The Challenges of Islamic Education in the Digital Age: Moral Crisis, Digital Literacy, and Religious Authority

Milda Amalia¹, Ruqoyah Arifatul Hasanah¹

¹ STAI Masjid Syuhada Yogyakarta, Indonesia

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The development of the digital era has brought significant changes in Islamic educational practices. On the one hand, the digital era opens up vast opportunities for access to knowledge and learning innovation, but on the other hand it also presents a variety of serious challenges. This article aims to analyze the challenges of Islamic education in the digital era which include student moral crises, low digital literacy, and shifts in religious authority. The method used in writing this article is a literature review with a qualitative-descriptive approach through the analysis of relevant literature, such as books, journal articles, and credible digital sources. The results show that exposure to unfiltered information, instant culture, and the dominance of social media contribute to the weakening of the internalization of moral values, the low ability to think critically, and the emergence of new religious authorities that do not always have scientific legitimacy. Therefore, Islamic education is needed to revitalize the curriculum, strengthen digital literacy, and rebuild scientific authority based on Islamic values. This effort is expected to be able to make Islamic education relevant and competitive in the midst of digitalization flows.

Corresponding Author:
Milda Amalia
STAI Masjid Syuhada Yogyakarta, Indonesia; mildaamalia88@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology in the last two decades has brought fundamental changes in almost all aspects of human life, including in the field of education (Maury, Smith, Crumbley, & Hitt, 2024). The digital era is marked by the acceleration of information flow, easy access to knowledge, and the presence of social media as a new space for the formation of opinions, identities, and authority (Amalia, 2018). In the context of Islamic education, this digital transformation presents a great opportunity to expand access to learning and da'wah, but at the same time it also raises various serious challenges that touch on fundamental aspects of Islamic education, namely the formation of morals, the strengthening of religious literacy, and the legitimacy of scientific authority.

Rapid technological advancements, such as the internet, mobile devices, and social media, have given the digital generation easier and more intensive access to technology, making them more skilled

and accustomed to using it. The digital generation also tends to have a deeper understanding of various applications of technology and utilize it in various aspects of life, including education, communication, and entertainment (Astuti, Herman, Hadawiah, & Ardiyanti, 2018). However, with advances in digital technology also come a number of challenges that need to be overcome. One of them is the authenticity and reliability of the content delivered through digital technology. In an era of information that is so fast and abundant, the spread of false, inaccurate, or inconsistent content with Islamic teachings can easily occur. Therefore, there is a need for stricter supervision and verification of content to ensure that what is conveyed through digital technology is in accordance with the principles of the Islamic religion.

Islamic education normatively not only aims to transmit religious knowledge, but also to form people with noble character, Islamic personality, and are able to place knowledge as a means of devotion to Allah and the benefit of the ummah. In the Islamic educational tradition, the values of adab, teacher example, and scientific sanad occupy a central position (Saada, 2023). However, in the digital era, the relationship between educators and students has undergone a significant shift. The learning process no longer takes place entirely in physical space and direct relationships, but is largely mediated by technology, digital platforms, and social media algorithms that are often value-free.

One of the main challenges of Islamic education in the digital era is the occurrence of a moral crisis among students. The exposure to massive, unfiltered, and often contradictory digital content to Islamic values has influenced the mindset, attitudes, and behaviors of the younger generation of Muslims (Amalia, Assegaf, & Arifin, 2024). Phenomena such as declining manners towards teachers, instant culture, hate speech, and the normalization of unethical behavior in the digital space show that technological progress is not always in line with moral maturity. This condition raises fundamental questions about the extent to which Islamic education is able to carry out the function of moral development in the context of a complex and dynamic digital society.

In addition to the moral crisis, low digital literacy is also a crucial problem in Islamic education. The ease of access to religious information on the internet is not always accompanied by the critical ability to comprehensively sort, verify, and understand content (Anggraeni, Fauziyah, & Fahyuni, 2019). Many learners consume religious information partially, textually, and ahistorically, without adequate methodological guidance. As a result, not a few are trapped in superficial, extreme, or even distorted religious understandings. From an Islamic perspective, tabayyun's attitude, prudence, and responsibility in conveying information are fundamental principles that are often overlooked in daily digital practices.

Another challenge that is no less important is the shift in religious authority in the digital age. The authority of scholars, kiai, and teachers who have been built through a long process of education and scientific legitimacy are now facing competition with popular figures on social media who have a wide reach but do not always have adequate scientific capacity. The phenomenon of "instant ustaz" and the commodification of da'wah on digital platforms has led to the fragmentation of religious authority, where popularity is often more decisive than the depth of knowledge and moral integrity (Bagaskara, 2022). This condition is a serious challenge for Islamic education in maintaining the continuity of scientific traditions and authentic Islamic values.

In the Indonesian context, these challenges are increasingly complex considering the diversity of social, cultural, and institutional backgrounds of Islamic education, ranging from Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, to Islamic religious universities. Digitalization that is not balanced with strengthening values, critical literacy, and moral exemplary has the potential to weaken the strategic role of Islamic education as an agent of social transformation and a guardian of the morality of the ummah.

