread digital access without guidance is correlated with increased misbehavior, decreased empathy, and violations of norms among students. Common forms of moral decline include: individualism; and a decline in compassion and cooperation (Fauzan et al., 2024), hedonism and consumerism fueled by social media culture (Dwistia et al., 2025), hate speech, bullying, and cyberbullying; the spread of hoaxes and misinformation; and a decline in manners, responsibility, and self-control (Naswa et al., 2025).

The rapid pace of technological advancement has, in fact, led students to become increasingly complacent and adopt an attitude of shirking responsibility, experiencing moral decline, exhibiting increased dishonesty, failing to follow rules, acting defiantly, showing a lack of compassion, and displaying disrespect toward teachers and parents (Kuttab, 2023). Social change and rapid advances in digital technology have given rise to moral deficits such as cyberbullying and the spread of misinformation, highlighting the failure of traditional character education systems and underscoring the need for a relevant curriculum. The moral decline among students in the digital age stems primarily from the unchecked convergence of technology with a weak values ecosystem. Research evidence supports a comprehensive solution: strengthening character and religious education integrated with digital literacy and ethics, supported by close collaboration among families, schools, communities, and the online environment.

The Strategic Role of Islamic Education Teachers' Ethical Competence in Addressing Moral Decline

The ethical competence of Islamic Education teachers plays a highly strategic role in addressing the moral decline among students in the digital age. This role can be identified in the following dimensions:

1. Islamic Education Teachers as Uswatun Hasanah (Role Models).

Role modeling is the most fundamental aspect of an Islamic education teacher's moral competence. The behavior, attitudes, and examples demonstrated by teachers during the learning process play a strategic

role in shaping students' character and moral values. Therefore, teachers should always be consistent role models in their words, actions, and the moral values they teach, so that PAI instruction is not merely cognitive but also impacts students' affective aspects and daily behavior.

Various studies confirm that setting a good example is the most effective strategy and dimension in Islamic Education (PAI): PAI teachers are expected to serve as role models who must demonstrate honesty, responsibility, empathy, discipline, and good manners in their daily lives, not just while teaching (Zalillah and Darmawan, 2025). The personality and personal competencies of Islamic Education teachers serve as an "internal motivator" that significantly influences students' moral character at the junior high and high school levels (Puteri, 2025).

The statements above consistently demonstrate that exemplary conduct is the most fundamental dimension of a PAI teacher's ethical competence. When teachers become well-rounded role models—whose words, actions, and Islamic values are in harmony—PAI education moves beyond the purely cognitive to become a learning experience that engages students' emotions and shapes their actual behavior.

2. Islamic Education Teachers as Ethical Digital Educators.

In the digital age, the ethical competencies of Islamic education teachers must be expanded to include digital literacy. Islamic education teachers play a strategic role as educators, role models, mentors, and supervisors in instilling digital ethics. Efforts undertaken include integrating Islamic values into digital learning, fostering ethical behavior in the use of technology, teaching digital literacy grounded in moral values, and collaborating with parents to monitor device usage at home (Namora, Tambak, et al., 2025).

3. Islamic Education Teachers as Learning Innovators

Strengthening teachers' pedagogical, professional, and social competencies is crucial, and proficiency in digital technology can enhance the effectiveness of the learning process, as well as students' understanding of and motivation toward Islamic values.

Facing a generation of digital natives (Millennials and Gen Z), Islamic Education is required to adapt and innovate. Conventional teaching methods, such as one-way lectures, are often considered irrelevant and boring, thus failing to capture students' interest and engagement. Innovation in Islamic Education is a necessity—not to alter the substance of the teachings, but to present them in a "language" and format that aligns with the characteristics of today's generation.

Strengthening Islamic Education Teachers' Ethics in the Digital Age

The literature review identifies several strategies to strengthen Islamic Education teachers' moral competencies in addressing students' moral decline in the digital age:

1. Strengthening Personality Competencies Based on Islamic Values

Innovative teaching strategies, fostering religious practices at school, teachers serving as role models, and family support can encourage the internalization of moral values among students. Character development through PAI requires collaboration among the entire educational ecosystem to ensure it is effective and sustainable.

