



The role of character education in shaping the digital ethics of students at State Islamic Junior High School

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the role of character education in shaping students' digital ethics at State Islamic Junior High School. This study uses qualitative methods. In qualitative research, theory serves only as a guide for data gathering and analysis. The data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and written document analysis at the research site. The research was conducted in an Islamic junior high school in Palu city, Indonesia. The researcher chose the school because the school is a reputable government school that implements policies on digital ethics, which are relevant to Islamic education. The results of this study show that character education plays a fundamental role in shaping students' digital ethics. This role is not fulfilled through a single program or specific activity, but rather through a character education ecosystem that integrates the school policies, curriculum, instruction, school culture, teacher role-modeling, guidance and counseling services, and student participation. All these components function as interconnected mechanisms in the process of internalizing character values among students. At the institutional level, character education is reinforced through policies and programs that position character building as an integral part of educational goals. At the curriculum and instructional levels, character values are integrated into the learning process particularly within Islamic Religious Education by linking lessons on ethics and moral conduct to students' real-life issues, including their use of digital media and technology.

Keywords: Character education, Digital ethics, Digital behavior, Islamic school students

Introduction

The advancement of digital technology in the era of globalization has brought about fundamental changes in nearly every aspect of human life, including education (Askar, Nurdin, Pettalongi, Pettalongi, & Basire, 2025; Timotheou et al., 2023) [6, 29]. Digital transformation has not only influenced how people work and communicate but has also shaped their ways of thinking, attitudes, and social interactions. Junior high school students today are growing up as "digital natives"—a generation accustomed from an early age to using gadgets, the internet, social media, and various digital platforms (Nurdin, Pettalongi, & Mangasing, 2019; Pomicter, 2025) [19, 23]. Consequently, digital technology has become an integral part of their lives, whether within the family, the community, or the school environment. In the context of education, digitalization offers significant opportunities to enhance the quality of learning. Digital technology enables learning to be more interactive, flexible, and innovative through the use of digital media, online learning resources, and technology-based instructional models.

However, these developments also present serious challenges, particularly regarding the formation of students' moral and ethical values (Rustina et al., 2026) [27]. Students are required not only to possess digital skills but also to demonstrate the moral and ethical capacity to use technology responsibly. As the intensity of digital media usage increases, various negative phenomena have emerged, revealing a lack of digital ethics among adolescents. Issues such as cyberbullying, hate speech,

the spread of hoaxes, impolite social media comments, and the dissemination of pornographic or indecent content have become increasingly alarming (Yang & Yang, 2026) [31]. Research indicates that unethical behavior in the digital realm can impact students' mental health, social relationships, and character development. Cyberbullying, for instance, not only causes psychological trauma for victims but also has the potential to foster aggression, a lack of empathy, and poor self-control in perpetrators (Nizam, Matta, Kukreti, Upadhyay, & Dangwal, 2024) [16]. Furthermore, freedom of expression on social media when unaccompanied by ethical awareness often gives rise to rude and immoral communication behaviors. This situation demonstrates that the digital space has become both a new arena for character formation and a new setting for a moral crisis among the younger generation. Digital ethics has thus become a crucial concept that requires attention within the educational landscape.

Digital ethics encompasses a set of moral values and norms that govern individual behavior regarding the responsible, courteous, and dignified use of digital technology (Bayram, Bal, Chiappinotto, & Palese, 2026; Zamani, Angelopoulos, & Conboy, 2026) [7, 32]. It goes beyond mere adherence to rules, extending to moral awareness, empathy, and social responsibility within digital interactions. Character education plays a highly strategic role in addressing the complexities of these challenges (Abdurahman, 2018; Alfarezel, 2025) [1, 3]. It is not merely understood as the cognitive teaching of values, but rather as a systematic, planned, and continuous process of

instilling moral values, ethics, and character traits in learners. Values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, empathy, cooperation, and mutual respect serve as the fundamental basis for shaping ethical behavior in both the real world and the digital realm. Various studies (e.g. Arif, Nurdin, & Elya, 2023; Berkowitz & Bier, 2004) ^[5, 8] confirm that character education consistently implemented in schools can significantly contribute to strengthening students' morals and ethics. Character education helps students develop self-control, moral awareness, and the ability to make ethical decisions in various life situations, including the use of digital technology. Without strong character education, digital proficiency risks being misused, potentially exacerbating the ethical crisis among adolescents. In the digital era, character education cannot be separated from digital literacy. Digital literacy encompasses not only the technical skills required to use digital devices but also critical thinking, an understanding of technology's social impact, and ethical awareness in digital interactions. Digital literacy that is not integrated with character education risks producing students who are technologically savvy yet morally and ethically weak.

