

The Role of Islamic Religious Education as an Agent of Social Control in Addressing Moral Degradation in the Digital Era

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Abstract

The advancement of digital technology has significantly impacted students' lives, leading to moral degradation marked by indiscipline, social media misuse, declining courtesy, and weak self-control. These conditions demand that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) serves not only as a medium for transmitting religious knowledge but also as an agent of social control to shape character and reinforce moral values. This study aims to analyze PAI's role as a social control agent in addressing moral degradation in the digital era and to describe its function in student character formation. A qualitative case study approach was conducted at SMK YPE Sawunggalih Kutoarjo. Informants included PAI teachers, vice-principals for curriculum and student affairs, guidance counselors, and students. Data were gathered through observation, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. Findings reveal that PAI functions as a social control agent through internalizing religious values, cultivating religious habits, teacher role-modeling, and strengthening school culture. Implemented strategies include Islamic-based digital literacy education, religious habituation, and character development via school programs. The results emphasize that successful moral development requires synergy among schools, families, and communities. This study reinforces PAI's relevance as a social control agent in tackling moral challenges in the digital age.

Keywords: *Islamic Religious Education, Agent of Social Control, Moral Degradation, Character Education, Digital Era; Islamic Digital Literacy*

Abstrak

Kemajuan teknologi digital membawa perubahan besar dalam kehidupan siswa, termasuk degradasi moral seperti kurangnya disiplin, penyalahgunaan media sosial, menurunnya kesopanan, dan lemahnya pengendalian diri. Kondisi ini menuntut Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) tidak hanya sebagai transfer pengetahuan, tetapi juga sebagai agen kontrol sosial dalam pembentukan karakter siswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis peran PAI sebagai agen kontrol sosial dalam mengatasi degradasi moral di era digital serta mendeskripsikan fungsinya dalam pembentukan karakter. Pendekatan kualitatif dengan studi kasus digunakan di SMK YPE Sawunggalih Kutoarjo. Informan meliputi guru PAI, wakil kepala sekolah, guru BK, dan siswa. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi, lalu dianalisis dengan model Miles and Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa PAI berfungsi sebagai agen kontrol sosial melalui internalisasi nilai agama, pembiasaan ibadah, keteladanan guru, dan penguatan budaya sekolah. Strategi yang diterapkan meliputi literasi digital berbasis Islam, pembiasaan keagamaan, dan pengembangan karakter melalui program sekolah. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa keberhasilan pembinaan moral siswa memerlukan sinergi antara sekolah, keluarga, dan masyarakat. Penelitian ini memperkuat konsep PAI sebagai agen kontrol sosial yang relevan menghadapi tantangan moral di era digital.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Agama Islam, Agen Pengendali Sosial, Kemerosotan Moral, Pendidikan Karakter, Era Digital; Literasi Digital Berbasis Islam

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A. Introduction

The development of digital technology has transformed patterns of social interaction, information access, and the process of moral and value formation among young generations. The ease of internet access and social media usage provides students with extensive opportunities to acquire knowledge rapidly; however, it simultaneously presents various moral challenges, including the spread of misinformation, cyberbullying, hate speech, pornography, consumerist behavior, and declining communication ethics. These phenomena indicate that technological advancement does not necessarily correspond with the moral development of individuals. Recent studies have demonstrated that uncontrolled social media use may influence adolescents' moral judgment and increase their vulnerability to deviant behavior.¹ Therefore, strengthening moral and character education has become an urgent necessity in responding to the dynamics of contemporary digital society.

In the Indonesian context, moral degradation among young people has become one of the major challenges facing the educational sector. Various cases of bullying, student violence, lack of discipline, misuse of social media, and declining respect toward teachers and parents reflect a shift in values among adolescents. This situation requires educational institutions not only to function as centers for knowledge transmission but also as institutions responsible for character and moral development. Within the national education system, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) occupies a strategic position because it aims to cultivate students who are faithful, pious, morally upright, and capable of implementing Islamic values in their daily lives.² Consequently, IRE serves as an essential instrument for strengthening the moral resilience of young generations amid the challenges of globalization and digitalization.