Based on this background, this article aims to critically analyze the challenges of Islamic education in the digital age, focusing on three main issues, namely the moral crisis, digital literacy, and the shift in religious authority. This study is expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution to the development of Islamic education that is responsive to technological developments, but still firmly rooted in Islamic values. Thus, Islamic education is not only able to survive in the midst of

digitalization, but also plays an active role in forming a generation of Muslims who are knowledgeable, moral, and competitive in the global era.

2. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with the type of library research. This approach was chosen because the main objective of the article is to conceptually and critically analyze the challenges of Islamic education in the digital age, particularly as it relates to moral crises, digital literacy, and shifts in religious authority. Literature review allows researchers to systematically elaborate on previous ideas, theories, and findings in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

This research is descriptive-analytical and critical, namely describing the reality and problems of Islamic education in the digital era while analyzing it in depth from the scientific perspective of Islamic education. This approach not only exposes the phenomenon, but also examines its normative and practical implications for the Islamic education system and praxis in Indonesia.

Data sources include primary literature, namely in the form of classic and contemporary books on Islamic education, morals, Islamic scientific epistemology, and the thoughts of Muslim scholars and scholars related to education and morality. Secondary literature, in the form of scientific journal articles, results of previous research, proceedings, and research reports that discuss Islamic education, the digital era, digital literacy, and religious authority. Supporting documents, such as education policies, popular scientific writings, and studies related to religious phenomena in the digital space that are relevant to the Indonesian context.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the literature review show that Islamic education in the digital era faces multidimensional challenges that are interrelated, especially in the aspects of moral crisis, digital literacy, and shifting religious authority. These three aspects do not stand alone, but rather influence each other and form new dynamics in contemporary Islamic educational practices.

3.1. Moral Crisis in Islamic Education in the Digital Era

The role of digital technology has great potential to bring positive change and enrich religious learning experiences. However, keep in mind that the use of technology must be done wisely, paying attention to the principles of digital literacy and Islamic values that prioritize the goodness and progress of mankind (Ibda, 2018). The results of the literature analysis show that there are strong indications of a moral crisis among Muslim students which is influenced by the intensity of the use of digital technology. Social media and digital platforms have become the main space for the formation of attitudes, behaviors, and identities of the younger generation. However, the digital space tends to have minimal control of values and ethics, so it has the potential to give birth to behaviors that are contrary to Islamic moral principles, such as weakening of manners towards teachers, instant culture, individualism, and the normalization of hate speech and unethical behavior in virtual public spaces.

From the perspective of Islamic education, this moral crisis shows that there is a gap between the cognitive progress and the affective-spiritual development of students. The learning process that focuses on knowledge transfer and the use of technology has not been fully balanced with the internalization of moral values and examples. In fact, in the Islamic tradition, education is actually the process of forming manners before knowledge. When the dimension of manners is marginalized by the dominance of technology, then Islamic education risks losing its basic spirit and orientation.

The moral crisis that arises among students shows that there is an inequality between technological progress and moral development. The intensity of the use of digital media without strengthening values and manners has had an impact on the weakening of ethics, respect, and social responsibility. This condition confirms that it is not enough for Islamic education to adopt digital technology, but must still place the formation of noble morals as the core of the educational process.

3.2. Heading Digital Literacy and Religious Understanding Problems

Digital literacy was first introduced in 1990 and one of the figures involved was Gilster, who defined digital literacy as the ability to understand and use information from various digital sources. More than just reading skills, digital literacy also involves the ability to think critically in evaluating information found through digital media (Anggraeni et al., 2019). In the early Islamic civilization, the use of technology was not new, but was an ongoing process that was the main driver for progress in forming a great civilization at that time. The application of multimedia technology in the understanding of Islam is not considered haram, because in Islam, things that bring great benefits to human progress are allowed.

Low digital literacy is a serious challenge in Islamic education in the digital era. Access to extensive religious information through the internet is not always accompanied by the critical ability to comprehensively sort and understand content. Students tend to consume religious information quickly, partially, and without adequate verification. This phenomenon has an impact on the emergence of textual, superficial, and even extreme religious understandings (Kamal Basir et al., 2025). The principle of tabayyun, which is a fundamental teaching in Islam, is often overlooked in digital practice. Digital literacy that is not based on Islamic values opens up space for the spread of religious hoaxes, hate speech in the name of religion, and da'wah content that is not scientifically and ethically irresponsible (Muflihin & Makhshun, 2021).

In the context of Islamic education, digital literacy should not be interpreted solely as technical ability to use digital devices, but also include ethical, critical, and spiritual literacy. The integration of Islamic values in digital literacy is an urgent need so that students are able to become intelligent, responsible, and moral users of technology. There is no postulate or dispute among scholars that explicitly prohibits the use of multimedia technology, because Islam always emphasizes the importance of goodness and conformity with changes and developments of the times. Islam also encourages its people to master knowledge that covers various fields, including science that is closely related to multimedia technology (Mohd Nawi, 2020).