Therefore, integrating character education and digital literacy has become an urgent necessity in modern education systems. This integration aims to equip students to use technology wisely, responsibly, and in accordance with prevailing moral values. Schools play a crucial role in integrating these two aspects through the curriculum, school culture, and daily instructional practices. Character formation holds a fundamental position within the tradition of Islamic education. Islamic education aims not merely to transfer knowledge but also to shape personality and cultivate noble character. The concept of character education in Islam is rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah, which position moral character as the core of the educational mission. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself emphasized that the primary purpose of his mission was to perfect human character.

Consequently, character education from an Islamic perspective encompasses integrated spiritual, moral, social, and intellectual dimensions. In the context of formal education particularly in Islamic schools- character education is inseparable from Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in instilling Islamic values such as honesty, trustworthiness, responsibility, courtesy, and social concern (Hareli, Weiner, & Yee, 2006; Wahyuddin, Nurdin, & Pettalongi, 2022) ^[13, 30]. These values are not only relevant to real-life situations but are also highly pertinent to the behavioral challenges students face in the digital realm. Consequently, character education grounded in Islamic values serves as a robust normative foundation for shaping students' digital ethics. In the digital era, the challenges facing Islamic education have become increasingly complex. The unhindered flow of information, the influx of unfiltered global culture, and the normalization of unethical behavior on social media threaten to erode students' moral values. Without the reinforcement of strong Islamic character, students risk experiencing a "disorientation of values"—a disconnect

between the values taught in school and the behaviors practiced in the digital world. Therefore, character education from an Islamic perspective must be contextualized within digital realities; this ensures that moral values do not remain merely normative but are genuinely internalized in students' digital conduct.

Literature review

The Philosophical foundation of character education in Islam

Character education within Islamic education is rooted in the Islamic view of human nature and the purpose of human creation (Alhamuddin, Eko, & Revan Dwi, 2022; Curren, 2017) ^[4, 11]. Islam regards human beings as possessing physical, intellectual, spiritual, and moral potentials that must be developed in a balanced manner. Consequently, education in Islam is not directed solely toward mastering knowledge or technical skills, but toward forming a holistic personality one that is faithful, virtuous, and responsible in both individual and social life. This perspective positions character education not as an ancillary aspect, but as the core of the entire Islamic educational process. Character education in Islam does not stand apart from religious education; instead, it is integrated into all educational activities aimed at cultivating individuals of noble character. Thus, educational success is measured not merely by learners' cognitive achievements, but by the quality of their character and behavior in real life. The philosophical foundation of Islamic character education rests on the concept of *insān kāmil*, which means the perfected human being who maintains a balance among intellectual, spiritual, moral, and social dimensions. This concept asserts that education must harmoniously develop the full range of human potential. Education that emphasizes only intellectual aspects without fostering character is viewed as unbalanced and potentially conducive to a moral crisis (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007) ^[9].

The normative foundation of Islamic character education is derived directly from the Qur'an, which serves as the guiding principle for Muslims' lives (Arif et al., 2023) ^[5]. A key verse underpinning character formation specifically moral character is Surah Al-Ahzab (33:21), which establishes that character formation in Islam relies on the power of exemplary conduct. In an educational context, teachers and the *madrasah* environment must embody the character values intended to be instilled in students. This principle of leading by example is particularly relevant in the digital age, as educators' digital behavior also serves as a model for students to emulate. Moral character holds a central position in Islamic education; the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized that the primary mission of his prophethood was to perfect human character. This statement demonstrates that character and moral formation are not secondary objectives but constitute a fundamental orientation of Islamic education. Moral character is understood not merely as outward behavior, but as an inner state that consistently gives rise to actions without the need for external coercion.

A transcendental dimension serves as a defining characteristic of character education in Islam. Character values are derived

not merely from social consensus or human rationality, but from divine revelation, which is normative and binding. Every human action including behavior within the digital realm is understood as part of one's moral accountability to Allah. This dimension provides an internal force that compels individuals to behave ethically, even without social oversight. In contemporary education, the philosophical foundation of Islamic character education remains highly relevant, especially amid the moral and ethical crises accompanying the advancement of digital technology. The digital landscape, characterized by anonymity and minimal external control, necessitates strong internal moral regulation. Islamic character education, with its transcendental foundation, offers an ethical framework that can guide student behavior in such environments.