Ideally, Islamic Religious Education is expected to function as a moral safeguard through the internalization of religious values and the development of Islamic character. Nevertheless, empirical realities indicate that various forms of moral degradation remain prevalent in educational settings, including low discipline, lack of courtesy, misuse of digital technology, and other forms of deviant behavior.³ This condition reflects a gap between the normative objectives of Islamic Religious Education and its practical implementation in students' daily lives. Therefore, a broader perspective is needed—one that views Islamic Religious Education

¹ Apoorva Upadhyaya et al., "Exploring How Students Interact with AI for Detecting Moral Sentiments in Social Media," *Array* 30, no. November 2025 (2026): 100941, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.array.2026.100941>.

² L Syahid, I., Ridhoi, M., & Alfiya, "Pendidikan Karakter Sebagai Solusi Krisis Moral Generasi Muda" 3, no. 2 (2021): 98–110.

³ Dana Ismawan Sri Hardianty, Nidia Fitriani, "Preventive Strategies against Students' Moral Degradation through Islamic Religious Education at SMP Negeri 3 Aceh Barat," *Ezra Science Bulletin* 1, no. 2 (2022): 224–30.

not merely as an academic subject but as a social force capable of directing, regulating, and shaping students' behavior according to religious and societal norms.

Research concerning Islamic Religious Education and moral development has evolved in several directions. Some studies emphasize the role of IRE in character formation and the strengthening of students' religious values⁴. Other studies focus on Islamic education as a solution to moral crises, juvenile delinquency, and the negative impacts of digital technological development.⁵ Furthermore, several scholars have examined the roles of IRE teachers, religious habituation programs, school culture, and collaboration among schools, families, and communities in character building⁶. Overall, previous studies consistently demonstrate that Islamic Religious Education contributes significantly to strengthening the moral and character development of younger generations.

Despite these contributions, previous studies have predominantly focused on character education, instructional strategies, religious value internalization, and the effectiveness of IRE teachers in fostering students' morality. Research that specifically positions Islamic Religious Education as an agent of social control remains relatively limited. From the perspective of educational sociology, social control functions as a mechanism for maintaining social order, reinforcing adherence to norms, and directing individuals to behave according to socially accepted values. This limitation reveals a significant research gap, particularly regarding how Islamic Religious Education performs its social control function in addressing students' moral degradation within the digital era.

In response to this gap, the present study offers a perspective that conceptualizes Islamic Religious Education as an agent of social control within educational institutions. The novelty of this research lies in employing a social control perspective to analyze the existence and role of Islamic Religious Education in addressing students' moral degradation in the digital age. This study aims to examine the existence of Islamic Religious Education as an agent of social control, identify the forms of its contribution to students' moral development, and explain the

⁴ Anggun Syahriani Putri and Rizka Harfiani, "Pengaruh Pendidikan Agama Islam Terhadap Pembentukan Karakter Siswa Di Era Digital," *Hikmah : Jurnal Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam* 2, no. 4 (2025): 12–24, <https://doi.org/10.61132/hikmah.v2i4.1280>; MiftakhulAmin, "Journal of Multidisciplinary Science," *Journal of Multidisciplinary Science Vol. 2 No. 2, June 2025, Pages. 436-445 P-ISSN: 3046-692X, E-ISSN: 3046-6911 Doi: 10.59631/Multidiscience.V2i2.379 Nusantara: 2, no. 2 (2025): 436–45*, <https://doi.org/10.59631/multidiscience.v2i2.377>.

⁵ Elsa Salsabila et al., "Menghadapi Degradasi Moral Generasi Muda Melalui Penerapan Pendidikan Islam Pada Peserta Didik," *Al-Tarbiyah: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 1 (2024): 284–95, <https://doi.org/10.59059/al-tarbiyah.v2i1.1038>; Syahid, I., Ridhoi, M., & Alfiya, "Pendidikan Karakter Sebagai Solusi Krisis Moral Generasi Muda."