In the 21st century, which is colored by the advancement of digital technology, the role of technology in the transformation of Islamic education is becoming increasingly important and relevant. Digital technology has changed the way we learn, interact, and access information. In the context of Islamic education, digital technology has great potential to transform and enrich the experience of religious learning. The development of digital technology has made it possible for Islamic education to be more accessible, interactive, and inclusive (Kurniawan, 2019).

Online platforms, mobile apps, and social media enable global access to Islamic educational resources, allowing individuals from different parts of the world to access and deepen religious understanding. In addition, digital technology also allows for more interactive learning methods, such as videos, animations, and simulations, which can help students better understand religious concepts (Sutopo, 2017). However, the role of digital technology in the transformation of Islamic education is also faced with challenges, such as content authenticity, privacy, and technology accessibility gaps.

Islamic education can reach a wider audience and provide positive benefits to Muslims around the world. In an effort to improve digital literacy, the guidance mechanism can be carried out in stages as follows: a). Providing an understanding of the importance of personal data protection and awareness of the dangers of irresponsible data misuse. b). Teaching manners and ethics in interacting in cyberspace, because the internet is part of the real world and requires the same behavior. c). Directing to find credible sources of information and avoiding the spread of fake news (hoax) by teaching the ability to check the truth of information before believing it. d). Prioritize the usefulness of using the internet, avoid spending time on things that are less useful, and make students aware of the importance of selectivity in obtaining information. e). Encourage mutual respect and maintain harmony in the digital world, avoid bullying behavior (cyber bullying) and teach students to deal with differences of opinion wisely and without bullying.(Muflihin & Makhshun, 2021)

3.3. The Sift in Religious Authority in the Digital Space

The digital era shows a shift in religious authority. The authority of scholars, kiai, and teachers, which was previously built through a long educational process and scientific legitimacy, is now facing challenges from popular figures on social media. The platform's popularity, number of followers, and algorithms often determine legitimacy rather than depth of knowledge and moral integrity (Yusuf, Afrizal, & Alfiandi, 2022).

This shift has led to the fragmentation of religious authority, where students and the public are more likely to trust viral religious content than authoritative scientific references (Sinha, 2011). The phenomenon of "instant ustaz" and the commodification of da'wah has the potential to reduce religion to mere digital consumption that loses the depth of scientific meaning and responsibility (Fealy & White, 2012).

The shift in religious authority in the digital space is also a serious challenge to the sustainability of Islamic scientific traditions. The authority of scholars and educators who have been acting as guardians of Islamic values and knowledge face competition with popular figures who do not necessarily have adequate scientific legitimacy. This condition requires Islamic education to revitalize the role of educators as moral and intellectual authorities, while equipping them with relevant digital competencies (Syakur, 2016)(Ali & Erihadiana, 2021). For Islamic education, this condition is an epistemological and pedagogical challenge. Scientific authority can no longer be maintained only through structural positions, but must be strengthened through digital competence, moral exemplars, and communication skills relevant to the digital generation without sacrificing scientific integrity.

Islamic education in the digital era requires a comprehensive and sustainable strategy. First, strengthening character and moral education must be a top priority in every learning process, both offline and online. Second, digital literacy needs to be systematically integrated into the Islamic education curriculum to equip students with critical thinking skills and digital ethics. Third, Islamic educational institutions need to strengthen their role as centers of scientific authority by presenting religious content that is moderate, credible, and relevant to the digital context. Islamic education not only functions as an institution for knowledge transfer, but also as an agent of moral and social transformation in the digital era. This effort is expected to be able to answer the challenges of moral crisis, digital literacy, and the shift in religious authority holistically and based on Islamic values.

4. CONCLUSION

The digital era has brought fundamental changes in the world of education, including Islamic education. The development of digital technology presents great opportunities in expanding access to learning and the dissemination of Islamic knowledge, but at the same time it poses complex challenges. Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that Islamic education in the digital era faces three main challenges, namely the moral crisis of students, low digital literacy, and the shift in religious authority. The moral crisis is reflected in the weakening of the internalization of moral values in the lives of students, both in the real and digital spaces. Low digital literacy makes students vulnerable to hoaxes, disinformation, and superficial and uncritical religious understanding. Meanwhile, the shift in religious authority in the digital space has the potential to weaken the legitimacy of Islamic science and scientific traditions that have been the foundation of Islamic education.

Islamic education is required to carry out an adaptive and value-based transformation. Strengthening character education, integrating digital literacy, and reaffirming credible religious authority are strategic steps so that Islamic education remains relevant, competitive, and able to answer the challenges of the times without losing its Islamic identity.

Some suggestions that can be submitted are as follows. First, Islamic educational institutions need to revitalize the curriculum by integrating moral education and digital literacy in a balanced and sustainable manner. Second, Islamic education educators are expected to improve pedagogic and digital competencies in order to be able to guide students in utilizing technology wisely and

responsibly. Third, Islamic educational institutions need to utilize digital media as a means of da'wah and learning that affirm scientific authority, religious moderation, and Islamic values rahmatan lil 'alamin. The next research is suggested to empirically examine the implementation of digital literacy-based Islamic education in various educational institutions, so that it can make a practical contribution to the development of Islamic education in the digital era.

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