Integration of Islamic character education and digital literacy

Islamic character education needs to be systematically integrated with digital literacy (Rokhman, Hum, Syaifudin, & Yuliati, 2014) ^[24]. Digital literacy should be understood not merely as the technical ability to use digital devices, but also as the capacity to comprehend, evaluate, and utilize information ethically and responsibly. This integration enables Islamic character education to address students' digital lives more tangibly. Integrating Islamic character education and digital literacy aims to cultivate students who are not only technologically proficient but also wise in their use of technology. Moral values such as honesty, responsibility, courtesy, and empathy must be translated into concrete digital behaviors, including ethical communication on social media, responsible information sharing, and respect for others' privacy. Research indicates that integrating character values and digital literacy into instruction contributes positively to strengthening students' digital ethics. This approach is considered more effective than digital ethics education that is purely technical and divorced from character education.

Ethical Theories and Digital Ethics

Ethics is a major branch of philosophy that examines the moral values, norms, and principles that guide human behavior (Agrawal & Singh, 2025; Chaddha & Agrawal, 2023) ^[2, 10]. Within philosophical inquiry, ethics is understood as a critical reflection on human actions in relation to fundamental questions regarding what is considered good or bad, right or wrong, and how individuals ought to conduct themselves in both personal and social spheres. Thus, ethics serves not merely as a set of moral rules but also as a conceptual framework that enables individuals to evaluate and consider the moral consequences of their actions. Etymologically, the term "ethics" derives from the Greek word *ethos*, meaning custom, character, or way of life. As philosophical thought evolved, the concept came to denote the systematic study of human morality. Ethics seeks to understand the rational foundations of moral values and guides how individuals should act rightly across various life situations.

From the perspective of moral philosophy, ethics is often understood as the discipline that studies the principles determining the rightness or wrongness of human actions. Franz Magnis-Suseno explains that ethics is a critical reflection on morality aimed at assessing whether an action is morally justifiable. Ethics does not merely describe the moral customs prevailing in society but also rationally evaluates whether those customs align with defensible moral principles. Echoing this view, Bertens states that ethics is the study of the moral values and norms that guide individuals in regulating their behavior. Ethics guides individuals in determining the right course of action in social life, thereby enabling the creation of harmonious and just social relationships. In modern moral philosophy, ethics goes beyond discussing rules of conduct to include a critical analysis of the foundations of human morality. Consequently, ethics plays a vital role in helping individuals develop the reflective capacity needed to make moral decisions. Individuals do not simply follow prevailing norms automatically; rather, they can understand the moral reasoning behind those norms and consider the ethical implications of their actions. In education, understanding ethics is crucial, as education aims not only to develop learners' intellectual abilities but also to shape their moral consciousness. Ethical education helps learners understand the moral values underpinning social life and encourages them to act responsibly in various life situations.

Genuis & Lipp (2013) ^[12] also explain that digital behavior reflects how individuals use technology in their daily lives. Digital behavior encompasses not only the skills required to operate technological devices but also the attitudes and moral values associated with their use. Positive digital behavior is demonstrated by using digital media responsibly and without harming others. Conversely, negative digital behavior can manifest as spreading hoaxes, plagiarism, cyberbullying, privacy violations, and misuse of social media. From the perspective of character education, shaping digital behavior requires a continuous process of habituation and the internalization of moral values. Schools and *madrasahs* play a crucial role in guiding students to utilize digital technology as a positive tool for learning, communication, and personal development. Based on Mike Ribble's concepts, digital ethics is a vital component of modern education, emphasizing the responsible, polite, and moral use of technology. This study employs Mike Ribble's theory to analyze students' digital behavior and to understand the role of character education in shaping digital ethics within the madrasah environment.