⁶ Sri Hardianty, Nidia Fitriani, "Preventive Strategies against Students' Moral Degradation through Islamic Religious Education at SMP Negeri 3 Aceh Barat"; Marzuki Yusuf, M Saidun Anwar, and Rizky Hidayatullah, "Pedagogical Strategies for Character Building in Islamic Education : Addressing Moral Degradation in Secondary Schools" 4, no. 1 (2026): 93–111; Suardi Samsuriadi, "Journal of Educational Sciences," *Journal of Educational Sciences* 9, no. 2 (2025): 876–85, <https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.6.3.p.444-458>.

supporting and inhibiting factors affecting its implementation. Accordingly, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the advancement of Islamic education scholarship and practically to the strengthening of character education within schools.

This study is grounded in the assumption that students' moral degradation cannot be effectively addressed solely through the cognitive transmission of religious knowledge. Islamic Religious Education must perform a broader role as an agent of social control through exemplary conduct, religious habituation, the strengthening of school culture, social supervision, and the internalization of Islamic values in everyday life. This perspective aligns with Thomas Lickona's character education theory, which emphasizes the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action in character formation, as well as Albert Bandura's social learning theory, which explains that human behavior develops through observation, imitation, and social interaction. Therefore, the more effectively Islamic Religious Education functions as an agent of social control, the greater the likelihood of cultivating students who possess strong character, noble morals, and the capacity to navigate the challenges of the digital era responsibly.

B. Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using a field research design. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the existence of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) as an agent of social control in addressing students' moral degradation in the digital era. Qualitative research enables researchers to explore meanings, practices, and social dynamics within educational settings from the perspectives of individuals directly involved in the phenomenon under investigation.⁷ Specifically, this research adopted a case study design, as it focused on a particular context, namely the implementation of Islamic Religious Education in a vocational secondary school environment.

The research was conducted at SMK YPE Sawunggalih Kutoarjo, Central Java, Indonesia. This site was purposively selected because the school actively implements various religious and character-building programs aimed at strengthening students' moral values and discipline amid the challenges posed by rapid digitalization. Moreover, the school provides a relevant context for examining how Islamic Religious Education functions as a mechanism of social control in fostering students' moral development and preventing deviant behavior.

⁷ C. N. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (4th Ed.). Sage Publications., n.d.; E. J. Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (4th Ed.). Jossey-Bass., n.d.

Research participants were selected using purposive sampling. This technique was chosen because the selected informants possessed direct knowledge, experience, and involvement related to the research phenomenon.⁸ The key informants consisted of Islamic Religious Education teachers, the Vice Principal for Curriculum Affairs, the Vice Principal for Student Affairs, Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers, and students. The diversity of participants enabled the researcher to obtain comprehensive and multidimensional insights regarding the implementation of Islamic Religious Education as an agent of social control within the school environment.

C. DISCUSSION

1. The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Character Formation and Moral Reinforcement in the Digital Era

The findings reveal that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a significant role in shaping students' character and strengthening their moral values through learning activities, religious habituation programs, teacher role modeling, and school-based character development initiatives. These findings indicate that character formation is not merely achieved through the transmission of religious knowledge but through a continuous process of value internalization that influences students' attitudes, behaviors, and daily interactions. In the context of the digital era, where students are exposed to diverse information and moral influences, Islamic Religious Education functions as a moral compass that guides them in distinguishing appropriate from inappropriate behavior.

These findings can be interpreted through Lickona's (1992)⁹ Character Education Theory, which emphasizes the integration of three fundamental dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The study demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education at SMK YPE Sawunggalih Kutoarjo contributes to the development of moral knowing by providing students with knowledge of Islamic teachings and ethical principles. Moral feeling is cultivated through religious habituation activities, spiritual reflection, and the development of empathy and responsibility. Meanwhile, moral action is manifested through students' observable behaviors, such as discipline, respect toward teachers and peers, responsibility in carrying out school duties, and ethical conduct both offline and online. These findings suggest that effective character education requires a holistic approach that integrates cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions.