2. Integration of Digital Literacy Grounded in Islamic Ethics

The transformation of the PAI curriculum must involve modifying three key elements: objectives—aiming to instill moral and spiritual values; content—integrating relevant, interdisciplinary, and technology-based materials; and innovative and adaptive learning strategies.

3. Application of the Habituation Method for Ethical Values

PAI teachers serve as educators, role models, mentors, and catalysts for character values through exemplary behavior, habituation, and the integration of values into learning. Staidimakassar Consistent and repeated habituation of ethical values will shape students' character deeply and make them resilient against the negative influences of the digital age.

4. Revitalizing the Role of Islamic Education in the Curriculum

The Islamic Education curriculum serves to balance intellectual and moral development, and to prepare students to face the challenges of globalization with a strong foundation of faith and morality.

Furthermore, the Islamic Education curriculum helps foster Islamic character, strengthen moral resilience, and serves as a guide for educators in designing contextual and relevant learning experiences.

The Impact of Islamic Education Teachers' Ethical Competence on Students' Moral Development

This literature review indicates that there is a strong and significant relationship between the moral competence of Islamic Education teachers and the success of fostering students' moral character in the digital age. Enhancing the professionalism of Islamic Education teachers is a solution to addressing the challenges of fostering students' moral character while also improving the effectiveness of Islam-based character education (Namora, Amril, et al., 2025). Furthermore, the steps teachers need to take to address the challenges of the digital age include mastering the subject matter, knowledge, and technology they will teach; serving as role models; mastering various methods and strategies; and maintaining an open mindset toward innovation and new perspectives in the development of their professional competencies (Namora et al., 2023).

This is in line with the words of Allah SWT in Surah Al-Ahzab [33]: 21, which affirms that the example set by the Prophet Muhammad SAW is the most authentic and effective method of moral education. In the current context, Islamic Education teachers are required to actualize these exemplary values in both the digital space and the classroom, so that students possess a strong moral foundation in facing the rapid tide of digitalization.

Furthermore, Islamic education, particularly through Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and madrasahs, holds significant potential in upholding moral and religious values, as well as addressing the social challenges faced by society today, including cybercrime, misinformation, and the erosion of social values. This great potential needs to be continuously optimized by strengthening the moral competencies of educators, particularly PAI teachers, as the spearhead of moral education in educational institutions.

Allah SWT also emphasizes this responsibility through His words in Surah At-Tahrim [66]: 6:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا

“O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from the Fire...” (Quran 66:6)

This verse clearly affirms the moral obligation of every Muslim, including PAI teachers, to protect and guide the younger generation from moral corruption. In the context of education, this responsibility requires PAI teachers to continuously develop their moral competence so that they can serve as a moral bulwark for students amidst the rapid tide of digitalization.

CONCLUSION

The moral competence of Islamic Education teachers is at the core of the entire process of students' moral education; it is not merely a supplementary attribute. This competence encompasses three main dimensions: serving as a role *model* (*uswatun hasanah*), the capacity to act as an ethical digital educator, and the role of an innovator in Islamic-values-based learning. Strategies to strengthen the ethical competence of PAI teachers in addressing the moral decline of students in the digital age include: strengthening personality competencies based on Islamic values; integrating digital literacy grounded in Islamic ethics into instruction; applying consistent and repetitive methods for instilling ethical behavior; and revitalizing the role of PAI within the national education curriculum. The normative foundations of the Qur'an and Hadith affirm that the primary mission of Islamic education is the refinement of character. The exemplary conduct of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as enshrined in Surah Al-Ahzab [33]: 21, serves as the ideal model that PAI teachers must embody in the digital era, both in the classroom and in digital spaces. The implication of this study is the need for continuous training programs for PAI teachers that encompass the strengthening of moral character as well as Islamic-based digital literacy. The government, educational institutions, and society need to collaborate to ensure that PAI teachers possess strong, adaptive, and responsive moral competencies to address the moral challenges of the digital age.

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