Methodology

This study uses qualitative methods. In qualitative research, theory serves only as a guide for data gathering and analysis (Nurdin & Pettalongi, 2022; Nurdin, Stockdale, & Scheepers, 2016) ^[17, 22]. The data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and written document analysis at the research site (Nurdin, Pettalongi, Ahsan, & Febrianti, 2023; Rusli, Hasyim, & Nurdin, 2021; Rusli & Nurdin, 2022) ^[18, 25, 26]. The research was conducted at an Islamic junior high school in Palu City, Indonesia. The

researcher chose the school because it is a reputable government school that implements a digital ethics policy relevant to Islamic education. The results of this study can later serve as a reference and guideline for other schools in building digital ethics for their students based on religious values and in making the school a model for other educational institutions. Data were collected through direct observation, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and written document analysis. The interviews involved the school principal, five teachers, and ten students. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were reviewed with participants to obtain their consent (Nurdin, Scheepers, & Stockdale, 2022; Nurdin, Stockdale, & Scheepers, 2014) ^[20, 21]. The data analysis used a deductive approach, interpreted as a research procedure that produces deductive data from interviews and field notes. Data analysis used thematic analysis following Strauss and Corbin (1998) ^[28]. The analysis started with open, axial, and selective coding. The final result of the data analysis is the set of themes identified.

Results and Discussion

Character education as the foundation of digital ethics

Research findings indicate that character education serves as the primary foundation for shaping students' digital ethics within the school environment. Interviews with the Madrasah Principal, the Deputy Principal for Curriculum Affairs, the Islamic Religious Education teacher, the Guidance and Counseling teacher, and the students revealed that the entire educational process at the madrasah is geared toward reinforcing character values as the basis for student behavior both in real life and during interactions in the digital realm. These findings demonstrate that digital ethics is not viewed as a standalone competency but rather as an integral part of character education implementation within the madrasah's culture. Interviews with one informant revealed that character education is a top priority in the madrasah's educational operations. According to this informant, the advancement of digital technology must be balanced with character strengthening so that students not only can use technology but are also capable of taking responsibility for their behavior in the digital space. Consequently, character education is integrated into all madrasah activities through instruction, habituation, teacher role modeling, and supervision of digital media use. One informant stated that:

At the madrasa, we integrate character education into all learning activities and extracurricular engagements. Values such as smiling, greeting, offering salutations, practicing courtesy and politeness, and showing mutual respect are applied to the use of digital technology. Teachers are guided to consistently remind students to use social media and the internet positively and to avoid spreading unverified information.

Furthermore, the Head of the Madrasah emphasized that character building is not solely the responsibility of Islamic Religious Education teachers but is the shared responsibility of the entire school community. This is implemented through

policies requiring every teacher to set a good example, provide guidance, and supervise students' use of digital devices. As the head of the institution, he directs all teachers to ensure that instruction focuses not only on academic achievement but also on character development. The school has also established policies regarding digital device usage on campus, conducts monitoring, provides guidance to students, and involves parents in supervising digital media use at home. The school views character education as the primary foundation for shaping students' digital ethics. Character education is not regarded as an incidental program or the responsibility of specific subjects alone; rather, it serves as the basis for the entire educational process at the madrasah. Character strengthening is achieved by integrating moral values into learning activities, fostering a school culture, having teachers set a positive example, supervising digital media usage, and collaborating with parents.

These findings also indicate that the Madrasah Head views the advancement of digital technology as both a challenge and an opportunity in education. On one hand, technology facilitates students' access to information and the development of their competencies. On the other hand, using technology without a strong character foundation risks giving rise to various forms of deviant digital behavior, such as the spread of misinformation, the use of impolite language, privacy violations, and cyberbullying. Consequently, character education serves as the moral foundation guiding students to use technology responsibly. A notable aspect of these findings is that the Madrasah Head does not treat digital ethics merely as a set of technical rules for social media use, but as an integral part of shaping students' moral character. Thus, student behavior in the digital space is viewed as a reflection of the character quality cultivated through the educational process at the madrasah. According to the researcher, the Madrasah Head's perspective reflects a paradigm shift in character education.

Character education is no longer understood merely as a process of verbally transmitting values; it has evolved into a school culture that influences all educational activities. This paradigm demonstrates that the madrasah strives not only to enhance students' academic abilities but also to foster a moral consciousness that will underpin their behavior when facing the challenges of the digital era. The researcher observes that the Madrasah Head's policy is preventive. Character strengthening takes place before students encounter the risks associated with the misuse of digital technology. This approach differs from strategies focused solely on addressing infractions after problems have occurred. By cultivating character from the outset, the madrasah aims to foster students' capacity for self-control, responsible decision-making, and consideration of the moral implications of their digital activities. Furthermore, the researchers find that policies involving teachers, students, and parents show that cultivating digital ethics cannot be approached in a piecemeal fashion.