⁸ M. Q Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods (4th Ed.)*. Sage Publications., n.d.

⁹ T. Lickona, "Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility. Bantam Books.," n.d.

The results are consistent with previous studies conducted by Putri and Harfiani (2025), Rahmah and Turmidzi (2026), and Amin (2025)¹⁰, which found that Islamic Religious Education contributes significantly to character development and moral strengthening among students. Similarly, Alwi and Jannah (2025)¹¹ emphasized that Islamic Religious Education enhances adolescents' psychological and religious resilience, enabling them to respond more effectively to contemporary social challenges. However, the present study extends previous research by demonstrating that character formation is strengthened when Islamic Religious Education is integrated with school culture, leadership programs, student organizations, and daily religious practices. Thus, moral development is not limited to classroom instruction but becomes embedded within the broader educational ecosystem.

Another important finding concerns the role of teacher exemplification in shaping students' character. Consistent with Bandura's (1977)¹² Social Learning Theory, students tend to learn values and behaviors through observation and imitation of significant role models. The findings indicate that Islamic Religious Education teachers are perceived not only as instructors but also as moral exemplars whose attitudes, communication styles, and daily behaviors influence students' character development. This finding reinforces the argument that successful character education depends heavily on the consistency between moral values taught in the classroom and those demonstrated in practice by educators.

From an academic perspective, these findings strengthen the theoretical linkage between character education, social learning, and Islamic educational values in explaining moral development among adolescents. The study suggests that character formation is most effective when religious values are internalized through a combination of instruction, habituation, role modeling, and social participation. From a practical perspective, schools should develop integrated character education programs that involve teachers, school leaders, families, and students in a collaborative effort to foster moral awareness and ethical behavior. Such an approach is particularly important in addressing

¹⁰ Anggun Syahrani Putri and Rizka Harfiani, "Pengaruh Pendidikan Agama Islam Terhadap Pembentukan Karakter Siswa Di Era Digital"; Dhea Aulia Rahmah and Imam Turmidzi, "Implementing Religious Character Values in Islamic Religious Education to Address Adolescent Moral Degradation at SMP Nurul Hikmah," 2026; MiftakhulAmin, "Journal of Multidisciplinary Science."

¹¹ Siti Roudhotul Jannah Haris Adnan Alwi, "Peran Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Membentuk Karakter Siswa Di Era Digital," *Karakter: Jurnal Riset Ilmu Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 3 (2025): 288–96, <https://doi.org/10.61132/karakter.v2i3.1253>.

¹² A Bandura, "Social Learning Theory," *Elgar Encyclopedia of Cross-Cultural Management*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803928180.ch33>.

the moral challenges posed by digital technology and social media, which increasingly shape adolescents' attitudes and behaviors in contemporary society.

2. School Culture and Collaborative Educational Ecosystems in Strengthening Moral Development

The findings indicate that the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) as an agent of social control is strengthened through the integration of school culture and collaborative educational programs. Character development at SMK YPE Sawunggalih Kutoarjo is not solely implemented through classroom instruction but is reinforced through various extracurricular activities, student organizations, leadership training programs, and religious activities. These initiatives provide students with opportunities to practice moral values in real-life situations, thereby transforming religious and ethical principles into habitual behaviors. This finding suggests that moral development is more effective when supported by a conducive educational environment that consistently promotes positive values and social responsibility.

From the perspective of Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969)¹³, the effectiveness of moral development is influenced by the strength of students' social bonds within their educational environment. The involvement of students in organizations such as OSIS, Pramuka, PMR, PKS, and leadership development programs reflects the dimensions of commitment and involvement, which function as protective factors against deviant behavior. Through active participation in these programs, students develop a sense of responsibility, social awareness, leadership skills, and adherence to institutional norms. This finding demonstrates that social control in educational settings operates not only through formal regulations but also through meaningful participation in collective activities that reinforce positive social values.

The findings also reveal that character education becomes more sustainable when supported by a strong school culture. A religious and value-oriented school environment creates a social climate that encourages students to internalize ethical norms and practice them consistently. This result is consistent with the studies of Samsuriadi and Suardi (2025)¹⁴, which emphasize the importance of institutional support, school leadership, and religious culture in enhancing the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education. Likewise, Hardianty et al. (2025)¹⁵ found that collaboration among teachers, parents, and school stakeholders significantly contributes to students' moral development. The present study

¹³ T Hirschi, *Causes of Delinquency*, 1969.

¹⁴ Samsuriadi, "J. Educ. Sci."

¹⁵ Sri Hardianty, Nidia Fitriani, "Preventive Strategies against Students' Moral Degradation through Islamic Religious Education at SMP Negeri 3 Aceh Barat."

extends these findings by illustrating how formal educational programs and informal school culture interact to create a comprehensive moral development system.

An important aspect emerging from this study is that school culture serves as a mediating mechanism between religious values and students' daily behavior. While classroom instruction provides moral knowledge, school culture offers practical opportunities for students to experience, apply, and reinforce those values through social interaction. This finding supports Lickona's (1992)¹⁶ argument that character formation requires continuous reinforcement through a supportive moral community. Therefore, educational institutions should not view character education as the sole responsibility of Islamic Religious Education teachers but rather as a collective responsibility involving all school stakeholders.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that schools should strengthen organizational activities, leadership development programs, and value-based school cultures as complementary strategies for moral education. Such efforts can provide students with authentic experiences that foster responsibility, discipline, cooperation, and ethical decision-making. Academically, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on Islamic education by demonstrating that the effectiveness of moral formation depends not only on religious instruction but also on the broader educational ecosystem that supports the internalization and practice of moral values.

3. Synergy of School Culture and Educational Ecosystems in Strengthening Students' Moral Development

The findings indicate that the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as a social control agent is not solely determined by classroom instruction but is also influenced by the synergy between school culture, student organizations, school leadership, and the broader educational environment. Various extracurricular activities, including the Student Council (OSIS), Scouts, School Security Patrol (PKS), Youth Red Cross (PMR), Leadership Training Programs (LDK), and religious activities, provide opportunities for students to practice and internalize the moral values acquired through PAI learning.

These findings suggest that character formation is fundamentally a social process that requires support from the entire educational ecosystem. From the perspective of Social Control Theory, students' participation in positive social activities strengthens social involvement, which in turn reduces the likelihood of deviant behavior. Hirschi

¹⁶ Lickona, "Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility. Bantam Books."

(1969)¹⁷ argues that individuals who are strongly attached to social institutions and actively involved in constructive activities are more likely to comply with prevailing social norms. In this context, school-based programs function as mechanisms that reinforce students' commitment to moral values while simultaneously creating a supportive environment for character development.

The results are consistent with the findings of Samsuriadi and Suardi (2025)¹⁸, who emphasize that moral development is shaped by the interaction of institutional, pedagogical, and socio-cultural factors. Likewise, the studies conducted by Alwi and Jannah (2025)¹⁹ and *The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Adolescent Moral Formation* (2025) highlight the importance of collaboration among schools, families, and communities in fostering students' moral character. The present study strengthens these findings by demonstrating that the success of moral education depends not only on instructional strategies but also on the creation of a value-oriented educational culture that continuously reinforces positive behavior.

An interesting finding emerging from this study is that despite the existence of relatively strong character-building programs within the school, social media remains one of the most significant challenges to students' moral development. This condition indicates that school-based social control mechanisms have limitations when confronted with digital environments that are open, dynamic, and difficult to monitor directly. Consequently, the role of Islamic Religious Education as a social control agent should be expanded beyond the school setting through stronger collaboration with families and communities. Such collaboration is essential to ensure that moral values are consistently reinforced across multiple social environments where students interact.