The digital realm is a social space that extends beyond the confines of the school environment; thus, successfully fostering digital ethics requires synergy between education

within the Islamic school and education within the family. These findings indicate that the school's character education has adopted an educational ecosystem approach, wherein character formation is achieved through the involvement of all components interacting with the students. The research findings align with the character education theory proposed by Thomas Lickona (Lickona, 1996, 1999) ^[14, 15]. Lickona explains that character education is a process integrating three primary dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. These three dimensions must develop in balance so that students not only understand moral values but also commit to internalizing and practicing them in their daily lives. In light of the research results, the school's principal policies reflect the implementation of these three dimensions. Integrating character education into the learning process gives students the opportunity to understand digital ethics values as part of moral knowing. Cultivating the "5S" culture (a practice emphasizing greetings and courtesy), along with guidance and reinforcement of religious values, fosters moral feeling and helps students realize the importance of respecting others in digital communication.

Furthermore, supervising digital media use and encouraging polite behavior help shape moral action manifesting as tangible behavior that reflects character within the digital sphere. Thus, the research results demonstrate that the character education program applies Lickona's principles by integrating knowledge, attitude, and action into a unified educational process. From an Islamic educational perspective, these findings align with Imam Al-Ghazali's concept of moral character. According to Al-Ghazali, *akhlaq* is a trait deeply embedded in the soul, giving rise to spontaneous behavior without lengthy deliberation. Character is not formed merely by imparting knowledge, but through habituation and continuous practice until it becomes an integral part of a person's personality.

In light of the research findings, the Madrasah Head's emphasis on cultivating the "5S" culture, teacher role-modeling, and monitoring digital media use shows that developing digital ethics aims not merely at momentary compliance, but at forming character traits deeply ingrained in students. In this context, students are expected to maintain ethical communication standards demonstrating honesty, responsibility, and respect for others while using digital media, even without direct teacher supervision. The researcher notes that this approach indicates the school prioritizes developing internal moral control over external control enforced through technology-use rules. This approach is particularly relevant given that the digital realm affords users significant freedom; consequently, ethical behavior is determined more by character quality than by the presence of oversight. Character education serves as the cornerstone for shaping students' digital ethics. This role is realized through integrating character values into madrasah policies, instructional practices, habituation, teacher role-modeling, digital media monitoring, and collaboration with parents. These findings show that developing digital ethics at the school is not merely a matter of mastering technology, but of internalizing character values that enable

students to use digital media responsibly, in alignment with moral principles and Islamic teachings.

Integration of character education into curriculum and instruction

Research findings indicate that the development of digital ethics among students at the school is not achieved solely through madrasa policies but is also systematically integrated into the curriculum and the learning process. Interview results reveal that character education serves as the core of instruction, making every teacher responsible for instilling character values relevant to their specific subjects. This integration is realized through curriculum development, the preparation of instructional materials, the implementation of both intracurricular and co-curricular activities, and the reinforcement of character values during every learning interaction. These findings demonstrate that character education is not taught as a separate subject but rather functions as an integral part of the learning process. Consequently, digital ethics develops continuously through students' learning experiences, rather than merely through the communication of rules regarding digital media use.

Based on interview results, the Deputy Head of Madrasa for Curriculum Affairs explained that character education has become an inseparable part of the madrasa's curriculum. As an institution under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the entire learning process is geared toward integrating Islamic values with advancements in science and technology. According to the official, character reinforcement forms the foundation of curriculum implementation, ensuring that students not only acquire academic competence but also develop the ability to use technology responsibly. One informant stated the following:

As our school operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, we are mandated to integrate Islamic educational values with modern technological advancements. In accordance with the Ministry's directives, we also incorporate the "Curriculum of Love" as the guiding spirit of our learning process. Furthermore, as a digitally oriented school, we ensure our students understand the wise use of social media, digital communication ethics, and the importance of upholding moral character when using information technology.

The integration of character education into the curriculum is carried out in a planned and systematic manner. Character education is not merely a component of learning objectives; rather, it has become a primary orientation in curriculum design and the implementation of the educational process. The "Curriculum of Love" serves as an instrument that enables the *madrasah* to bridge Islamic values with the challenges of digital life faced by students. Findings also indicate that the cultivation of digital ethics begins as soon as students enter the school. Through activities involving mutual counsel, students gain knowledge of digital etiquette, responsible social media use, and the importance of maintaining proper conduct in online communication. This demonstrates that character

education is proactive rather than reactive; it provides foundational preparation to ensure students have moral awareness before actively engaging with various digital platforms. Furthermore, integrating character education into the curriculum reflects continuity between school policy and classroom instructional practices. The curriculum ensures that character values are not simply understood as slogans but are translated into learning objectives, teaching methods, and the nature of interactions between teachers and students.