From a practical perspective, these findings suggest the need to develop collaborative character education models involving schools, families, and community stakeholders. In terms of educational policy, schools should strengthen religious value-based digital literacy programs as an integral component of character education in the digital era. Such initiatives can help students navigate digital spaces responsibly while maintaining adherence to ethical and religious principles.

¹⁷ Hirschi, *Causes of Delinquency*.

¹⁸ Samsuriadi, "J. Educ. Sci."

¹⁹ Haris Adnan Alwi, "Peran Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Membentuk Karakter Siswa Di Era Digital."

4. Islamic Religious Education as a Social Control Agent in Addressing Moral Degradation

The findings reveal that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) functions as a social control agent through the internalization of religious values, moral instruction, religious habituation, and behavioral supervision of students. These findings indicate that PAI is not merely oriented toward achieving cognitive religious competencies but also toward developing students' self-control mechanisms to prevent various forms of deviant behavior that have emerged in the digital era.

From the perspective of Hirschi's Social Control Theory (1969)²⁰, individual behavior is influenced by the strength of social bonds connecting individuals to their social environment. These bonds consist of attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. The findings demonstrate that all four dimensions are reflected in educational practices at SMK YPE Sawunggalih Kutoarjo. Attachment is evident in the educational and religious relationships established between teachers and students. Commitment is reflected in students' participation in character-building programs. Involvement is manifested through active engagement in religious activities and school organizations. Meanwhile, belief is reinforced through the cultivation of religious values as fundamental guidelines for behavior and decision-making.

These findings support the studies of Ramadani et al. (2026), Salsabila et al. (2024), and Syahid et al. (2025)²¹, which emphasize that Islamic Religious Education serves a sociological function as an instrument of social control in addressing the moral crisis among young people. However, the present study extends previous findings by demonstrating that the social control function of PAI operates not only through formal classroom instruction but also through an integrated system of school culture, religious practices, and social activities. Consequently, social control within Islamic education is not coercive or punitive in nature; rather, it functions as a preventive and educative mechanism that continuously shapes students' moral awareness and behavior through value internalization.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that moral degradation in the digital era cannot be adequately addressed solely through disciplinary regulations or institutional sanctions. Instead, effective social control requires the cultivation of internal moral awareness that

²⁰ Hirschi, *Causes of Delinquency*.

²¹ Intan Suci Ramadani and Silvina Waroh, "Degradasi Moral Generasi Muda Dan Peran Strategi Pembelajaran Afektif Dalam Pendidikan Agama Islam Sebagai Solusi: Kajian Literatur," 2026, 3693–3705; Salsabila et al., "Menghadapi Degradasi Moral Generasi Muda Melalui Penerapan Pendidikan Islam Pada Peserta Didik"; Syahid, I., Ridhoi, M., & Alfiya, "Pendidikan Karakter Sebagai Solusi Krisis Moral Generasi Muda."

enables students to regulate their own behavior when facing various digital challenges. The presence of social media, unrestricted access to information, and exposure to diverse value systems make self-regulation increasingly important. In this regard, PAI contributes not only by transmitting religious knowledge but also by strengthening students' moral resilience, enabling them to evaluate information critically and make ethical decisions in both online and offline environments.

Another important implication of the findings is that the effectiveness of social control depends on the consistency between religious teachings and the broader educational environment. Students are more likely to internalize moral values when those values are reinforced through daily interactions, school norms, and institutional practices. This indicates that social control in Islamic education operates through a combination of normative guidance, social reinforcement, and habitual practice, creating a moral ecosystem that supports positive behavioral development.

Academically, these findings reinforce the relevance of Social Control Theory in explaining the role of religious education within vocational secondary schools in the digital era. The study contributes to the growing body of literature by demonstrating that Islamic Religious Education functions as an integrated social control mechanism that combines religious instruction, character formation, and social regulation. Practically, the findings suggest that strengthening the social control function of PAI can serve as an effective preventive strategy for reducing the risks of moral degradation associated with technological advancement and social media exposure. Therefore, educational institutions should continue to develop value-based programs that integrate religious learning with character education and digital literacy to foster morally responsible and socially aware students.