According to the researcher, integrating character education into the curriculum indicates that a school has adopted a comprehensive educational approach. The curriculum functions not merely as a guide for delivering academic content but also as an instrument for shaping students' character. Consequently, the learning process produces students who not only master knowledge and technology but also can manage their digital behavior in accordance with moral and religious values. The researcher also observes that implementing the "Curriculum of Love" demonstrates the *madrasa's* effort to align character education policies with the needs of digital society. Values such as compassion, respect for others, responsibility, and tolerance are taught not only in face-to-face social interactions but also in the digital realm. This is significant given that students' interactions are no longer confined to physical environments but also take place intensively via social media and various digital platforms.

Another interesting finding is that providing digital ethics instruction as early as possible demonstrates the school's adoption of a preventive-educational strategy specifically, fostering students' moral awareness before they encounter the various challenges associated with digital technology use. This approach is more effective than one focused solely on imposing sanctions after violations occur. These research findings align with Thomas Lickona's theory (1996) ^[14], which posits that character education should be integrated into all educational activities rather than being confined to specific subjects. Effective character education is a process that engages the entire school environment, ensuring that moral values become an integral part of the students' learning experience. In the context of this study, integrating character education into the curriculum demonstrates that the school has successfully implemented this principle. Students not only acquire knowledge regarding digital ethics but also undergo a learning process that continuously instills values such as responsibility, honesty, respect, and care in their use of technology. Thus, the learning process serves as a vehicle for internalizing character traits that foster ethical digital behavior.

From an Islamic educational perspective, integrating character education into the curriculum aligns with the concept of *tarbiyah*, which views education as a holistic process of human development aimed at cultivating the "perfect human". Education aims not only to develop intellectual faculties but also to shape the students' character, spirituality, and sense of social responsibility. The implementation of the "Curriculum of Love" and the provision of digital ethics training demonstrate the school's commitment to embedding Islamic values into every aspect of the educational process. Values

such as compassion, mutual respect, honesty, trustworthiness, and responsibility are not merely taught as abstract concepts but are contextualized within the realm of digital media usage. The researcher observes that this approach positions digital ethics as an integral part of practicing Islamic character in contemporary life. The study concludes that integrating character education into the curriculum and instructional practices is a key strategy for shaping students' digital ethics. Through the "Curriculum of Love" and the integration of character values into learning, the school equips students with academic and digital competencies while fostering the moral awareness needed to use technology responsibly and in accordance with Islamic values. These findings highlight the curriculum's role as a primary instrument bridging character education with the development of digital ethics.

Conclusion

Character education plays a fundamental role in shaping students' digital ethics. This role is not fulfilled through a single program or specific activity, but rather through a character education ecosystem that integrates school policies, curriculum, instruction, school culture, teacher role-modeling, guidance and counseling services, and student participation. All these components function as interconnected mechanisms in the process of internalizing character values among students. At the institutional level, character education is reinforced through policies and programs that position character building as an integral part of educational goals. At the curriculum and instructional levels, character values are integrated into the learning process particularly within Islamic Religious Education by linking lessons on ethics and moral conduct to students' real-life issues, including their use of digital media and technology.

Meanwhile, school culture provides a space to habituate these values through religious activities, the "5S" culture (greetings and courtesy), congregational prayers, Quranic recitation, and various student development activities. Teacher role-modeling is also crucial, as students acquire values not only through verbal explanations but also by observing how teachers communicate, conduct themselves, and use digital media. Guidance and counseling teachers reinforce this process through mentoring, dialogue, counseling, reflection, education on social media use, and strengthening students' self-control. Thus, character education serves as a moral foundation, an internalization mechanism, and a guide for student behavior in the digital realm. The character values acquired through this educational process are then translated into digital behaviors such as polite communication, responsible media use, caution in receiving and sharing information, respect for others, self-control, and responsible technology use. These findings demonstrate that digital ethics cannot be separated from a student's character. Digital ethics is not merely a technical ability to use technology; rather, it is a manifestation of character built through a systematic, continuous educational process grounded in Islamic values.

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