5. Internalization of Character Values through Religious Habituation and Teacher Role Modeling

The findings indicate that students' character development is fostered through a combination of religious habituation and teacher role modeling. Activities such as congregational prayers, greeting culture (*salam*), the practice of courtesy and respect, and the promotion of digital ethics serve as primary media for internalizing moral values in students' daily lives. These activities transform moral education from a theoretical concept into a lived experience, enabling students to consistently practice religious and ethical values within the school environment.

These findings can be explained through Thomas Lickona's Character Education Theory (1992)²², which emphasizes that effective character education should encompass three essential dimensions: *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, and *moral action*. The results demonstrate that PAI learning at SMK YPE extends beyond providing knowledge about right and wrong (*moral knowing*). Through continuous religious habituation and the cultivation of religious awareness, students develop emotional attachment to moral values (*moral feeling*), which subsequently manifests in concrete behaviors (*moral action*). Therefore, character education is implemented holistically, integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions rather than focusing solely on intellectual understanding.

Moreover, the significance of teacher role modeling aligns with Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977)²³, which posits that individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and interaction with influential social models. Within this study, PAI teachers function as role models who not only communicate moral values verbally but also demonstrate their practical application in everyday interactions. Students observe how teachers communicate respectfully, demonstrate discipline, practice religious values, and respond to social issues. As a result, the effectiveness of character education depends not only on instructional content but also on the consistency and authenticity of teachers' behavior as moral exemplars.

The findings support previous studies conducted by Yusuf et al. (2026), Rahmah and Turmidzi (2026), and Hardianty et al. (2025)²⁴, which found that religious habituation and teacher role modeling are effective strategies for strengthening students' character. However, this study contributes a broader perspective by demonstrating that the effectiveness of religious habituation increases when it is integrated with responsible digital citizenship education. In the context of rapid technological advancement, students require guidance not only in religious practices but also in applying moral values while interacting within digital spaces. This finding suggests that character education in the digital era must adapt to changing social realities while maintaining its foundation in Islamic values.

²² Lickona, "Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility. Bantam Books."

²³ Bandura, "Social Learning Theory."

²⁴ Yusuf, Anwar, and Hidayatullah, "Pedagogical Strategies for Character Building in Islamic Education : Addressing Moral Degradation in Secondary Schools"; Rahmah and Turmidzi, "Implementing Religious Character Values in Islamic Religious Education to Address Adolescent Moral Degradation at SMP Nurul Hikmah"; Sri Hardianty, Nidia Fitriani, "Preventive Strategies against Students' Moral Degradation through Islamic Religious Education at SMP Negeri 3 Aceh Barat."

A noteworthy aspect of the findings is that students perceive moral guidance related to digital behavior as equally important as traditional religious instruction. This indicates a shift in the scope of character education, where moral development extends beyond physical social interactions to include online communication and digital engagement. Consequently, digital ethics becomes an essential component of contemporary Islamic character education, enabling students to navigate technological environments responsibly while adhering to religious principles.

The integration of religious habituation and digital ethics also illustrates that moral development is most effective when values are reinforced across multiple contexts. Students who regularly participate in religious activities while simultaneously receiving guidance on ethical technology use are more likely to develop consistent moral behavior. This pattern suggests that character education should be viewed as a continuous process of value reinforcement rather than a series of isolated instructional activities.

From a practical perspective, these findings highlight the need to strengthen teachers' role-modeling competencies and develop religious habituation programs that are relevant to students' digital lives. Schools should provide opportunities for teachers to enhance their capacity as moral exemplars while integrating digital literacy and ethical awareness into character education initiatives. Academically, this study enriches the discourse on Islamic character education by demonstrating the interrelationship between moral development, religious value internalization, and digital religious literacy. It further suggests that successful character formation in the digital era requires the integration of traditional Islamic educational principles with contemporary approaches to digital citizenship and ethical technology use.

6. Internalization of Character Values through Religious Habituation and Teacher Role Modeling

The findings indicate that students' character development is fostered through a combination of religious habituation and teacher role modeling. Activities such as congregational prayers, greeting culture (*salam*), the practice of courtesy and respect, and the promotion of digital ethics serve as primary media for internalizing moral values in students' daily lives. These activities transform moral education from a theoretical concept into a lived experience, enabling students to consistently practice religious and ethical values within the school environment.

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Moreover, the significance of teacher role modeling aligns with Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977)²⁵, which posits that individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and interaction with influential social models. Within this study, PAI teachers function as role models who not only communicate moral values verbally but also demonstrate their practical application in everyday interactions. Students observe how teachers communicate respectfully, demonstrate discipline, practice religious values, and respond to social issues. As a result, the effectiveness of character education depends not only on instructional content but also on the consistency and authenticity of teachers' behavior as moral exemplars.

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²⁵ Bandura, "Social Learning Theory."

²⁶ Yusuf, Anwar, and Hidayatullah, "Pedagogical Strategies for Character Building in Islamic Education : Addressing Moral Degradation in Secondary Schools"; Rahmah and Turmidzi, "Implementing Religious Character Values in Islamic Religious Education to Address Adolescent Moral Degradation at SMP Nurul Hikmah"; Anggun Syahrani Putri and Rizka Harfiani, "Pengaruh Pendidikan Agama Islam Terhadap Pembentukan Karakter Siswa Di Era Digital."

character education, enabling students to navigate technological environments responsibly while adhering to religious principles.

The integration of religious habituation and digital ethics also illustrates that moral development is most effective when values are reinforced across multiple contexts. Students who regularly participate in religious activities while simultaneously receiving guidance on ethical technology use are more likely to develop consistent moral behavior. This pattern suggests that character education should be viewed as a continuous process of value reinforcement rather than a series of isolated instructional activities.

From a practical perspective, these findings highlight the need to strengthen teachers' role-modeling competencies and develop religious habituation programs that are relevant to students' digital lives. Schools should provide opportunities for teachers to enhance their capacity as moral exemplars while integrating digital literacy and ethical awareness into character education initiatives. Academically, this study enriches the discourse on Islamic character education by demonstrating the interrelationship between moral development, religious value internalization, and digital religious literacy. It further suggests that successful character formation in the digital era requires the integration of traditional Islamic educational principles with contemporary approaches to digital citizenship and ethical technology use.

D. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMK YPE Sawunggalih Kutoarjo demonstrates a significant role as a social control agent in addressing students' moral degradation in the digital era, functioning not only as a medium for transmitting religious knowledge but also as a mechanism for character formation through internalization of Islamic values, religious habituation, teacher role modeling, and strengthening school culture, with strategies such as digital literacy education, religious activities, and student participation contributing to enhanced moral awareness, discipline, responsibility, and positive social behavior. Theoretically, this study contributes to Islamic education scholarship by reinforcing the relevance of Hirschi's Social Control Theory, Lickona's Character Education Theory, and Bandura's Social Learning Theory, demonstrating that moral development is shaped through strong social bonds, continuous value internalization, and teacher exemplarity, while practically implying that schools must strengthen character education integration across all activities, with PAI teachers adapting pedagogical approaches to technological developments and digital literacy grounded in Islamic values becoming an essential component. Furthermore, the study confirms that successful character formation requires collaboration among schools, families, and communities, positioning PAI as a strategic moral foundation that equips students to

evaluate information critically, regulate behavior, and make ethical decisions, though this study has limitations including its single-institution focus at SMK YPE Sawunggalih Kutoarjo, limited participant perspectives, and short research period that prevented observation of long-term behavioral changes, thus future research is recommended to involve multiple institutions, employ mixed-methods or longitudinal designs, and incorporate parental and community perspectives for a more comprehensive understanding of PAI's effectiveness as a social control agent in addressing moral challenges in the digital era.

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